

Literacy and Learning for Nonnative English Speakers in a Teacher Education Program

*Maureen Snow Andrade
Utah Valley University*

Nonnative English speakers (NNESs) in higher education institutions face linguistic and cultural challenges. Although these challenges are well-documented, faculty approaches for accommodating and supporting NNESs in various disciplines have received less attention. Faculty must be responsive to NNESs in terms of supporting their literacy and learning needs and preparing them with professional skills. Three activities—preparing reading questions, presenting a poster session, and developing a philosophy statement—were developed in a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) training course to support these goals. The assignments address literacy and learning needs of NNESs, encourage reflection, and involve application to anticipated teaching situations. Similar types of assignments can be developed for other disciplines to address NNESs' needs as well as those of native English speakers (NESs). Through these assignments, faculty can gain insights into students' learning needs and perceptions to better prepare these students for future professional contexts.

International students, many of whom are nonnative English speakers (NNESs), comprise approximately 4% of the total enrollment and 12% of graduate enrollments at institutions of higher education in the United States (Bhandari & Chow, 2007). These students have studied English extensively and demonstrated, usually through standardized exams, the proficiency to succeed in higher education (Andrade, 2008). However, despite their achievements, many struggle with the literacy demands of their academic programs (Andrade, 2008; Andrade & Evans, 2009). The amount and complexity of required reading, (Cheng, Myles, & Curtis, 2004; Holmes, 2004), expectations for written discourse and documentation of sources (Holmes, 2004;

Loewy, & Vogt, 2000; Sundstrom, 2009), and classroom participation patterns (Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Holmes, 2004) are a challenge for NNESs. Cultural differences within and outside academic contexts also create barriers, which cause homesickness and isolation (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2003; Schutz & Richards, 2003).

Although the transitional experiences of NNESs in terms of language and culture are well-documented, less attention has focused on how faculty members address the literacy and learning needs of these students in specific disciplines. Several studies provide faculty with recommendations based on student experiences (e.g., see Beykont & Daiute, 2002; Huang, 2004;

Parks & Raymond, 2004); however, only a few report faculty implementation of specific teaching/learning approaches to support the literacy needs of NNESs (Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Lee, 1997). While some faculty acknowledge that the English-language skills of NNESs need improvement, they feel it is the responsibility of others, and favor initiatives that do not involve themselves; these can include higher admission standards, English-language support services, and peer-to-peer interaction opportunities outside the classroom (Andrade, 2009).

Purpose

This article presents a reflection on practice involving data collected from the successful implementation of three course activities in a teacher trainer

course. The assignments allow faculty to gain insights into the perceptions and concerns of NNEs to help them strengthen their literacy and prepare them for future teaching contexts.

Although the emphasis of the discussion is on NNEs in a particular discipline, faculty can implement comparable assignments to gain insights into and meet the transitional literacy needs of all students across disciplines. First, I review issues related to NNEs in teacher education programs and describe the teaching context for the study in terms of the course and the students. Then, I explain the assignments and discuss findings related to their benefits.

Nonnative English Speaking Students in Teacher Education Programs

In teacher education, specifically training English as a Second/Foreign Language¹ (ESL/EFL) teachers, students who are not native speakers of English must not only focus on the development of their own literacy skills in order to be successful in their courses and master the English language, but also on ways to help their future students develop similar skills. Teacher education courses in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) typically include pedagogical methods for teaching writing. Teaching writing to second language (L2) learners has a long and varied history (e.g., see Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Hyland, 2003; Leki, 1992). Initially, the purpose of including writing in the curriculum was to reinforce grammatical structures as typified in the audio-lingual approach. However, as communicative-based language teaching gained support, teachers recognized that students needed to develop writing skills for future academic and employment contexts.

Thus, literacy skills have become an integral part of the ESL/EFL classroom. In higher education, continuing literacy development for NNEs is critical to success in most disciplines.

In the case of training NNEs to be ESL/EFL teachers, faculty need to consider dual goals—strengthening the literacy skills of NNEs while helping them apply the pedagogical principles of L2 writing to future contexts. The latter involves adopting a postmethod approach in which teachers recognize that no best method exists for teaching language, but that they must be familiar with research-based methods, use investigative processes to determine what works for specific learners, explore their own beliefs about teaching and learning, and be prepared to exercise autonomy in decisions about teaching methods based on their professional and personal knowledge (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

The Teaching Context

The context for this study was an undergraduate bachelor's degree program in TESOL. This major is offered at a university where nearly 50% of the approximately 2,400 students are NNEs. The majority are international students who are in the United States to earn a degree and will return home to pursue their professions. The TESOL program serves 120 students, of whom approximately 80% are NNEs, the majority being from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, French Polynesia, Samoa, and Tonga. Most of these students enroll in the university's credit-bearing ESL program when they arrive on campus, so they have experiences learning English in both their home countries and in the United States.

Although the largest numbers of NNEs in the TESOL major are from the six countries mentioned, the complete list of origins of these students is extensive and includes Brazil, Columbia, Peru, Mexico, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia,

Mongolia, Nepal, China, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. Professors who teach in the program must not only consider how to prepare students for a variety of teaching contexts (e.g., different types of institutions, educational levels, proficiency levels, learner ages, and learning goals), but also for a vast array of EFL contexts. Additionally, they must address issues related to the learning needs and developing identities of the students as future nonnative English speaking teachers.

The Course

For this study, I gathered data related to the implementation of three specific assignments in my undergraduate TESOL course on how to teach writing. The purpose of the assignments was to accommodate and strengthen students' English skills as well as help them engage in the course content, relate it to their own experiences, and adapt and apply it to their future teaching contexts, or, in other words, to adopt a postmethod approach to teaching. The 15-week course met weekly for two 50-minute sessions. Data were collected over two semesters. The total number of students in the sample was 41, distributed by country of origin as follows: United States (11); Japan (11); Korea (6); Hong Kong, Vietnam, Thailand, Tonga (2 each); Philippines Tahiti, Fiji, Taiwan, New Zealand (1 each). Nine (22%) of the students were male and 32 (78%) were female. The university has higher enrollments of female students than male (approximately 60% to 40%).

The course reviews past and present theories related to L1 and L2 composition and the relationship of reading to writing, and focuses on practical classroom issues such as conducting a needs analysis, selecting a textbook, determining learning goals, creating a syllabus, developing materials and writing tasks, incorporating peer response, responding to and assessing student writing, addressing grammatical accu-

¹ EFL refers to the study of English in non-English speaking regions whereas ESL (English as a Second Language) refers to the study of English in English-predominant countries.

racy, and using technology. One of the challenges of the course is that the textbook emphasizes ESL environments and English for academic purposes. The text is not atypical in its approach to training teachers how to teach writing, but the content may not reflect the contexts many of the students will encounter, particularly in EFL settings. Many of the writing samples, syllabi, lesson plans, prompts, scenarios, and guidelines provided as examples reflect introductory-level English composition courses at American universities. For instance, the sample syllabus provided in one of the course textbook chapters is over eight pages in length and would be overwhelming to all but the most advanced ESL student. The NNEs in the class expressed doubts that they would be in teaching situations in which syllabi were provided to students.

The Students

TESOL-training programs typically have a strong presence of NNEs as the demand for English-language learning worldwide is high, and credentialed TESOL professionals have good employment prospects. Graduates of this particular TESOL program have a strong record of obtaining full-time employment both within the United States and abroad. However, Vitanova (2007) found that teachers who had graduated from TESOL preparation programs in the United States and were teaching in EFL contexts did not find their methods courses useful. These courses emphasized the history of various methods and encouraged use of the communicative approach (i.e., using language to communicate in authentic contexts). The latter is not easily implemented in contexts in which students are accustomed to rote learning, where the curriculum is grammar-based, or where opportunities to use English to communicate in daily life are limited.

Although these teachers exhibited characteristics of the postmethod era of language teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 1994; 2001), specifically by recognizing

the need to adjust their methods to fit local contexts and observe the techniques of local teachers, they did not feel their course work had emphasized this. In other words, they had not been trained to be eclectic and to adapt and apply principles derived from a variety of methods to their own teaching contexts. They believed in a best method approach for the most part even though contexts for teaching English vary widely as do learner needs and goals.

One challenge that teacher educators face in the TESOL program in this study is that although the NNEs have completed the ESL requirements at the university and are now embarking on their major courses, they continue to prefer and exhibit many traditional cultural modes of learning. For example, many studies examining the adjustment of international students in institutions of higher education in the United States and other English-speaking countries have noted the reluctance of NNEs to participate in class discussions (e.g., see Berman & Cheng, 2001; Coleman, 1997; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Lee, 1997; Parks & Raymond, 2004). Reasons for this include cultural background, the desire to respect the knowledge and expertise of the professor, lack of confidence in English skills, and familiarity with or preference for different discourse patterns.

Beykott and Daiute (2002), for instance, note that international students are often more accustomed to formal educational settings in which the classroom is teacher-centered, the professor is viewed as an authority figure who transmits knowledge, and where little discussion occurs. Students indicate being most comfortable in American educational settings in which professors direct discussions, ensure equitable participation, draw out students from different backgrounds, respect diverse opinions rather than insisting on their own views, and ensure some students do not dominate the discussion or get off the topic. One of the key suggestions of

students in this study was that professors allow preparation time before expecting a response. They indicated being more comfortable with responding after reflection and only when they have something important to express. In contrast, they described the discourse pattern of their American peers as thinking out loud. They also recommended that professors ensure that all students have a chance to speak as some may find it difficult to interrupt. Similarly, they appreciated being asked to comment on cultural perspectives; otherwise, they may not volunteer this type of information. These learning style preferences are independent of language proficiency, and in some cases, could apply to U.S. students as well.

Although the native English speakers (NESs) in the TESOL program described are in the minority, they dominate class discussions. In fact, the NNEs often expect them to do so. During one class session when my students were working in groups and preparing to share their ideas with the whole class, I overheard a discussion in which the NNEs identified a NES as the one to report to the larger group. The NES responded, "Why am I the one to report—because I'm a NES?" The students have a close bond—due to the small size of the university, small classes, and the fact that they progress through their major courses as a cohort and are thus well acquainted. In spite of this supportive environment and training related to respecting linguistic and cultural diversity, many NNEs were not comfortable participating in class. In multicultural classrooms, such as those characteristic of the class described, a variety of factors must be considered including assumptions about teaching and learning, and the discourse patterns to which learners may be accustomed (Beykott & Daiute, 2002).

The Assignments

This reflection on practice examines the implementation of three course requirements designed to account

for the unique needs of NNEs in a TESOL-training program and provide faculty with insights into student learning. Two of the ideas focus on providing alternate means of student response while one emphasizes application of course concepts to anticipated EFL teaching contexts. I next describe the three course assignments: 1) reading-based questions, 2) poster sessions, and 3) philosophy statements. I discuss the rationale for and implementation of the assignments (including possible variations), and explain the findings related to their effectiveness in addressing the learning needs of NNEs and informing the teacher educator.

Reading Questions

In the teaching writing course, I asked students to submit three or four questions or observations about the reading material assigned for each class period. Students were required to type the questions and label them with their names and the due date. The questions were to be submitted at the beginning of the class period for which the reading was assigned. Late questions were not accepted. If students were absent, they could not submit questions because the assignment was a way to encourage attendance. The rationale for having the questions typed and submitted at the beginning of the class period was to prevent students from composing their questions during class based on the discussions and handing them in. The latter is certainly viable, but has a different purpose. Another option is to have students e-mail their questions before class. This has the advantage of allowing the teacher preparation time in order to use the questions as the basis of class discussion, but does not assist with taking attendance.

The purpose of the questions is to help students engage more deeply with the reading materials. The questions also inform the teacher as to the concepts students may have had difficulty understanding and their viewpoints about the issues being studied. The main

advantage of this assignment for NNEs is that it allows them to review the material, reflect on it, and come prepared with questions—whether or not these questions are verbally expressed. This supports the findings of Beykont and Daiute (2002) that NNEs appreciate preparation time before being expected to participate in a class discussion. Allowing students to participate in a different way should they choose not to verbalize their comments also addresses the different patterns of interaction that may be reflected by the various cultures in the class. In presenting this assignment, I discuss the concept of cultural interaction patterns and related research to help students understand that participation can take a variety of forms. For example, individuals from some cultures prefer to reflect prior to responding while those from other cultures are more comfortable thinking out loud. One group should not negatively view another's interaction patterns. For future TESOL professionals (both NNEs and NESs), these concepts are particularly important. Similarly, many NESs benefit from the opportunity to reflect and critically ponder the information to be discussed prior to class. As such, this practice not only supports cultural preferences but also individual learning styles, and encourages deeper learning for all students.

The questions have a number of pedagogical uses. Teacher educators can respond individually to the questions and return them to students. This allows students to have their questions answered directly and motivates them to submit questions of significance. However, it presents a heavy workload for the teacher and some questions are so broad that they are difficult to answer in only a few words. For example, one may receive questions such as "What are the strengths and weaknesses of holistic and analytic scoring rubrics?" This question is not only difficult to answer briefly, but since this information is discussed at length in the text, the question also points

to a lack of any real reflection on the reading content, or perhaps only a mere skimming of the reading assignment.

If questions are submitted a day or so prior to the class period, the teacher can read them and select some questions to serve as the basis of the class discussion. Teachers can also use them to review or clarify key points in subsequent class periods, a technique I frequently used. For example, after collecting the questions and presenting my lesson as planned, I studied the questions after class and determined commonalities or areas of interest that I may not have addressed. This also allowed me to see the number of students who raised the same or similar questions. By putting the questions on a PowerPoint slide or asking them verbally, I then posed a few of these questions at the beginning of the next class period. Another way to respond to questions is simply to refer to them as the material is discussed. The teacher might say, for instance, "Several of you asked questions related to how to maintain objectivity in responding to student writing. One of the ways to address this is to use a rubric with well-defined categories." In this way, students recognize that the teacher is reading their questions and tailoring the class to fit their needs.

Questions can also be used as a starting point for pair or small-group discussions, or the teacher can leave several minutes at the end of each class period for students to verbalize some of their written questions, especially those they feel have not yet been answered. Students should also be encouraged to ask their written questions in the course of the discussion as this is one of the purposes of the assignment, particularly for NNEs who may prefer preparing their questions in advance. In this study, it was not uncommon for students to preface a question in class with "This was one of the questions I handed in, but . . ." and then proceed to ask the question.

Another way the questions serve as

a pedagogical tool is by revealing the students' comprehension of the reading, their critical thinking skills, and their insights and concerns about being nonnative English-speaking teachers. As the text for the teaching writing course was academic and difficult, particularly for NNEs, occasionally students asked for an interpretation of a particular term or sentence in the text such as "What does the author mean on p. 50 when she talks about communities of practice?" or "What is 'purposeful and contextualized communicative interaction' mentioned on p. 14?" At times, NNEs even asked about vocabulary for which they could refer to a dictionary—for example, the word *divergent*. These kinds of questions allowed me to provide further explanation of material in the text, discuss sentence structure and linguistic clues to meaning, and/or encourage students to adopt independent learning techniques such as dictionary use.

The reading questions frequently indicated that students felt there ought to be a single approach or a correct way to teach and wanted to be told exactly what to do in the classroom. The following examples illustrate: "What is the best method to approach teaching writing? I have seen many methods and theories present in the chapter, but I cannot figure [figure] it out which method is the best for teaching writing?" "I have noticed that there are many textbooks for teaching writing, reading, speaking and listening in the market, how do I know what kind of book that will be good for my student?" "As a teacher, when should I use peer response in my classroom?" "What is the best way to reply to a student's writing?" "Which is better—holistic or analytic scoring system?" "Is the computer the best for teaching writing?" "Can you help me to understand what is the most important things that I need to put in my syllabus?" This perspective on knowledge is also representative of American college students, who may not have developed critical thinking or application skills or be comfortable with ambiguity as they

embark on their studies.

I often found myself responding to questions by commenting, "It depends on the context in which you are teaching," and then explaining that as teachers they would need to consider their students' learning goals, the course and program objectives, sociocultural parameters, and so forth. These kinds of questions also led to an awareness that when introducing an idea for a task or method, I needed to frequently ask my students, "Would this work in an EFL context?" The responses varied, and as a class we were able to talk through some of the educational settings the students were familiar with and/or expected to encounter. Although these types of "single approach" questions were not limited to the NNEs in the class, the latter perhaps demonstrated the most concern for knowing how to approach the classroom as the examples in the text had an ESL focus and most of the NNEs expected to teach in an EFL context.

At other times, questions indicated students' insecurities about being nonnative English-speaking teachers as the following examples demonstrate: "Teaching writing is very challenging for non-native speaker teacher; do you have any suggestion for me about that? I am a non native speaker and, I will be English teacher, and it is scary to teach writing." "What can I do if I cannot correct all English error for my students because I am not native speakers?" "How do I make self editing effective because I think my knowledge is not that good for editing my own work?" These concerns were very real and required sensitive discussion, the identification of strategies to compensate for weaknesses, and confidence-building through a recognition of the strengths nonnative English-speaking teachers bring to the ESL/EFL classroom.

Aside from the insecurities demonstrated by the NNEs, they also had observations and questions regarding anticipated future teaching conditions. This is evident in the following

examples: "I have never studied at the university level in Thailand and I am not sure that they will have the syllabus for students or not." "Can you manage a classroom without textbooks? In some country, schools do not provide any materials because of finances deficit. As a teacher, how can you manage a classroom without any textbooks or other resources?" "What can I do if I happen to teach in the places where it has no technology for teaching at all?" "In American education system, students need to do homework assignment [as opposed to just doing well on tests] . . . to get good grades. I would like to adapt American education for my students, are there any ways that I can?" These questions provide exceptional opportunities to prepare both NESs and NNEs for diverse teaching contexts and cultures and to address students' real needs and concerns. As mentioned earlier, some questions were general, leading to the conclusion that students may not have read the material or had invested minimal thought or effort in their assignment. Other questions were only peripherally related to the topic. These examples illustrate: "How can we teach formal writing to the students?" "What is formative writing assessment? What is summative writing assessment? Are there any differences between both two?" "Are there any free softwares for teaching writing?" Of course, even these types of questions are informative for teacher educators, indicating lack of comprehension, poor preparation, and/or minimal reflection. Teachers may want to address this situation early in the semester by providing a few examples of the types of questions expected so that students have a model and understand the expectations.

Based on the findings of this reflection on practice, the use of reading questions in training NNEs has definite advantages. It addresses the challenges noted previously—lack of participation, textbook material that does not meet the learners' needs, and the inability of students to apply general principles to a

variety of contexts. The reading question assignment allows the participation of all students—especially those who hesitate to ask questions in front of the class. It also encourages students to process information at deeper levels and informs the teacher of students' reading comprehension skills. The assignment is simple to implement and manage and has numerous pedagogical applications for a broad range of students in any discipline.

Poster Sessions

The second course assignment was poster sessions. Like the reading questions, this assignment offered NNEs an alternative way to participate and encouraged all students to process information more deeply. I asked students to present a practical teaching idea or the results of a mini-research project as a poster session. I required them to submit a proposal in the same way they would for a professional conference. The purpose of the poster session assignment is to prepare students for the professional world and provide the teacher with insights into how well students have understood the material. It also allows students to identify topics that will be applicable to them in a variety of teaching contexts.

To introduce the assignment, I provided a set of handouts that included 1) an explanation of the poster session genre; 2) logistical information such as the size of the board; 3) examples of proposals including titles, abstracts, and session descriptions; 4) the rationale for the assignment; 5) the scoring rubric; 6) sample presentation handouts; 7) a list of possible topics; and 8) tips for creating an effective poster. In class, the students and I reviewed pictures of posters from previous semesters, and later in the semester we looked at these more carefully and practiced evaluating them with the rubric. The purpose of this was to help students analyze their own work, and, as peer response was part of the evaluation, to evaluate fairly the posters of others. This peer-response activity

supported the principles of peer response discussed in the course and also gave students experience in assessment although not specifically the assessment of student writing.

For this assignment, students had the option of presenting an idea for teaching any skill and in any context. In this way, they had the opportunity to select a topic of interest and contextualize their poster for a teaching situation they anticipated encountering. Since most of the NNEs were international students intending to return home to their countries, this allowed them to apply some of the principles they were learning to EFL settings.

The poster sessions were exhibited in a public venue on campus so that not only TESOL professors and students could view them, but all faculty, staff, and students on campus. Some teachers in the ESL program brought their students, and gave them an assignment to engage in conversation with the presenters and follow up with an oral or written report about what they learned from the poster and their interactions. One ESL student commented in a written report that two posters gave him ideas for improving his English. One "was the importance of expanding [his] vocabulary such as setting a specific time to memorize new words, watching films, or listening to the radio." An ESL teacher who attended the sessions expressed the following in an e-mail: "I am very impressed with the quality and variety of the poster presentations! Please let the students know that they are top-notch. I got some good ideas from what they presented."

Some examples of topics of particular importance to the NNEs in the class were what motivates Japanese students to speak English and how teachers can encourage their participation, how students view a course syllabus because this was perceived to be an American practice by many of the NNEs, what activities can be conducted for each stage of the writing process as EFL learners may be unfamiliar with

this, and how pair work could be implemented in traditional teacher-centered classrooms. Although these topics were of particular importance to NNEs, they were highly relevant to the NESs as they would face some of the same dilemmas working with ESL/EFL students in their classrooms. The design of the posters varied widely in terms of the use of color, text fonts, and the display and sequencing of information.

At times, the information on the posters or obtained through asking questions of the presenter was not quite in keeping with concepts studied in class. For example, one student claimed that reading slowly allows students to comprehend better, which is not accurate. Another poster indicated that the post-writing stage (i.e., after the final draft is returned) involved proofreading, which would not be the case since the paper has received a final grade and no further revisions are involved. Through the poster presentations and the interactions with the presenters, the other TESOL professors and I were able to examine students' grasp of course content and identify material that needed to be reviewed or reinforced.

The major advantage of the poster session assignment for NNEs, as compared to NESs, was providing the opportunity for a different type of interaction or participation than typically occurs in a classroom setting. NNEs who seldom spoke in class were able to gain experience in explaining concepts to a diverse audience (TESOL and ESL instructors, ESL students, and other students, staff, and faculty at the university) on a one-to-one basis, which was more comfortable for many of them than speaking in front of a large group. They had the opportunity to instruct others, which provided limited teaching experience in a safe environment. As many of the NNEs lacked confidence in their English and presentation skills, this experience was very positive for them. Their personalities emerged in a different way from the classroom and they demonstrated enthusiasm and spoke

with a sense of self-assurance. They were also able to explore topics of specific interest to them as NNEs planning to teach in an EFL environment.

The poster session assignment was a means of considering students' various learning styles, which may be the result of educational backgrounds and affective factors. Similar to the reading question assignment, the poster session also demonstrated students' understanding and application of course reading materials. The assignment greatly benefited NESs as well in that it provided an engaged learning opportunity in which students could apply course concepts, explore meaningful information, demonstrate their knowledge, practice their presentation skills, and prepare for future professional conference participation. This activity is appropriate across disciplines to build students' literacy and learning skills and help faculty assess student comprehension of material.

Philosophy Statements

The final assignment incorporated in the course was having students develop a philosophy of teaching writing. Students were to base their philosophies on the concepts learned in the class, along with their personal experiences as language learners, and consider their future teaching contexts (i.e., ESL or EFL) and unique personal strengths. Concepts and readings that provided students with ideas and possible directions were Larsen-Freeman's (2000) discussion of "principled eclecticism" (p. 183), Mendelsohn's (1996) insights on the value of humanistic approaches, and Kumaravadivelu's (1994, 2001) work on postmethod language teaching.

Larsen-Freeman (2000) encourages teachers to recognize that language teaching and learning are complex and that not all methods or approaches are equally suited for all situations. Each method has some value, but techniques must be blended according to a particular

principle or philosophy. She comments that "teachers who practice principled eclecticism should be able to give a reason for why they do what they do" (p. 183). Adopting techniques depending on the context and learners' needs, teachers should be guided by their values, knowledge, experience, and desired outcomes. Before this can happen, teachers must identify these values, question them, have an attitude of inquiry, and experiment with various methods. This idea of principled eclecticism addresses the concerns raised earlier regarding the students' inclinations to want to know the best way to teach writing or the best textbook to use. They must understand that the answer depends largely on the context and the learners' goals. In other disciplines, students also need to be trained to evaluate and analyze situations to solve problems and determine preferred courses of action.

Based on the practices and philosophies of Janos Korczak, Mendelsohn (1996) observes that methodologies change over time and suggests teacher educators focus on humanistic approaches and values. Mendelsohn suggests that teachers should observe their students (rather than primarily observing other teachers) and learn about their students' backgrounds, personalities, preferences, and learning styles. He advises teachers not to confine themselves to any particular theory or book, and emphasizes the importance of practice to validate theory. Mendelsohn asserts that this approach requires reflection and lifelong learning through professional development opportunities. The philosophy statement assignment seeks to encourage this reflection and the ability to inquire and seek answers.

Finally, Kumaravadivelu (2001) describes the concept of "particularity" (p. 538) as one of three dimensions of postmethod pedagogy. Particularity involves the adoption of pedagogical practices that consider a specific set of teachers, learners, and goals as well as institutional and sociocultural contexts. It

is a departure from the idea that all English-language teaching contexts share a single set of aims, objectives, principles, or procedures. The approaches teachers use must be appropriate to local contexts and based on teachers' individual and collective experiences. These are derived from observations of teaching, evaluation of outcomes, identification of problems, discovery of solutions, and experimentation to see what works and what does not. The postmethod teacher begins by learning about methods based on psychology and linguistics. Through investigation over time, the teacher develops a personal knowledge of the teaching and learning process, specifically which approaches work with which learners and why, and what changes are needed to meet goals.

The philosophy statement assignment provided NNEs with the opportunity to reflect on themselves as English-language teachers, on their possible teaching contexts and approaches, and on their own experiences learning English. Kumaravadivelu (2001) acknowledges that teacher educators are not working with students who lack educational experiences; students already have notions of what constitutes good teaching based on prior learning. Teacher educators must encourage students' critical thinking about their personal and professional knowledge to give them the tools to develop needed strategies and autonomy. Having future teachers compose an initial teaching philosophy statement is a first step in encouraging them to reflect and blend personal experience with professional insights.

The students' philosophy statements revealed that their own experiences as second language learners had provided them with particular sensitivities to the teaching and learning process. Several of the students in the teaching writing class said that they felt learning to write in English was extremely difficult. One commented, "I was once an apprentice writer in English and learning how to

write in a second language has been challenging." She expressed thanks for her teachers who helped her "become a successful writer in the English language." Another remarked, "As English is my second language, the time I devoted to improving my English the most was for my writing skills." Because she kept erasing what she wrote, she "always ended up leaving only a few paragraphs on [her] paper" but now she is able "to write with joy because of strategies that [she] learned in class."

One student began his philosophy statement this way: "When I was in high school in Japan, I had such a hard time to learn English." He explained that he went to an elite high school and had excellent, knowledgeable teachers. He continued, "However, many students including myself were struggling so much with learning this second language." The remainder of his philosophy statement focused on his identification of why he and his classmates struggled and how he would address these problems based on what he had learned from his subsequent experiences and TESOL courses. Even as a teacher in training, he demonstrated the kind of investigation that Kumaravadivelu (2001) argues should characterize the postmethod teacher.

One NNES connected her experiences learning to read in English with what she had learned about schema:

I was having a hard time to read a novel in English; however, it was relatively easy for me to read the one I chose, and it was fun! I think this was because I already knew the brief story and had basic knowledge of that book. Schema, the students' background knowledge, can be a tool to identify where we should start teaching . . . , and it will be a guideline to choose right materials for the students.

Another NNES recognized the importance of helping students set realistic goals. He commented that most students "try to achieve big goal . . .

which is to be like 'Native Speaker,'" and explained "that native-like proficiency shouldn't be the goal for all second language learners." One student expressed her concerns that as a NNES, she may not be able to answer all the students' questions about the language. Her strategy was to not "pretend to know all things because this destroys the trust between student and teacher," but "to acknowledge the limits of her knowledge" and "show that she is also learning with [the students] . . . therefore showing the students her love for education." She felt this would result in a relationship of trust.

This NNES also recommended getting "rid of any type of classroom hierarchy," treating "the students with respect and [taking] their opinions seriously" so that "the students [would] then begin to voice their opinions more." She continued, "By doing this, the teacher is showing love for the students. When the teacher shows that she loves the students, the students open up to the teacher and desires her help with learning." The latter ideas are clearly evident of Mendelsohn's (1996) humanistic approach to language teaching.

Other students' thoughts reflected the idea of being a principled eclectic. One explained that knowing different theories would help her make "informed decisions about what to teach and how to teach," and that she had learned about theories for "how to give feedback and different of feedback styles." She went on: "I will meet very different students in the future. However, I have also learned many different styles of feedback ways." Another illustrated this principle: "I can consider a number of approaches, draw from them, then building my own theories for my students. Teachers can understand and find out the students' styles or ways of learning."

The idea of blending theory with practice, espoused by both Mendelsohn (1996) and Kumaravadivelu (2001) is expressed in the following student quotation:

Teachers need to also become

reflective about their own practices and self-evaluate. For example, I learned about how to improve accuracy. I know the theories so I can predict the result. After I teach, I can get the result and if it is different from my prediction, I can check what is wrong compared with the result of basic theory.

The students' philosophies demonstrated their awareness of the need to be sensitive to their learners: "We must understand our learner population. In order to do this, we must know our students and make sure that we are designing a course in writing that fits their individual needs."

These multiple examples demonstrate the richness of the students' backgrounds as second language learners and the positive impact of their experiences on their future teaching endeavors. The assignment helped the students see the unique advantages they bring to the classroom. They were beginning to form their identities as teachers and demonstrated an awareness of how to create an appropriate fit among teaching approaches, diverse learners, and contexts. They also demonstrated deep levels of learning and engagement with the course materials. The experience was also valuable to NESs in the course as they reflected on their experiences with teaching and learning. Many of them had learned a foreign language and some already had teaching experience. The philosophy assignment develops and supports literacy skills through the writing experience itself, the synthesis of information from course content, and the self-exploration of beliefs about literacy and learning. As such, it could benefit students in many transitional literacy contexts and encourage deeper processing of information.

Student Response and Feedback

The three assignments were evaluated by students by means of a short survey administered in class at the end of

the semester, and received strong ratings. Students rated the following three statements on a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 representing *strongly disagree* and 7 representing *very strongly agree*. The mean for each question, reflecting the opinions of 41 students (12 NESs; 29 NNEs) is reported below.

1. The reading questions helped me engage with the material and be prepared for discussions, and allowed for an alternate way to participate. Mean 5.8

2. The poster session helped me apply what I learned, engage in active learning, demonstrate my understanding of course materials, and prepare me for future teaching situations and professional presentations. Mean 6.2

3. Writing a philosophy statement allowed me to reflect on my own experiences, on my identity and role as a teacher, and on the way I can apply the content learned in the course. Mean 6.3

Informal verbal feedback that I collected throughout the semester also provided insights into student views regarding the assignments. For the reading questions, one student stated that she was impressed that I would take the time to respond individually to her questions. When I returned the students' questions at the beginning of class, they read my comments avidly and would sometimes inquire further about what I had written before or after class. This attests to the value they placed on my feedback. When I elected to respond orally in class to similar questions asked by several students in the class, students indicated interest in questions their peers had asked and volunteered their own responses in addition to mine.

The poster sessions were the highlight of the semester. Students not only discussed their proposals with me but also informally with other professors in the department. Their questions reflected some discomfort with the fact that there was more than one way to present a poster, and they needed much

reassurance. This reaction is similar to their wanting to be told the "right" way to teach or the "best" theory for teaching writing. Students were also extremely concerned about their performances and sought my opinion and those of their other professors when the sessions were over. They needed validation related to their first experience in the professional world. When those who attended the poster sessions did not ask questions, the students were disappointed because they were prepared to share their ideas and wanted attendees to engage them in conversation about their work. This finding illustrates the appropriateness of the assignment for encouraging learner engagement and as an alternate way to promote participation.

Similar to the positive responses related to the reading questions and poster sessions, students also indicated that they enjoyed writing their philosophy statements as it gave them the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences as language learners, and the way the course content either modified or supported their previous beliefs about teaching and learning. The students included these philosophy statements in an electronic portfolio, which showcased their accomplishments in the major and could be shared with potential employers. This helped them consider a wider and authentic audience as they wrote, a fact that they recognized, if not immediately, then at some future point. One student recently e-mailed me and said she needed to polish her philosophy statement as posted in her electronic portfolio as she had found some spelling errors. She had gained some perspective of the importance of professionalism from the assignment and its application to the professional world, especially now that she was in the professional world.

The various responses to the assignments signified that students were invested in developing themselves within the profession. In some cases, they also point to needed refinements in the way I teach the class. This is particularly true of the poster sessions. I

found it difficult to spend adequate time at each poster in order to visit with the students and evaluate their work. Some students felt that I did not spend enough time reviewing their posters. In future sessions, I will need to have the posters set up earlier or have them remain up longer, or I can elicit the help of other TESOL professors to help me evaluate the posters. Also, as the posters were public, instances of students' work being challenged occurred, as did disagreements with the evaluations of their peers. To address this, I need to do more training, and have students evaluate example posters (e.g., those generated by their peers and by professionals at actual TESOL conferences), so that they can make appropriate judgments. This will allow them to recognize that some elements of evaluation are objective and therefore not as relevant (e.g., choice of color, font, and design), but that general principles (e.g., readability, clarity, logical flow of ideas) should be followed. Including both strong and weak professional examples will help students recognize that we are all learning and growing in our professional endeavors.

A variation on the reading assignment has also occurred to me as the result of this reflection. Having students engage in an electronic discussion group would allow greater opportunity for exchange of ideas among themselves in addition to receiving my feedback. Students would be able to participate in class and/or online. The use of technology for ESL students is well-established (e.g., see Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008; Thorne & Black, 2007; Thorne & Payne, 2005; Warschauer, 2006). Online activities in particular are advocated as a means of supporting students who may not feel confident speaking out in class (Palmer, Holt, & Bray, 2008); however, one must be sensitive to possible writing deficiencies in the case of NNEs (Yena & Waggoner, 2003). These online discussions need to be structured and graded in order to be effective. A

disadvantage of this variation is that as future teachers, the students need to be comfortable promoting dialogue in the classroom.

Conclusion

Reflection is an important part of teaching and learning. This reflection on practice has demonstrated how course assignments can be designed to meet the needs of learners, in this case, NNEs, and be successfully implemented. In turn, the implementation process can help teachers examine their approaches and gain insights into their students' perspectives. The three assignments described—reading questions, poster sessions, and philosophy statements—are beneficial to all teachers in training. However, the assignments are especially sensitive to NNEs as learners and seek to provide them with opportunities to explore and discover themselves and their potential professional contributions. The assignments build confidence and help teachers in training apply concepts to their expected teaching contexts. Allowing students to identify needs and address concerns, the assignments are also informative for faculty.

Many faculty have the privilege of preparing NNEs for their professional roles. TESOL preparation programs in particular must find ways to encourage these students to be full participants in their training, empowering them to pursue knowledge relevant to their needs and teaching environments. These future teachers must be equipped to effect positive change both within and outside the profession to overcome the challenges they face as they enter a world where NESs may be favored. Traditional training approaches and courses found in many preparation programs in the United States and other ESL contexts may fall short of preparing NNEs for this role unless responsive approaches can be identified to encourage them to find and express their voices, and to identify relevant approaches to language teaching and learning in a variety of contexts. Similarly, modeling good

teaching practices increases the likelihood that these teachers in training will emulate these practices in the field.

As the outcomes of this reflection demonstrate, faculty in higher education contexts can and should be responsive to the literacy and learning needs of NNEs and their needs as future professionals. These assignments provide NNEs with invaluable insights related to how to learn languages and how to teach them. Similar kinds of assignments can be developed for NNEs in other disciplines. Perhaps more importantly, educators can use these assignments to learn about their students' concerns and experiences.

Beyond meeting the needs of NNEs in the discipline of TESOL, these assignments can assist all students in developing literacy skills through deeper learning as the result of investment in course materials, synthesis and reflection on learning, alternate ways to participate, and the opportunity to develop professional presentation skills. As with teacher educators, other faculty can also benefit from the outcomes of these assignments in terms of learning more about their students' learning processes. In other words, faculty can adopt a humanistic approach to teaching as they engage with students in the classroom, and modify their pedagogical methods as appropriate. The assignments are easily adaptable for different content areas. Educators involved in building students' literacy and learning skills will find that these three straightforward assignments result in further insight about their students, and successful learning experiences for all.

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