

11 NNESTs, Teacher Education, Language Diversity, and Equality

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In this chapter, I describe my experience as the director of an ESL writing program, including my role preparing NNESTs and NESTs to teach ESL writing. I am a NES who completed my undergraduate and graduate degrees in the US. In my graduate work, I focused on linguistics, ESL, L2 writing, and rhetoric/composition. My research and publications have centered primarily on L2 writing, including ESL writing, EFL writing, and writing in non-English L2s. I have also published some work related to world Englishes. Since 1990, I have taught college-level writing, mostly ESL writing. Currently, I am a professor in the English department at the University of Toledo, where I have worked since 1997. Since 2005, I have directed my department's ESL writing program.

To understand the context of my work, it is important to understand the institution where I am employed. The University of Toledo is a public university located in the U.S. Midwest. It enrolls approximately 20,000 students, including about 16,000 undergraduates. It accepts about 94% of its undergraduate applicants. Approximately 870 undergraduate international students attend the university. Until recently, most international undergraduates entered through the university's intensive English program and were allowed to matriculate with a score of 450 on the paper-based, institutional TOEFL. (The score range for this test is 360–677.) Recently, the university has decided to waive this requirement to allow students who graduate from the intensive English program to matriculate without a TOEFL score. In the last several years, more international students have been enrolling in the university without attending the intensive English program; they must achieve a 71 on the iBT (internet-based TOEFL) or equivalent to matriculate. Until recently, all sections of ESL writing at the University of Toledo were taught by TAs earning an MA-TESOL at the University of Toledo through the English department. Typically, eight to 12 ESL TAs taught in the program in any given year, many of whom were NNESTs. In most cases, NNEST TAs were in the minority, but during some periods, half or more of the ESL TAs were NNESTs.

In my university's now-defunct MA-TESOL program, I taught various linguistics courses and courses about ESL pedagogy. Just as the MA-TESOL program was ending, my department started a new MA program in English with a concentration in writing studies. My colleagues in the writing studies concentration were eager to have me continue to teach *Issues in ESL Writing* and *Sociolinguistics* as two required courses in the writing studies concentration.

During more than 17 years as the director of the English department's ESL writing program, I have worked with many NNES TAs. Before I started directing the ESL writing program, I had read some of the NNEST literature and was attuned to such issues as the "native speaker fallacy" (Phillipson, 1992). I had also worked alongside NNES TAs during my graduate studies. However, as the supervisor of the TAs teaching ESL writing at the University of Toledo, I did not initially set out to address the needs of NNES TAs in particular. Rather, my goal was to support all TAs, and frankly, I did not see NNESTs as needing extra help, perhaps because I had never experienced the challenges of being a NNEST myself. I was also influenced by the fact that almost all of the NNES TAs in our program had already taught, typically in their home countries, when they started their MA-TESOL—and thus often seemed more competent than their NES TA counterparts, who rarely had previous teaching experience. Thus, rather than having an explicit plan to support NNES TAs, I found myself adjusting my practices over time to try to meet the needs of the TAs I had—many of whom happened to be NNESTs.

Over the years, I have drawn several conclusions about the needs of NESTs who are preparing to teach writing or currently teaching it. In this chapter, I make several recommendations about the preparation of writing instructors, especially NNES writing instructors, drawing on my years of teaching ESL writing and directing my university's ESL writing program. My recommendations are also based on my background in L2 writing research and sociolinguistics. I argue that in-service and pre-service education for writing instructors, including NNESTs, should focus explicitly on teaching L2 writing. Additionally, I argue that pre-service and in-service writing instructors should also receive in-depth education about issues of language variation and diversity. Finally, I argue that during teacher education and professional development related to writing instruction, NNESTs and NESTs should be treated as equals by their supervisor, who should foster a sense of equality among all TAs.

The Importance of Coursework Related to L2 Writing

Almost all teachers of writing will encounter NNES writers in their courses, whether those courses are mainstream writing courses or courses aimed at

NNES students. Thus, it is important for all future or in-service writing instructors, including NNESTs, to take a course that focuses on teaching ESL writers. It should not be assumed that NNESTs are qualified to teach ESL writers simply because of their own NNES status.

In fact, many NNESTs I have encountered in my years of teaching have received most or all of their English-language instruction outside the US, where English-language writing instruction is often the least-emphasized language skill. According to previous work (Cerezo et al., 2020; Reichelt, 2020), when writing is assigned in foreign language contexts, its purpose is typically to support the overall acquisition of English, especially grammar and vocabulary, rather than to teach academic written genres. Additionally, I have found in my research (Reichelt, 1996; 2005a; 2020) that NNESTs may or may not have received writing instruction in their first language(s), as writing instruction is not necessarily a part of the L1 curriculum in various countries around the world (See also Hatasa, 2011). And even if NNESTs have received L1 writing instruction, differences in pedagogical approach and genre expectations may make the U.S. writing classroom and teaching approaches unfamiliar to NNESTs (Clachar, 2000; Hargan, 1995; Lee, 2013; Naghdipour, 2016; Reichelt, 1996, 2009b, 2020). Thus, NNESTs need instruction about teaching ESL writing in U.S. academic contexts.

When the MA-TESOL TAs I supervised were teaching ESL writing courses at the University of Toledo, all of them were required to take my course *Issues in ESL Writing*. I still offer the course, which is now required for students pursuing our new MA in English with a concentration in writing studies. The primary source for course readings is Dana Ferris' and John Hedgcock's (2013) textbook *Teaching L2 Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice*. I use relevant articles and book chapters to supplement the textbook. The course provides a brief summary of historical trends in L1 and L2 writing pedagogy and overviews the various writing theories on which current ESL writing pedagogy draws. Additionally, my course *Issues in ESL Writing* overviews the various types of ESL writers who appear in ESL writing courses and provides information about course and task design; feedback and assessment of ESL writing; plagiarism concerns; and tutoring ESL writers in the writing center. In the course, we also compare and contrast ESL with (E)FL writing instruction, drawing on Ilona Leki (2001) and ideas from my own work EFL writing around the world (e.g., Reichelt, 1997, 2005a; 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2013). This topic is especially relevant to NNESTs because of differences in approaches to L2 writing instruction in various geographical contexts.

Many of the readings, discussions, and activities I use in the course are intended to help students view linguistic diversity in a positive light, under-

cutting the idea that the purpose of writing is simply to display grammatical accuracy. This is crucial, especially for NNESTs, whose English-language education in their home countries may have focused on grammatical correctness in writing assignments. In *Issues in ESL Writing*, we discuss holistic approaches to reading student writing, focusing primarily on higher order concerns such as genre appropriateness, audience awareness, content, organization, and development of ideas. In the course, I also expose students to the holistic procedures for scoring ESL writing placement tests for our ESL writing program, examining and scoring sample tests with them. Many NNESTs have commented on the usefulness of learning to view writing holistically rather than focusing on errors, noting that it helped them with grading. These NNESTs had been students (and in many cases, teachers) of English as a foreign language in their home countries and had focused on writing as a means of practicing and reinforcing English vocabulary and grammatical structures—rather than focusing on the broader quality of a piece of writing.

Additionally, since grading is often a very difficult aspect of teaching, especially for new teachers (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013), as part of the course activities, we practice grading several ESL writers' papers, sometimes in class, sometimes in groups, and sometimes as at-home assignments. NNESTs in the course have commented on the usefulness of this approach, noting that it was especially helpful because they had not taken an English-language writing course in the US and thus weren't sure how to approach grading student papers. I provide students in the course with grading rubrics for each paper, ones that I have developed over many years of teaching. The rubrics emphasize higher order concerns and are designed to remind the grader of each assignment's focus as well as the priorities of the course in general. I especially emphasize that graders should not penalize students for difficult-to-acquire aspects of language such as prepositions and articles, which rarely interfere with meaning (See Casanave, 2017, pp. 157-164 for a discussion of the error correction debate in L2 writing). I use this approach because, based on my years of teaching ESL writing and my own experience as a writer of several non-English L2s, I believe it is the best way to respond to the writing of ESL students. My choice of this approach isn't based on concern that NNESTs will mark such errors inaccurately; however, this approach may allay the fears of some NNEST instructors if they experience linguistic insecurity about grading papers, especially responding to linguistic errors. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, it offers NNESTs more experience with approaching papers holistically.

The course *Issues in ESL Writing* places NNESTs and NES TAs on equal footing in multiple ways. Since no one in the program has previously taken coursework in second language writing, everyone in the course is a novice, each

exploring a body of unfamiliar theory, research, and ideas about pedagogical practices. One of the first assignments for the course is a reading-writing autobiography. I have been assigning reading-writing autobiographies in various courses for around 30 years. In this course, the reading-writing autobiography assignment highlights the strengths of NNESTs, even as the NNESTs express their own writing insecurities in these narratives. Through sharing their reading-writing autobiographies, the NNESTs and NESTs learn about each other's experiences as well as perceived strengths and weaknesses as writers. Often, the NESTs are impressed with the NNESTs' breadth of reading and writing experiences in multiple languages and express admiration and respect. In addition, NNESTs learn from their NEST counterparts' autobiographies that even NESTs struggle with aspects of academic writing in English. Although the main purpose of this assignment is to allow students to reflect on their own literacy experiences and goals, the reading-writing autobiography also allows everyone in the course to learn more about each other. As Lia Kamhi-Stein (1999) writes in a discussion of preparing NNESTs, analyzing NNESTs' language-learning histories not only offers NESTs the opportunity to learn about their peers' L2 learning processes, but it also helps NNESTs see themselves as sources of information. This can counter any sense that NNESTs are inferior to their NNEST counterparts simply by virtue of being native speakers of English. Additionally, during peer review, NNESTs are able to showcase their ability to provide useful feedback on their NNEST and NEST peers' work, again reinforcing their competence and value.

NNESTs' strengths and experiences also surface during other class discussion in this course, especially when NNESTs report to the class on their own experiences with English as a foreign language (EFL) writing—as students and often as teachers—in their home countries. Often, this has led to NESTs being impressed by the NNESTs' knowledge of writing instruction practices in various contexts around the world—and realizing that NNESTs are valuable sources of information about how the NESTs' own ESL students may have experienced writing instruction in their home countries.

The Importance of Coursework Related to Sociolinguistics, Including Language Diversity

Todd Ruecker et al. (2018) recommend providing courses to NNESTs that explore issues of language diversity. Because of my background in linguistics in general and my research background in sociolinguistics (e.g., 2005b, 2006; Sánchez & Reichelt, 2021), I am able to offer a course in sociolinguistics. So-

ciolinguistics was a required course for the defunct MA-TESOL and is now a required course for the MA-writing studies concentration. In the course, language variation and diversity is addressed in detail. The main source of readings for the course is Rajend Mesthrie et al.'s (2009) textbook *Introducing Sociolinguistics*. The course includes discussion of non-standard dialects of English, including African American English, Chicano English, Appalachian English, and varieties of English spoken by indigenous people in the US, e.g., varieties spoken on the Ute reservation in northeastern Utah. It is important for NNESTs, who may be unfamiliar with these varieties of English, to learn about them because they may encounter them when teaching mainstream or ESL writing. Many NNESTs enrolled in *Sociolinguistics* have not been familiar with these dialects. Interestingly, some NNESTs seemed more open than some of their NES counterparts to the notion that social dialects like African American English or regional dialects like Appalachian English are legitimate dialects of English. This is perhaps because the NNESTs did not grow up in a society that is biased against these varieties of English. The NNESTs' more objective perceptions of these dialects proved useful for class discussion.

Sociolinguistics also includes discussion of world Englishes (Canagarajah & ben Said, 2009; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2017). Since NNESTs may have feelings of self-doubt because of their status as nonnative speakers of English (Liu, 2005; Reis, 2011), it is helpful to all TAs to learn about and respect the many varieties of English that are spoken across the globe. I want all students in their course to know that linguists view different varieties of English as legitimate, especially given my role as an authority figure in their program. In our discussion of world Englishes, we engage in debunking the myth that native speakers are always the best teachers. Like Kang, a NNEST in Davi Reis' (2011) study, both NNESTs and NESTs are able to question their "blind belie[f] in the native speaker mode" (p. 146).

NNESTs as Equals and Experts in Their Roles as TAs

It is important that NNESTs be on equal footing with their NEST counterparts, not only in their coursework, but also in their work as TAs. NNEST participants in Ruecker et al.'s (2018) study indicated that they felt supported by professors who noted their interest in writing and were neutral or positive about their NNEST status, and I hope I live up to that characterization. In fact, because NNEST TAs in our MA-TESOL program had previous teaching experience before starting our program, it was easy for me to see them as valuable resources. Especially as NNESTs gained more experience in the program, they confidently asserted their competence in our ESL writing

TA staff meetings. During these meetings, the TAs usually wanted to discuss classroom management issues like attendance, tardiness, late papers, and plagiarism although we also discussed ideas about teaching the course material. Classroom management can be challenging for all new TAs because of their novice status, but markedly for NNESTs, especially if students question a NNEST's authority or credibility (Kamhi-Stein, 1999; Ruecker et al., 2018; Thomas, 1999). Our fairly informal discussions allowed TAs to pool their knowledge and experience in a collegial environment.

While all TAs seemed to benefit from staff meeting discussions, I believe these meetings particularly benefitted NNEST TAs. The meetings seemed to de-emphasize TAs' language backgrounds and instead put the focus on expertise (see Kasztalska & Maune, this volume, for more about WPAs emphasizing instructor knowledge and skills when working with NNESTs). Despite their NNEST status, second-year NNEST TAs were typically seen as experienced experts by their first-year counterparts. Second-year NNEST TAs quickly realized that after a year in the program, they were much more oriented to teaching writing at the U.S. university level than new TAs, whether those new TAs were NNESTs or NESs. The fact that most of the NNEST TAs had prior teaching experience (in their home countries), while the NES TAs rarely did, increased their clout in the eyes of their NES counterparts. Additionally, in staff meetings, NNEST TAs learned that their NES TA counterparts were also experiencing teaching difficulties and that they, the NNESTs, often had the expertise to provide productive solutions, especially once they had a year's experience in the program. All of this, I believe, helped undermine any hierarchies among TAs that related to their linguistic status.

In Jun Liu's (2005) study of NNEST TAs, participants indicated that they wished they had been provided more opportunities to observe the class they would eventually teach; Liu thus recommends that NNEST TAs receive hands-on training during their first semester rather than teaching their own class immediately. In our ESL writing program, both NNEST TAs and NES TAs experienced such hands-on training when they began teaching in the program. In their first semester, all TAs assisted an experienced TA with teaching an ESL writing course. The new, assisting TA attended all class sessions, worked with students during class, and met informally with the lead TA about classroom issues. As the semester progressed, the assisting TA became more involved, teaching some class sessions, working with the lead TA to grade papers, and/or meeting with the lead TA and individual students for conferences. When a TA began teaching their own class during their second semester, the TA they had assisted was a convenient peer with whom to discuss teaching ideas and problems. This arrangement was useful to NNESTs, who typically had little

or no experience in writing classes in higher education in the US. Additionally, NNES TAs may have felt more comfortable approaching a peer for advice rather than exposing weaknesses to me, their supervisor. As many authors point out, NNESTs may be particularly self-conscious about their weaknesses, based on their linguistic and cultural status (e.g., Liu, 2005; Reis, 2011). Being able to approach a peer informally is one solution to this problem.

This arrangement sometimes involved me assigning a second-year NNES TA to mentor a NES TA. This highlighted the notion to all TAs that it was expertise and competence, not linguistic status, that is important in teaching. In fact, new NES TAs seemed to take it in stride when they were assigned a NNES TA as a mentor. All new TAs often expressed feeling like they weren't prepared to teach ESL writing, and they appeared eager to learn from their more experienced peers, whether NNESTs or NESs. Experienced NNES TAs typically acted with confidence and authority in mentoring new TAs, drawing on what they had learned in their first year in the program.

Discussion and Conclusion

The specific ways in which these strategies were implemented at the University of Toledo can be adopted, perhaps in modified form, at other institutions. Since new TAs found it helpful to shadow experienced (second-year) TAs instead of teaching their own course right away, other WPAs might consider advocating for this practice at their own institutions if it's not already in place. At the University of Toledo, the practice started initially in the mainstream writing sections, with new MA-literature students—who were also TAs—shadowing full-time mainstream writing instructors. We soon followed suit in the MA-TESOL program, with new ESL writing TAs shadowing second-year ESL writing TAs. If this approach isn't feasible, new TAs, whether NNESTs or NNESTs, might also shadow permanent, full-time instructors—although this can place an unwanted burden on such instructors, who typically have heavy workloads. If this approach is adopted, those instructors should participate voluntarily and should receive a course release and/or monetary compensation. WPAs could argue that the temporary loss of the TA labor during one semester of training is balanced out by the fact that TAs are likely to provide higher-quality instruction after such an opportunity. If it is impossible to allow new TAs to forego teaching their own class during their first semester, TAs might be provided with opportunities to shadow a more-experienced instructor for several weeks while teaching their own class.

Allowing new TAs to assist an experienced TA is ideal because it creates a natural mentoring system. However, if such team teaching cannot be im-

plemented, WPAs can also pair new TAs with more-experienced TAs, even if they are not teaching a course together. This pairing should be done for all TAs, not just NNESTs, and the pairing should be based on experience and expertise, not linguistic status. When pairing individuals, WPAs can consider strengths, weaknesses, and individual personalities in order to foster positive mentoring situations. WPAs can also consider assigning TAs to groups of three rather than pairs if that is logistically preferable. These pairs/groups can support each other, exchange teaching ideas, compare notes about grading, and discuss classroom management issues. While WPAs can always help with such issues, TAs are often more likely to consult each other than a supervisor, partly because TAs see each other more often, and partly because they may not want to show their weaknesses to a supervisor. While such pairs/groups can be good for all TAs, they may especially benefit NNESTs, who may have more difficulty making informal connections with their TA peers and who may perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage compared to their NES counterparts.

TAs teaching writing should have the opportunity to take coursework focusing on teaching and research in ESL writing and on sociolinguistic issues (see Matsuda et al., 2013, who describe the need for professional preparation opportunities regarding L2 writing instruction for in-service and pre-service mainstream writing teachers.) Requiring a sociolinguistics course is the best option, but if that is not feasible, TAs should take a course in linguistics that places special emphasis on language variation and on linguistic diversity, including world Englishes and other varieties of English that TAs might encounter in the writing classroom, including, for example, African American English, Chicano English, and varieties of English spoken in native American communities.

Some of the activities and readings described above can also be used in staff meetings or workshops. In such sessions, participants can be asked to share their experiences writing in their first and second (and third, etc.) languages. This would highlight the expertise and experiences of NNESTs and allow NNESTs to learn that NESs also struggle with writing in English (Kamhi-Stein, 1999). WPAs might also arrange for a session focusing on non-standard varieties of English in the US and on world Englishes, perhaps asking a colleague in linguistics to lead it if the WPA is not familiar with the body of work in this area (See Casanave, 2017, Ch. 4, for a discussion of world Englishes as related to L2 writing instruction). Such a session can emphasize the legitimacy of all varieties of English and undermine the notion that NNESTs are always the best teachers of English and of writing.

In my experience, key aspects of preparing and supporting NNESTs for teaching writing courses include the following:

1. Requiring a course focused on teaching ESL writing
2. Requiring a course that offers opportunities to gain understanding and appreciation of the many varieties of English used within the US and around the world
3. Treating NNESTs as equals to their NEST peers
4. Offering shadowing/mentoring opportunities for all TAs, ones in which NNESTs sometimes serve as mentors
5. Helping NNESTs and NESTs appreciate the resources that NNESTs bring to the ESL writing classroom and to their peer group of new writing instructors.
6. Providing opportunities for NNESTs to serve as sources of information about their own experiences learning to write in L2 English, and about the cultural and educational contexts in which L2 writing takes place around the world.

Practices such as these can help us provide quality teacher education for NNESTs.

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