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ABSTRACT

Discussions of training and preparation needs for nonnative English speaking (NNES) master's students in teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) graduate programs have seldom given voice to the students themselves nor addressed their perceptions of whether their needs are being met in existing programs. This study reports on the needs identified by NNES students and contrasts these with training needs identified by teacher educators: self confidence, language improvement, and professional empowerment. An understanding of NNES students' perceptions can shed light on the responsibility of TESOL graduate programs to analyze motivations when designing curricula or creating courses. Suggestions are provided for becoming more equitable in addressing the needs of all students. (Contains 38 references.) (Author/KFT)

**"But This Program Is Designed For Native Speakers...": The Perceived Needs Of Nonnative English Speaking Students In MA TESOL Programs**

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***ABSTRACT***

Discussions of training and preparation needs for nonnative English speaking (NNES) MA TESOL students have seldom given voice to the students and addressed their perceptions of whether their needs are being met in existing programs. This study reports on the needs identified by NNES students and contrasts these with training needs as identified by teacher educators: self-confidence, language improvement, and professional empowerment. An understanding of NNES students perceptions can shed light on MA TESOL programs' responsibility to analyze motivations when designing curricula or creating courses, and provides suggestion for becoming more equitable in addressing the needs of all students.

## ***INTRODUCTION***

An indication of the increased demand for the MA in TESOL is reflected in the growth of programs in the United States – nearly 30% from 1989 to 1995 (Butler-Pascoe, 1997). Although many of these programs were primarily designed to train native English speaking teachers to teach adult ESL, MA TESOL programs today accommodate a growing influx of international students who are not necessarily native speakers of English. Have programs adapted to the changing needs of a student population for which they were not originally designed? Furthermore, native English speaking teachers (NESTs) and NNESTs show many differences in teaching behaviors (Medgyes, 1994); does this reflect differences that should be addressed in pre-service programs?

Because teaching is influenced by the teachers' own beliefs and perceptions (Richards & Lockhart, 1994), an understanding of the students' perceptions of their own educational needs will provide a better understanding of those differences in teaching behaviors between NESTs and NNESTs, may have implications for program assessment and development, or may illuminate issues needing further investigation. This paper will present the results of an empirical study focusing on the pre-service experiences of some nonnative English speaking MA TESOL students, to describe their perceived needs and expectations, in their own words, as they prepare to become ELT professionals.

### ***1. ENGLISH AND THE NNEST***

To situate this study into the larger context, I will briefly address issues relevant to any discussion of the NNEST, including the difficulties in defining the term native

speaker, issues of power and the ownership of English, and the realities of the job market for NNES teachers before turning to the study itself.

### ***1.1 What is a native English speaker?***

The definitions of a *native speaker* and a *nonnative speaker* have come under increasing scrutiny in the last two decades and have been discussed at length, and from different perspectives, by Davies (1991), Paikeday (1985), Phillipson (1992) and others. A brief look at the current discussion will serve to highlight the difficulties of assigning English speakers into categories of *native speaker* and *nonnative speaker*, illustrate the implications this has for nonnative teachers of English, and explain my decision to use these terms for this study.

Traditionally, the *native speaker* was "someone who learned a language in a natural setting from childhood as first or sole language" (Kachru and Nelson, 1996: 81). To now, this straight-forward definition has been sufficient for many purposes and many people. But with the rapid growth of English worldwide, in its many contexts and usages, this definition becomes more problematic. Many people in post-colonial communities may also identify themselves as *native speakers* of English, having acquired English alongside any number of local languages. Refusing to acknowledge these speakers as *native speakers* reveals a bias toward the dominant varieties of English – North American, British, Australian (NABA) – and stigmatizes the many other varieties of world English as less worthy or legitimate. Particularly troublesome is the *us and them* dichotomy inherent in the use of terms like *native speaker* and *nonnative speaker* (Kachru & Nelson, 1996).

For our purposes, the real difficulty begins with "the Chomskyan notion that the native speaker is the authority on the language" (Canagarajah, 1999:78). Aside from the difficulty of determining who is a *native speaker* is the importance of recognizing the significance of proficiency before determining language authority. In fact, many self-identified native speakers may indeed lack proficiency, or may be proficient only in certain vernacular registers. Because of this, Kachru and Nelson (1996) have argued that the label *native speaker* "is of no a priori significance, in terms of measuring facility with the language" (78-79). In terms of teaching, this idea of the *native speaker* as grammar authority with an innate understanding of the language, has fueled the idealization of the best teacher of English as the *native speaker*, or what Phillipson (1992) has called the "native speaker fallacy."

It is not my purpose or intention to settle the *native speaker* definition debate nor am I in the position to offer a new choice of terms. Because the issue remains unsettled, I will turn to Davies' (1991) acknowledgement of the significance of self-ascription, that "*we define ourselves* as native speakers or as non-native speakers of particular languages" (8). All of the participants in this study identified themselves as nonnative speakers of English, and because the distinction between NS and NNS exists "in the minds of millions of teachers" (Medgyes, 1994: ix), I will use the terms *native speaker* (NS) and *nonnative speaker* (NNS) when referring to these international students in the pre-service programs. For those teachers already teaching, I shall use the terms Native English Speaking Teacher (NEST) and Non-Native English Speaking Teacher (NNEST).

The issues of authority and ownership of the English language also make a discussion of the terms *native/nonnative* relevant in any analysis of teacher preparation

programs. As we have seen, the term *native speaker* does not reflect the complexities of English use today and it resonates with superiority and the notion of language authority. It is important that we question the motives in maintaining the current NS/NNS distinctions (Liu, D., 1999), and recognize that the very identification of the teacher as a *nonnative speaker* of English may in itself be disempowering (Amin, 1999). Are the use of *native* and *nonnative speaker* terms left from a time when the distinction seemed clearer, or is it simply for lack of something better? Do TESOL programs in the United States, even unconsciously, maintain the notion of native speaker superiority by catering to the needs of the native speaking students in MA TESOL programs at the expense of the nonnative English speaking students?

### ***1.2 Power and Ownership***

The predominance of English around the world and its multitude of functions, from personal interaction to business, commerce, and science and technology, (Kachru, 1992) are manifestations of its power. With this power comes the question of *ownership*. For some in NABA, the predominance of NNSs and varieties of English may pose a threat to the language (which is so much a part of heritage and identity) and to their *ownership* of it (Widdowson, 1996: 70). This feeling of *ownership* combined with the idealization of the NS as the language authority, is part of what "keeps the UK and the US at the centre of ELT" (Rampton, 1996:18).

This is an important point for our purposes, because it is in this atmosphere that the U.S. MA TESOL programs thrive. NNS students who come to such programs to study come to NS environments and may find themselves, in spite of different needs and

backgrounds, receiving the same training as their NS peers. NNS students from previous studies have voiced the need to have a language component as part of their program (Liu, D., 1998; Murdoch, 1994; Nitta, 1997), while others find existing required courses (given their background learning English) to be redundant and irrelevant (Johnston, 1994; Liu, D., 1998; Nitta, 1997).

In addition to coursework, the promotion of western methodologies with little or no acknowledgement of cultural differences or alternative educational ideologies and systems might also be problematic. To some, this is evidence of a type of linguistic imperialism that results in a Western dominance of "the rest of the world by controlling the source and production of knowledge and by dictating the direction of the profession" (Liu, D., 1999: 199-200). This is a valuable position to consider and underscores the need for program designs and motivations to be analyzed closely.

### ***1.3 NNEST realities***

To best prepare students to become ESL/EFL teachers requires that we look a bit at the realities of professional life for the NNEST. NNESTs often fare well in EFL environments where they can make use of the learners' L1, anticipate and prevent language difficulties, and empathize with the needs and problems of learners (Medgyes, 1994). NNESTs bring particular strengths to the ESL context as well. ESL administrators who hire NNESTs recognize the advantages of a teacher who can serve as a successful role model for students (they have learned the language well enough to teach it), and one who can be a facilitator of cross-cultural communications (Flynn, 1999). There is agreement about the elements that an NNS needs to be successful in an ESL



environment: general fluency, native-like or easy-to-understand accent, and an understanding of the language and the culture (Brown, 1998; Flynn, 1999). These three things – fluency, accent, and knowledge of language and culture – will likely pose little difficulty for NABA NS students in pre-service programs (even considering regional accents), but may pose considerable difficulties for their NNS peers.

Despite a professional organization like TESOL and its resolution to prevent discriminatory hiring practices with respect to NNSs (TESOL, 1991), there is ample evidence that the NNS teacher who graduates from a U.S. MA TESOL program will face different challenges than the NS graduates when looking for a teaching position. This is especially true in the ESL context, although a preference for hiring NSs exists in some EFL contexts as well (see Canagarajah, 1999 or Medgyes, 1999). The arguments of applied linguists about the definition of a *native speaker* notwithstanding, surveys of professionals and administrators indicate that the NS/NNS distinction still exists and that hiring preference is often given to the NS (Braine, 1999; Brown, 1998; Liu, J., 1999; Medgyes, 1992). The reasons are multiple, but consistent. In a survey of 116 Intensive English Program administrators, Brown (1998) found that two-thirds of the participants preferred to hire NSs to teach ESL, partly to satisfy departmental policies, but primarily due to NS knowledge of the language and culture, NS linguistic competence, and to accommodate the expectations of the students, some of whom still believe that native speakers are the best language teachers (Braine, 1999; see also Phillipson, 1992). Facing such challenges, how can MA TESOL programs best prepare the NNS students to become ELT professionals, qualified for a variety of teaching contexts? How can we address these issues without an adequate understanding of the needs of these students?

## ***2 THE NEEDS OF NNS PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS – FROM THE LITERATURE***

Because this study includes a comparison of the self-identified needs of the NNS students and those identified by teachers and teacher educators, we will begin with an overview of these areas before looking at the needs as identified by the students in the study. In the current professional literature three themes emerge that will form the basis of our comparison later: self-esteem and confidence, language proficiency, and empowerment in the profession.

### ***2.1 Self-esteem/confidence***

Obviously, self-esteem and confidence are important factors to all ELT professionals, experienced or novice, NS or NNS. Because the causes and manifestations of low self-esteem and confidence may differ between the NS and the NNS, this issue should be addressed in any discussion of particular NNS needs. The Reves and Medgyes (1994) survey of 216 NNESTs from ten countries found that "a constant realization of their limitations in the use of English may lead to a cumulatively stronger feeling of inferiority" among NNESTs (364).

For international students who have been successful with their studies in their home countries, and for those who have taught EFL, suddenly finding themselves surrounded by NSs can greatly undermine self-confidence. Cultural differences and uncertainty about their own abilities can be debilitating, and can result in NNS students who sit silent in graduate courses (Johnston, 2000; Thomas, 1999) or who suffer from the loss of prestige and acceptance experienced in their home countries (Samimy and Brutt-

Griffler, 1999). Making NNS students aware of their own strengths and advantages in the ELT profession is an important part of improving self-esteem. Medgyes (1992) argues that the differences between NESTs and NNESTs should not be blurred or ignored, but that sensitizing all teachers to their strengths and weaknesses will certainly aid in improving self-confidence.

## *2.2 Language proficiency*

Language proficiency, and teachers' perceptions of proficiency, play a key role in NNESTs' confidence (Cullen, 1994; Murdoch, 1994; Reves & Medgyes, 1994), especially given the increasing use of communicative methodologies and materials which require a higher level of proficiency, or mastery of a different register, than might have been required in the past (Cullen, 1994). In addition to self-confidence, accuracy and adherence to some standard variety of English are vital for teachers who may be the language model for their ESL or EFL students (Fillmore, 1992; Nickel, 1987; Radai & Shanklin, 1996). As seen earlier, higher proficiency is a key component to success in the job market.

NNS students and many educators recognize the need for language proficiency work in pre-service programs (Cullen, 1994; Liu, D, 1999; Master, 1990; Medgyes, 1999; Murdoch, 1994; Ryan, 1996). Medgyes (1999) contends that NESTs sometimes fail to recognize, or acknowledge, the NNSs' need to improve their language skills; is it possible that existing TESOL graduate programs do the same? Acknowledging language needs and making efforts in programs to include proficiency help for the NNSs will not

only help those students with language, but will help to improve self-confidence as well (Reves & Medgyes, 1994).

### *2.3 Empowerment*

The issue of empowerment exists in the written goals of the recently formed Non-Native English Speakers in TESOL caucus:

- to create a nondiscriminatory professional environment for all TESOL members regardless of native language and place of birth
- to encourage the formal and informal gatherings of nonnative speakers at TESOL and affiliate conferences
- to encourage research and publications on the role of nonnative speaker teachers in ESL and EFL contexts
- to promote the role of nonnative speaker members in TESOL and affiliate leadership positions (Braine, 1999b: 4).

It is encouraging that TESOL has reached a point where NNESTs have been able to form a caucus and to set these goals. But the need to articulate such goals in an organization the size and prestige of TESOL, I would argue, is a fair indicator of a lack of power felt by NNS teachers in the ELT profession as it currently exists. Braine (1999a) contends that NNSs must

accept that the playing field will not be level for NNS English teachers, that they will have to struggle twice as hard to achieve what often comes as a birthright to their NS counterparts: recognition of their teaching ability and respect for their scholarship (2).

TESOL does not maintain statistics on the percentage of its membership that are NSs or NNSs (from email correspondence with TESOL), but in the five years between 1994-1999, only 15-20% of scholarly writings submitted to TESOL Quarterly for publication came from NNSs. Even fewer were accepted for publication. There are many possible reasons for this – lack of resources in EFL settings, lack of familiarity with the discourse of the profession, a tendency to focus on localized problems, etc. – but there is no doubt that this results in very few role models, feelings of inferiority, and marginalization in the profession for NNSs (McKay in Flowerdew, 1999).

### ***3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS***

It is in the crucial area of needs analysis that this study attempts to add to the existing body of knowledge. This study is not meant to provide definitive answers to the question of what NNS students need to become ELT professionals; rather, it is designed to provide some of those students a voice and an opportunity to share their perceptions and expectations. By comparing those self-identified needs with those identified in the professional literature, it is my hope that this will assist MA TESOL programs to more accurately assess their strengths and weaknesses regarding the educational needs of NNS graduate students and may help program faculty, administrators, and other students to better understand areas that are currently absent from programs, ways in which existing programs may indeed be tailored for NS students at the expense of the NNS students, and needs that should be addressed to best prepare students for the job market and the ELT professional realm.

This study, then, will address the following research questions:

- What do nonnative English speaking MA TESOL students identify as their needs to become English language teaching professionals?
- How do the students' perceptions of needs correspond to those outlined in the current literature, specifically the issues of self-confidence, language proficiency and empowerment in the professional community?

#### ***4. THE PERCEIVED NEEDS OF NONNATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKING STUDENTS IN MA TESOL PROGRAMS***

##### ***4.1 Method – Context and Participants***

Participants in the study were drawn from two large universities in the United States with established MA TESOL programs. All were international students and identified themselves as nonnative speakers of English. This paper will report on the perceptions of six participants in the study. None had completed their studies and were in various stages of their programs, including one who planned to continue on to earn a doctorate in TESOL. Participants represented both genders (two men, four women), and they came from a variety of backgrounds, languages, and with varied experiences teaching English. To protect their privacy, each were given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. Below is a table that provides a short summary of the participants.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Home country</b>	<b>Year in 2-year MA TESOL program</b>	<b>ESL/EFL teaching experience</b>
<b>Ann</b>	Japan	2 <sup>nd</sup>	5 years (EFL)

Planned to teach EFL if she returned to Japan, planned to teach Japanese if she stayed in the USA. She didn't believe that she would teach ESL in the US because "I think I am disadvantaged here" as a nonnative speaker.

<b>Jack</b>	China	1 <sup>st</sup>	None
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Planned to return to China and teach EFL at the university level.

<b>Kathy</b>	Lebanon	2 <sup>nd</sup>	12 years (EFL)
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Planned to complete a Ph.D. following the MA and then would return to Lebanon and teach EFL at the university level.

<b>Marc</b>	Mexico	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 year (EFL) 1 year (ESL)
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Planned to remain in the US and teach ESL. She worried about fairness in the hiring process: "I hope the person that is in charge of hiring to be able to see beyond the nonnative part..."

<b>Muhammad</b>	Angola	1 <sup>st</sup>	5 years (EFL)
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Planned to return to Angola to teach EFL at the university level.

<b>Naomi</b>	Japan	1 <sup>st</sup>	4 ½ years (EFL)
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Planned to teach EFL if she returned to Japan, or might remain in the US and teach ESL, although she fears that "it will be difficult to find a position...because of the label of 'nonnative speaker'."

#### ***4.12 Data Collection***

The principal source of data for this research were complete transcriptions of interviews conducted in the fall of 1999 with each participant. A guide of open-ended questions was used in the interview with each student, with the intention of recording these students lived experiences and self-perceptions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In addition, individual email dialogues were established and discussion also continued informally over a one-year period; field notes were kept of these conversations as well.

#### ***4.13 Data Analysis***

The data were analyzed and common themes identified through “comparing, contrasting, aggregating, and ordering” (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p.17) these transcribed interviews, email dialogues, and from field notes kept during the interviews and in subsequent conversations with participants. I have chosen to focus on those issues that recurred throughout the data and formed salient themes for the students.

### ***4.2 FINDINGS***

#### ***4.21 Research Question One***

***What do nonnative English speaking MA TESOL students identify as their needs to become English language teaching professionals?***

In the data three major themes emerged: language improvement, cultural awareness and experience in an English speaking country, and pedagogy. We shall



examine each of these in turn and also include a look at other issues identified by the participants.

#### *4.22 Language*

By far the most common theme to emerge was the topic of language and linguistic competence. All of the participants identified language competence as central to their vision of the ideal teacher and five of the six identified increased proficiency as a goal for themselves personally. Issues of general fluency and pronunciation were the areas most frequently reported by the students, although writing, listening skills, reading, and aspects of pragmatics also surfaced in the interviews. When asked how proficient a teacher needs to be, Kathy, the only student who did not identify language proficiency as a concern, had this to say:

I do feel that a nonnative teacher should have a minimum proficiency in the language, minimum knowledge about the language to be able to answer questions and to be able to use it in such a way that, I mean I wouldn't want to go in a class and say "He do."

Muhammad spoke of language as it applies to teaching pronunciation, hoping to gain an understanding of the English phonological system, as well as a standard that he can use when teaching. Muhammad was the only participant to speak of the need for a "standard" English, and it is partly a result of his previous studies in England:

I appreciate that we are learning a range of diversities, in American dialects, American varieties of English, and accent and this and that...I went through the same system when I was in Britain, you know, learning in my phonetic and

phonology class, we learned different British varieties of English...but I wonder, where I will stand as an EFL teacher?

Three students – Jack, Naomi and Ann – named language improvement as a top priority. Naomi spoke of her role as a model for her future students and the importance of improved language skills for that reason:

I always ask linguistic questions to everyone around me, because I don't really know whether I am saying something right in a natural manner. Since I am going to be a language teacher, my goal is not to make myself intelligible, but to express myself as nativelike as possible since my students will listen to me and pick up my speech.

Writing skills were also important. Because writing was difficult and time consuming, two participants regretted the lack of writing assistance for NNS graduate students. Marc asked for a "research paper writing clinic" and Naomi echoed this:

the writing center [at the University] is for both native and nonnative undergraduate students. They are considered to be in need of help, I guess. But we graduate students are DEEPLY in need also (!) in my opinion [emphasis hers].

Jack, Kathy and Naomi named sociolinguistic competence and pragmatics as very important as well. Kathy worried that "sometimes I understand messages through my own Lebanese pragmatic interpretation."

Naomi:

Well, we, in Japan, we act differently in a different way from what we are expected here, which means we have to transfer pragmatic, pragmatic awareness, so and that doesn't come naturally all the time, so to seem natural and to seem and to look natural and to seem more native-like, have to be always conscious of how I should act or what kind of language I should use, or how to apologize, how to express gratitude, those things.

#### ***4.22 Cultural Awareness and Experience in an English Speaking Country***

Culture appeared in some form in every interview, and there were some significant differences in the approach and belief in the importance of cultural awareness for future teaching. Both Naomi and Jack's assessment of the importance of culture was tied directly to their futures as EFL teachers. Jack:

when I return to China I'm not supposed to teach only the English grammar, but also the English culture and my experience in the United States.

Muhammad named exposure to American culture as important for him, to add to his understanding of British culture. He views this as a way of broadening his experience and:

I wish I will have developed, by the time I finish, enough cultural information that may help me ... help students understand what language diversities are.

The attitude was a little different for Kathy, from Lebanon, and Marc, from Mexico. Kathy worried that "sometimes we exaggerate about the culture" but admitted:

It's important to know something about the language, the culture behind the language, a language is not something, I believe...it's not separate from the people who use it.

Required to take a class on American culture in her program, she had this to say:

It was lots of fun, I really don't see it helped me, it's going to ever help me in my teaching.

Marc had the strongest and only negative reaction to the importance of culture. She is the only one of the participants who took ESL classes in the United States, and her discussion of culture centered largely on her experiences as a student:

at some point I was thinking, well, it's too much American culture, too much Americanizing people...so maybe it's important to know...I mean, I know, like if someone's going to be living in certain places, they need to know certain rules, but that's different than bringing up culture all the time.

#### ***4.23 Pedagogy***

Only Kathy, the teacher with 12 years experience, did not name pedagogy as a major reason for pursuing an MA in TESOL. Muhammad stressed the importance of pedagogy in his description of the ideal teacher:

you have the two very important requirements from my point of view, which are the linguistic command of the language on the one hand and on the other hand the pedagogical preparation of the teacher. Combining the two I think would make a good teacher.

Ann also felt that methods were important for her:

My goal is maybe to learn various teaching strategies...I want to improve this kind of skills.

Jack stressed his interest in methods, but considered how those things he learned in the U.S. would apply to his future work teaching EFL in China:

I still need to improve a lot of things, and another thing is, of course, I should learn some teaching methods. I should maybe just learn some good things from American styles and then think about the Chinese realities and try to...combine them well when I return to China.

#### ***4.24 Other***

Before comparing these self-identified needs of the students with those identified in the literature, it is worth mentioning a few of the other issues that emerged in the discussions with one or more of the students. First is the area of academic preparation. Naomi wanted "more professional knowledge" and Marc "a strong academic background." Kathy, who plans to complete her doctoral studies in TESOL following completion of her MA, felt that the MA is just the beginning.

In addition, others felt a need for more information about the EFL situation, specifically because this is the environment in which they plan to teach. In his discussion of the issues of pronunciation and the search to find a "standard" to use in his classroom, Muhammad had this to say:

But in my EFL situation where people will never ever interact with Americans or British, there is not enough justification to expose them into a variety of dialects except when we adopt, say the standard English.

Lastly, some of the students spoke of the difficulty of making an adjustment to the first year in the programs, some because this was the first experience abroad, others simply because they felt isolated as international graduate students. Ann:

The first year was, that was so terrible, because I had no overseas experience...so I was struggling with many problems.

Kathy:

I must say at the beginning I was very disappointed, not by the courses themselves, but the attitude of the department, I expected, maybe because here again comes personal qualities, my characteristics, I'm a peoples person...but so I arrive in a strange country in a strange department and I didn't feel any welcome...I mean I don't expect a party or something...The professors are just names, frightening names, this is the guru, this person is the guru of this and this person is the guru of that and you feel just intimidation, that's all I felt. I'm like,

am I ever going to make it in this country, it's a different academic system, I've been away from classes and school for 12, 13 years, am I going to make it?

#### ***4.3 Research Question Two***

***How do the students' perceptions of needs correspond to those outlined in the current literature, specifically the issues of self-confidence, language proficiency and empowerment in the professional community?***

With the exception of language proficiency, there was little explicit overlap in what the students' identified as needs and the issues of self-confidence, language proficiency, and empowerment in the professional community as identified by teacher educators in the professional literature. The issue of self-confidence, however, seemed to lurk just below the surface in many of the conversations. One might expect any new graduate student to struggle with self-confidence, but for these students it seemed largely tied to their nonnative appearance and insecurities about their own language abilities.

In a discussion of his disappointment with one of his required classes, Muhammad said that he "felt at the beginning that I wasn't up to the subject because I'm an international student." He felt relieved when he learned that the NSs in the class were unhappy, too, an indication that Muhammad, and perhaps the others as well, seem always aware of their status as NNSs. The questioning of their own abilities, weighed against the perception of superior abilities from their NS peers, can have a dramatic effect on self-confidence (Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999b; Thomas, 1999).

Like the studies by Cullen (1994) and Murdoch (1994), the perception of their own proficiency and language competence results in pressure to perform linguistically in a way that was not required of NSs. This played a key role in the self-confidence of a number of participants, including Naomi:

as a nonnative speaking teacher, sometimes you are expected to know more than native speakers, because if you... [say] "Can you borrow me three dollars?"...these are considered okay in regular conversation of course, people never misunderstand you...but if you ever say this in class, if a nonnative speaking teacher said this in his class, people might catch it and think...because of my linguistics incompetence, oh she's a nonnative teacher, oh she made a mistake, oh she's not trustworthy.

*(Note: Borrow/lend is used interchangeably in some areas of the US. A NS can confuse these without a problem; in Naomi's view a NNS risks being judged as linguistically incompetent.)*

All of the participants stressed the importance of language proficiency for NNESTs. Five of the six identified increased proficiency as an important component and goal for them to become the English language teaching professionals that they want to be. The professional literature, as we have seen, abounds with recommendations about the necessity of providing language assistance for NNS pre-service teachers. Interestingly though, when asked what responsibility the MA TESOL program had to assist them with their language proficiency, not one of the participants felt that their graduate program had any responsibility for their language needs. Ann:



because this is a graduate course, so the student, I mean the graduate candidate should be, should speak more fluent English and this is, no, I don't think they're [the MA program] responsible for our English proficiency.

Marc was concerned about proficiency before she applied:

I don't know how responsible the program should be, when I asked about the program they told me, well, we're looking for really high quality people and if you are a nonnative speaker we are expecting that you will have almost a nativeness proficiency, so people will not have to wait for your response, or ask for clarification, I was like, wow, that's high.

Two of the participants said they felt that the program was designed for native speakers and they had no right to expect language help. Naomi:

But this program is designed for native speakers, I think, so I have to work on my linguistic competence on my own.

The final issue is that of empowerment in the professional community. With a single exception, none of the participants identified it as a need, let alone a priority. Of the six students, only two belonged to TESOL. Four of the six knew nothing about the Caucus for Non-Native English Speaking Teachers and only one belonged to the Caucus. Naomi was aware of the existence of the Caucus, but wasn't sure if she would participate in it:

I don't know what kind of activities they particularly do or I don't think I'm going to have research in this particular area, because this is just so personal for me, and I don't really want to do research on this, although I'm very interested.

Asked about joining any professional organizations, Jack said: "Who knows?" and felt that it wasn't that important for him as a "beginner".

Only Marc was active in both TESOL and the NNEST Caucus. Being part of the Caucus introduced her to other NNESTs.

I felt I was the only one in the world...I mean there have been nonnative teachers for years, I mean I'm reading this article from five years ago and they don't even mention them, it's like native speakers, native speakers. That's not fair, so I think it's a good start [the Caucus]...I like being part of that group. I'd like to be more involved.

Marc was the most activist of the participants. She valued involvement, questioned the presentation of American culture in ESL classes, and touched on the issue of race in teaching. As far as the MA TESOL program's responsibilities, she felt that the program should acknowledge the NNESTs contributions in the field:

I would like to see more discussion about the role of the native speaker and the nonnative speaker teacher, like some readings we have been doing, some of them are a little old...these are old readings, so we need to have more discussion about that...among the students and faculty. Yeah, more, to give more recognition,

more value to, because I, it's not that I'm the victim, but I really think I have to, nonnative speakers have to do a double effort.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Of the needs identified by the students, self-confidence and increased language proficiency were two areas mirrored in the professional literature. Issues of pedagogy, identified specifically as a priority by the students, was a given in the discussions throughout the literature. As we have seen, the issue of self-confidence seemed to be present in the background of much of the discussion with the participants. The more explicit concern about language skills is not particularly surprising, especially in an environment where constant comparison (from themselves and others) with their NS peers may result in a “feeling of underachievement [that] is particularly excruciating” to the NNS student (Medgyes, 1994: 15). But it is significant that while many educators actively promoted the inclusion of language assistance as an important component of a pre-service program, none of the participants concurred. Instead, they asked for “peripheral” help, such as access to a writing clinic, more feedback from teachers and peers, or the opportunity to observe or participate in ESL classes in the university IEP.

How can we explain the differences in the participant-identified needs and those identified by researchers and teacher educators? First is the issue of the experience that the latter bring with them to the discussion. As new graduate students, many may be *unaware* of their needs as future ELT professionals and come to programs not only to learn the craft of language teaching, but to learn *what they need to know*, and for this they rely on the program, and the experienced faculty, to provide them with courses and

resources that will expose them to the things they will need for the future. It seems likely that students, including the NNSs, trust that the programs they are enrolled in will have sound reasons for inclusion of some aspects of preparation and the non-inclusion of others; the faith, perhaps, that this MA TESOL program understands what I need better than I do.

A second, and important, reason that none of the participants in this study felt that the program had a responsibility for NNS student needs, particularly language competence, was explicitly answered by two of them: they felt that their program was designed for native speakers, geared specifically to provide the education and training that NS graduate students need. Although the NNS students in this study seemed to feel that the graduate programs had no responsibility to supply language help, I see the requests for language feedback and some acknowledgement of EFL issues as evidence that they wished the program would do a bit more in addressing areas that are of particular concern to them.

It is also possible in the current atmosphere of tolerance and multi-cultural sensitivity, that many administrators, faculty and students are loathe to focus on differences. Ignoring the differences may actually do more harm than being open and honest about them. One participant expressed her frustration with her mentor teacher's refusal to address her pronunciation or grammar errors, and another felt that the NNSs, with their different needs, seem to be ignored in classes.

A final issue of note is that of empowerment. Among the participants, there seemed an overall lack of awareness of the benefits or usefulness of participation in professional organizations. Part of this, I am certain, is the fact that some of the

participants are fairly new to the field, but a number of them come in with at least some experience teaching English. The experience of Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) and the graduate seminar that dealt with issues specific to the NNESTs, shows that empowerment may come only with an awareness of the issues and the students' own roles in the TESOL professional community. In fact, the only participant who questioned assumptions and advocated for discussion about the issues facing NNESTs, was the one student who became involved and joined the NNEST caucus after she learned at a TESOL convention that she wasn't "the only one in the world." At the very least, the increased use of NNEST authored materials, and an open discussion among faculty and students of the issues surrounding NESTs and NNESTs, may facilitate and build a sense of self-worth for the NNS student while recognizing NNEST contributions and potential in the profession.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

I believe this small study can supplement and add to the body of knowledge surrounding the perceptions and beliefs of the NNS students enrolled in MA TESOL programs. A surprising number of difficult issues in the field today surfaced in my interviews and discussions with the international students: world Englishes and "standard" English, ESL and EFL similarities and differences, and race and power in the profession.

There is obviously much more to be done and many other questions that need to be answered. It could be of great benefit to follow these NNS students after graduation, to gauge their perceptions of the successes and shortcomings of their MA TESOL

programs once they begin teaching their own classes. In addition, an analysis and comparison of the needs identified by native English speaking MA TESOL students and working NESTs and teacher educators; more data like that found in this study that focuses on NNS students; and a close scrutiny of the requirements for individual programs, will help to determine if existing programs are indeed geared to satisfy the needs of the NS students at the expense of the NNS students. And armed with that information, programs can ask themselves the following: what adjustments can, or should, be made to accommodate whatever differences exist in the needs of the NS and the NNS student?

As far as language competency, it is important to continue to research to better understand the minimum level of proficiency necessary for ESL/EFL teachers. Following that, the question remains of how responsible TESOL programs should be to include language courses as part of the curriculum for the NNS student. It could mean the development of an “individualized” MA, in which a program recognizes and accommodates the collective needs of students while possessing the flexibility to acknowledge individual student needs. Currently, some graduate programs seek to provide the language assistance that many NNS students need or want. Nitta (1997) found that the vast majority of her study participants, both NS and NNS, supported the idea of initial interviews with faculty upon admission, to assess potential language deficiencies and to steer students toward appropriate courses that they then include in their graduation plan. Other programs require MA TESOL students to participate in ITA (International Teaching Assistant) proficiency evaluations and/or coursework prior to teaching in the university IEP (the University of Minnesota, for example). Still another

suggests requiring all MA TESOL students to videotape an ESL lesson that is then reviewed by faculty and assessed using oral proficiency guidelines similar to those already in place for ITAs. This is to ensure that NNS students have "sufficient" proficiency (as judged by faculty, still a bit problematic) prior to graduation. Those who do not pass are referred on to appropriate courses to improve their speaking proficiency and then can submit a new videotape (Master, 1990). At the very least, the need for language development for NNS students in MA TESOL programs should be openly acknowledged and addressed.

Additionally, it is my hope that this study will also help to shed light on an MA TESOL program's responsibility to analyze its own motivations when designing curricula and creating courses. The specific suggestions from the NNS participants for help with the adjustment of the first year, coursework specific to teaching EFL, a willingness to work with NNSs and their own language weaknesses, and an acknowledgement of the existence, strengths and potential of NNESTs, might make current programs more equitable when addressing the needs of all of the students. I would argue that the NS MA students stand to benefit as well in a more open dialogue between themselves and their NNS peers. Jack ended his interview by saying "I mean native and nonnative English teachers should learn from each other." I agree and would argue that the ideal would be for all students, faculty, and administration to learn and work together to acknowledge and address the different needs of incoming students. The goal, after all, is to produce the most qualified ESL/EFL teachers, ones that will make worthwhile contributions to the field, and teachers, both NEST and NNEST, that can become role models to the next generation of MA TESOL students.

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