

# 2

## Constructing a Professional Identity: Nonnative English-Speaking Teachers in First-Year Writing Courses

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Research on nonnative English-speaking teacher (NNEST) identity has been well-documented in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) and TESOL (Cheung et al., 2015; De Costa & Norton, 2017; Tsui, 2007; Varghese et al., 2016; Yuan, 2018; Zhang & Zhang, 2015). On writing teachers' professional identity development, a body of research has grown in the "symbiotic field" of second language (L2) writing (Kim & Saenkhum, 2019; I. Lee, 2013; Racelis & Matsuda, 2015; Sánchez-Martín & Seloni, 2019). In mainstream composition, however, research on NNESTs' identities remains underexplored despite the fact that the number of nonnative English-speaking teachers of writing is increasing (Ruecker et al., 2018; Zheng, 2017)—I am one of them.<sup>1</sup> There are at least three contributing factors for this under exploration. First, the history of the notion of identity in composition scholarship is elusive because various concepts such as "self" and "representation" have been used to refer to writer identity (Cox et al., 2010). Second, while issues related to L2 writing have been acknowledged and received by the field, in practice, they are still perceived as special interest issues (Matsuda, 2012). Third, a raciolinguistic bias which assumes that faculty who teach college writing in English are linguistically and racially homogeneous is still prevalent (Alim et al., 2016; Geller, 2011; Martinez, 2020; Ruiz & Sánchez, 2016). Thus, to advance scholarship in this area, this chapter reports on a qualitative study that began as a graduate thesis work and extended two years after graduation that investigated factors that contribute to NNESTs' professional identity construction in FYW courses. Results suggest

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1 In this work, NNESTs are individuals who either grew up speaking languages other than English at home, are Generation 1.5 (immigrant students who came to the US as children or adolescents), international visa students, or naturalized citizens (Matsuda, 2011). I am a Mexican-born Hispanic woman and U.S. citizen by paper (Viera, 2016). English is my additional language and has become my dominant academic language. I began learning it in Mexico City at the age of 13. I migrated to the US as a visa international student at the age of 23.

that in order to develop and sustain a professional teacher identity, NNESTs of writing should achieve and maintain an alignment between the personal subjectivity and the cultural expectations of the profession, as well as to develop an openness and awareness to disciplinary identity reinvention. These findings are important because they can elucidate a better understanding of NNESTs of writing professional identity formation. For writing programs that employ NNESTs, the findings can assist in developing initiatives that help sustain their professional identities. And for NNESTs themselves, these findings shed light on the different factors that can help or hinder the development and balance of a professional identity.

## Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

### Operational Definition of “Professional Identity” in Composition

Defining “professional identity” within mainstream composition studies is challenging because the field has become highly interdisciplinary, many different theories and approaches come from areas inside and outside English studies (Fulkerson, 2005; Matsuda, 2012). As a result, teachers of writing from disciplines outside composition may develop a professional identity that aligns more with their community of practice (e.g., education, sociology, literature) (Wenger, 1998). Nonetheless, in 2013, *College Composition and Communication* published a special issue that explored what *profession* means to those of us in writing studies. The collection contains six vignettes and four empirical articles. While only one article explicitly investigated the concept of professional identity and suggested that teaching writing at a two-year college is a related but different profession than teaching at a four-year university (Toth et al., 2013), most of the individual narratives offer insights of the variegated lived experiences within the profession. For example, Ethna Dempsey Lay (2013) shared how her professional identity as a writing instructor was questioned by some colleagues who did not see her journey as legitimate because she was a Wall Street employee by day, graduate student by night, and part-time writing instructor before fully embracing academia. Kate Pantelides (2013), on the other hand, wrote about having a hyphenated identity where “mother” preceded her identity as teacher of writing, and Cruz Medina (2013) noted how welcoming his first child gave him a new understanding of the value of professionalism in the teaching of writing.

When read as a whole, this special issue highlights how the profession raises and complicates career expectations for its members (Hesse, 2013), and how our professional identities are always in contact with other subjectivities

(Pantelides, 2013), but it does not address the concerns and issues related to NNESTs' construction of their professional identities. To expand our understanding of NNESTs' identity construction, we draw on scholarship in the field of English language teaching.

In second language acquisition as well as allied fields, research on nonnative English language teachers has materialized since the 1990s (Braine, 1999; Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Most studies, however, have centered around "(non) nativism," that is, "whether a teacher identifies (or is identified by others) as a native-speaker (NEST) or nonnative speaker (NNEST)" (Ellis, 2016, p. 597) despite the fact that language is only one aspect of one's identity (Motha et al., 2012). Fortunately, research published in recent years has begun to explicitly expand beyond linguistic identity to include class, gender, privilege, emotions, and race in teacher identity work (Appleby, 2016; Charles, 2019; Ruecker & Ives, 2015; Varghese et al., 2016). Not that these issues were not present before, they were. Jacinta Thomas (1999), for example, wrote about how as a nonnative English teacher in Canada, she faced issues of credibility related to race, gender, and her Indian-accented English. However, although race and gender are mentioned in Thomas' piece, they are not salient concepts as language is.

In TESOL and the broader field of applied linguistics it is now accepted that "a teacher's identity cannot be viewed as the aggregation of a set of innate, acquired or ascribed attributes, but should be conceptualized as a socially constructed, contextually situated and continually emerging (and changing) sense of self that is influenced by myriad factors" (Cheung et al., 2014, p. 18). From this perspective, a teacher's identity is fluid and among the factors that constitute such identity is the integration of the personal and professional levels.

In this work, a professional identity refers to the complex ways NNEST writing faculty build, interpret, position, negotiate and enact their multiple roles as teachers-scholars in manners consonant with the constantly evolving professional structures and projections of the discipline itself at the macro, meso, and micro levels, and how these roles interact, influence, conflict, challenge, intersect, shape, and/or connect with their other subjectivities. In short, constructing a professional identity requires balancing one's personal subjectivities against the cultural expectations of the profession (Cheung et al., 2014; The Douglas Fir Group, 2016).

## Defining Personal Subjectivity

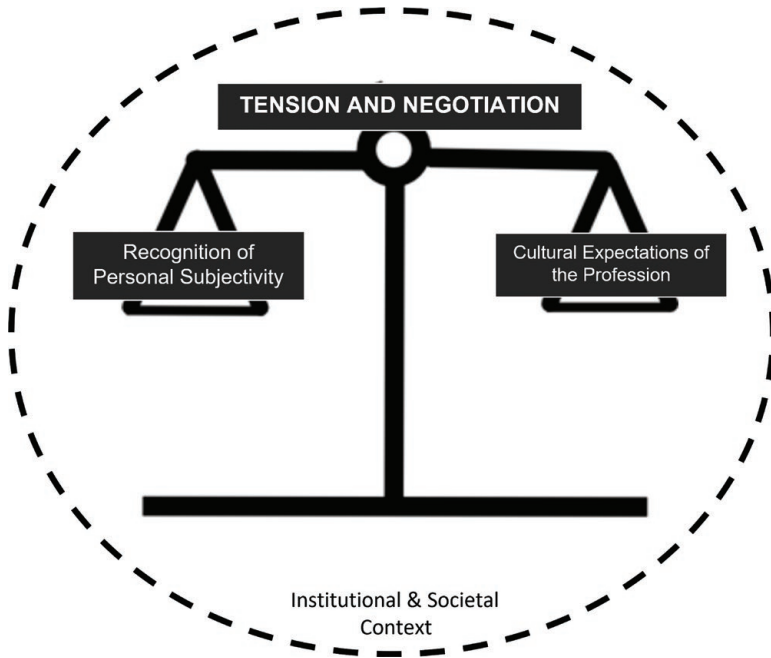
Personal subjectivity originally refers to the incorporation of the various identity strands that make up the self with other personal subjectivities or

ideologies (e.g., students, family, peers, even internal dialogues) through discourse (Alsup, 2006). The goal of engaging in dialogue is not to reach consensus among subjectivities, but coexistence. In this work, I use the term to refer to the various moments a NNES writing instructor realizes it is okay to acknowledge their translinguistic histories and pedagogical ideologies and see not only their linguistic identity but also other subjectivities such as racial, ethnic, religious, and gender as positive contributions to the profession even when tensions and discomfort occur.

The concept “translinguistic histories” refers to how our life experiences, including our linguistic and social identities, interact with our pedagogical practices (Motha et al., 2012). In other words, who we become as teachers is a function of the life-stories we bring to the profession. While all teachers have translinguistic histories, there are differences between NES and NNES teachers (Motha et al., 2012). NNESTs, in comparison with NES, undergo complex cognitive processes for developing proficiency in an additional language which allows them to develop translinguistic identities. By traversing between languages, NNESTs draw on a broader range of concepts and interpretative frames that ultimately impact their pedagogical practice and their understanding of their relationship to the world (Norton, 2013). Therefore, recognizing that something more than language skills is at play in constructing a professional identity is imperative. Mariya Tseptsura’s (this volume) autoethnography demonstrates these connections. She shows how her identity was shaped by her educational background and how it manifests itself in her teaching practices and shapes the relations of power in the classroom.

## The Cultural Expectations of the Profession

The cultural expectations of the profession refer to the attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills the discipline expects writing specialists to embody in the everyday context of their classrooms and in the interactions with the different stakeholders such as students, administrators, and colleagues (Pennington, 2015). These cultural expectations are in constant contact with the personal, forcing NNESTs to continually (re)organize themselves and to co-create their professional identities (Kim & Saenkhum, 2019). However, because identities are complex and fluid lived experiences (Block, 2007; Norton, 2000, 2013; Norton Peirce, 1995), an alignment between the personal and the cultural expectations is never neutral or permanent once it happens. Instead, this alignment constantly shifts in different degrees and assumes reflection, tension, and constant negotiation with the macro (societal) and meso (institutional), context (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016).



*Figure 2.1. A Balanced Professional Teacher Identity<sup>2</sup>*

A figure that helps to represent this synergy is a double-pan scale. The components of the scale are a base, a pivoted horizontal lever with arms of equal length and two weighing pans attached to each arm (see Figure 2.1). For the scale to work properly, the pivoted horizontal lever needs to be centered. While a scale rests at neutral, once an object is placed on either pan, to find and maintain balance, objects must be added on the other pan until equilibrium is achieved and the pans level off. The dotted line represents the influence of the institutional and societal context.

In this illustration, imbalance will occur when the cultural expectations of the profession pan is heavier than the personal subjectivity pan and/or the pivoted horizontal lever is misaligned thus creating unequal tension or negotiation. In other words, when NNESTs of writing suppress, ignore, neglect or are denied embodying their translinguistic identities, imbalance will happen. This imbalance can manifest itself in various negative ways. For instance, if NNESTs make their linguistic identity their sole identity-marker, they may

<sup>2</sup> I conceptualized the scale for my thesis work which reflects my understanding of identity then (Hebbard, 2012). In this work, I revised the scale and added the dotted line to point out that both the personal and professional identities function and interact within specific sociocultural, historical, and ecological contexts.

constantly question their professional and pedagogical qualifications and unintentionally reinforce for themselves (and for their students) the native vs nonnative stereotypes. An unbalanced scale can also prevent or block engaging in effective negotiation skills. In extreme cases, a decision to opt out of the profession can also happen (Alsup, 2006).

In contrast, when NNESTs recognize their translinguistic histories as a strength, they can deploy alternate identities that challenge, complicate, counter, or problematize commonly held assumptions about what it means to be an NNEST of writing which can help maintain a more balanced professional identity. Nabila Hijazi (this volume) offers a narrative that serves as a positive example of what happens when NNESTs translinguistic histories are recognized as a strength.

On the other hand, when the individual aspect is overemphasized, a cultural disconnection with the profession might result and can affect performance in the classroom ultimately inhibiting not only the development of a professional identity but also student learning. A study on eight white and monolingual pre-service high school teachers in Australia exemplifies this point. The study showed that when participants assumed their privileged cultural, ethnic, and linguistic positions uncritically, they marginalized their multilingual students and negatively impacted their learning (Santoro, 2009). Another study on non-White and multilingual faculty revealed similar findings. The study investigated ESL tertiary students' writing attitude and the learning problems they faced in a writing course at a university in Malaysia (Ismail et al., 2012).<sup>3</sup> Findings indicated that the multilingual writing instructors perceived the multilingual students' writing and language skills as deficient.

When looking at these studies through the professional identity scale, one can argue that when NESTs and NNESTs alike place their own subjectivities above their students and fail to interrogate their own variegated subjectivities (e.g., ethnic, gender, racial, religious, and linguistic assumptions), they are at risk of neglecting the cultural expectations of the profession that calls for an ethical treatment of all students' agencies (Silva, 1997). In sum, a balance between the personal subjectivity and the cultural expectations of the profession ought to exist to (re)construct or (re)invent and maintain a balanced professional identity scale. Achieving this balance requires that NNESTs develop critical awareness of their translinguistic histories, position their pedagogies in the richly relevant and complex context of their own lives, and interact with stakeholders within their specific institutional and social location.

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3 The authors do not provide background information of the lecturers in their article. I emailed the authors who replied stating that all four instructors are NNESTs.

## Study Description

This qualitative study began in 2011 as a graduate thesis work in a mid-size university located along the Mexico/U.S. border where more than 80% of enrolled students are Hispanic. My interest in conducting this research arose from my personal experience. Having taught ESL for thirteen years, I felt very comfortable teaching *in English the English language*. However, when I was hired as a TA to teach freshman English composition, I suddenly felt insecure and questioned *my identity* as a teacher. Since there were other non-native English-speaking instructors in the first-year writing program, I wonder if they too have gone through similar experiences. Four female lecturers who self-identified as NNES and who hold MAESL degrees accepted to participate. The questions investigated were: How do nonnative speakers of English teaching composition classes develop a professional identity? How do they view their role as teachers? And how do their students perceive them? Data collection from instructors included class observations, semi structured interviews, and a questionnaire. Student data included a survey administered at the end of the semester.

Two years later I returned to the same university. I wanted to follow up with participants and investigate whether their respective professional identity scale had suffered any shifts. Upon inquiring, I learned that three of the participants had left the institution and moved out of the area; one of them had left the profession entirely. Only one of the original four participants remained. I contacted her and requested an interview. She accepted.

In order to expand the first study, I invited two new participants, a newly hired Hispanic NNES female instructor with a Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition and the recently appointed White male writing program administrator (WPA) who self-identified as English monolingual and he/his/him pronouns. The purpose of interviewing the Ph.D. instructor was to explore whether disciplinary background, degree, and rank play a role in how NNESTs develop a professional identity. My interest in interviewing the WPA was to learn about his experience working with NNESs teaching composition, his perceptions on them, and the kind of support, if any, the program offers them. Both of them agreed to participate. In comparison with the first study, I did not conduct class observations or collect a questionnaire from the female instructor. I only carried out individual semi-structured interviews using the same protocol from the previous study. Each of the interviews lasted over an hour.

To analyze previously collected and new interview data, I used an In Vivo coding approach. This approach allows me to prioritize and honor the par-

participant's voice (Saldaña, 2016). I coded each participant's narrative separately twice and identified essential elements such as specific situations, memories, reflections, or interactions that assisted, challenged, or hindered their construction of their professional identities in FYW courses. Codes were then clustered according to similarity and regularity. After that, the clusters were combined into categories that resulted into three major themes. I refer to these themes as factors impacting NNESTs' professional identity construction which are: the impact of prior educational experiences, the impact of social support; and the impact of rank and disciplinary knowledge.

## Participants' Description

The information in Table 2.1 provides a snapshot of the participants' backgrounds. It shows that most participants began acquiring English as children and have used it alongside their native languages. For three participants, English is their third or fourth language. Participants are from different ethnic and linguistic groups. Two participants are Generation 1.5, they arrived in the US as children and three arrived as international visa graduate students. Three participants have previous teaching experience in an area other than writing and two have undergraduate studies in disciplines outside English studies. All participants worked as TAs in the writing program for a year while pursuing their respective master's degrees.

The participants' backgrounds are rich and diverse, therefore, analyzing their experiences is important because they can shed light on ways NNESTs of writing (re)construct their professional identities.

## Findings and Discussion

Before discussing results obtained for this study, I will summarize the findings from the original study. This information can assist the reader to better understand later on the discussion about the factors impacting the construction of a professional identity of the participants. Data analysis from the first study showed that Priscilla and Michelle had balanced professional identities, albeit that balance was being challenged due to changes in their personal subjectivities. Anita had a tilted scale where more of the weight had fallen on the cultural expectations of the profession. She was contemplating leaving the profession. For Rielle, results suggested her professional identity scale was going through a period of tension and negotiation. She reported she still had a hard time relating to students' experiences in writing courses (Hebbard, 2012). Andrea is the new participant. Next, I discuss the first factor.



**Table 2.1. Participants' Backgrounds**

Characteristics	Rielle	Priscilla	Anita	Michelle	Andrea
Rank	Lecturer	Lecturer	Lecturer	Lecturer	Associate Professor
Area/Country of Origin	European France	Slovenia	Japan	Overseas French Département	México
Languages spoken	French, English, and Spanish	Slovenian, English, and Italian	English and Japanese	French, Creole, English, Spanish, and Japanese	English and Spanish
Age they began learning English	11 years old	10 years old	12 years old	---	10 years old
Arrived in the US	As a graduate student	As a graduate student	With her parents at age 16	As a graduate student	With her parents at age 8
Academic Background Undergraduate (UG)	MA in Literature (earned in native country) MAESL	UG in Geography (earned in native country) MAESL	UG in English MAESL	UG in business (earned in native country) MAESL	UG in English MA in English Ph.D. Rhet & Comp
Years as TA	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year
Previous teaching experience before becoming a TA	None	Taught ESL in private school for three years in her home country	Student-teacher in a local high school	Taught French in Ireland and U.K. to students with psychological problems	Student-teacher in a local high school

### Factor 1: The Impact of Prior Educational Experiences

When asked about life experiences that influenced their self-perceptions as composition teachers, all five referred to prior educational experiences, corroborating previous research (Racelis & Matsuda, 2015). However, the analysis revealed that how they perceive these educational experiences either helps balance or destabilize their personal subjectivities. Michelle mentioned that teaching students with psychological issues in Ireland and the UK taught

her that facing difficult situations in the classroom is not tied to her nonnativeness. She expressed, “I could be a native English speaker and still have challenging situations with students.” She saw this experience as a positive contribution to balancing her sense of self as a writing teacher. In contrast, for Priscilla and Rielle, it was the lack of specific educational experiences that impacted their subjectivities. Both noted that in their native countries, there is no college class solely focused on teaching writing. This lack made it extremely difficult for them to understand the purpose of teaching composition, even after taking the required graduate class to become a TA in composition. They viewed writing as an integral element of any subject.

While other researchers have reported similar experiences (Park, 2012; Zheng, 2017), Priscilla and Rielle’s respective experiences raise important considerations about the intersection between learning and NNESTs’ identity formation. Ambrose and colleagues (2010) have defined learning as “a process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience” (p. 3). The principle of prior knowledge is part of this process. The authors wrote:

Students come into our courses with knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes gained in *other courses and through life*. If students’ prior knowledge is robust and accurate and activated at the appropriate time, it provides a strong foundation for building new knowledge. However, when knowledge is inert, insufficient for the task, activated inappropriately, or inaccurate, it can interfere with or impede new learning (p. 4). (Emphasis mine).

In this context, we can assume that Rielle and Priscilla did not arrive in the US as blank slates. They entered the required graduate class with robust knowledge about writing, including perceptions, models, and values acquired in their native countries. They viewed writing not as a compartmentalized skill but as an integrated aspect throughout the university curriculum. As graduate students in the US, they were expected to reverse this order. Whether their prior knowledge was accurately or sufficiently activated is unknown, but the data in this study implies that not having where to anchor their educational experiences created an imbalance in their personal subjectivity pan.

When I interviewed Rielle for the first study, the results suggested her identity scale was going through a period of tension and negotiation. Two years later, she mentioned that she had recently realized that what she had taught in the U.S. writing classroom was being studied by students in her country of origin in high school. Through ‘doing,’ she was making connections and building new understandings of the teaching and functions of writ-

ing. While developing a professional identity through doing is not unique to NNESTs (Ibarra, 1999), Rielle and Priscilla's experiences highlight the need to continue integrating assignments at the curricular level that not only appropriately activate NNESTs' prior knowledge and experiences with writing but also raise their awareness to perceive their transnational and multilingual identities (Sánchez-Martín, 2020), and mobile literacies (Lorimer Leonard, 2017), as positive contributions in their professional identity formation. One possibility is the use of a transnational literacy autobiography assignment (Canagarajah, 2020).

For Andrea and Anita, it was their educational experiences in the US that impacted their sense of self, yet in opposite ways. In fifth grade, Andrea's non-Spanish speaking teacher encouraged her to speak Spanish at home and to conduct research in Spanish. But, in seventh grade, her English teacher told her parents she would never earn an "A" in English class. These experiences made her question her abilities as a writer and as an English language learner. While she initially saw these as negative experiences, upon reflection, she determined these experiences resulted in a positive outcome. The personal experiences with language difference as a child influenced her current pedagogical approaches in the teaching of writing as well as her research interests.

Anita said she came to the US at the age of 16 and enrolled in high school. She did not like high school and cried almost every day. She was placed in an ESL class where most students came from Mexico and did not have a problem communicating with each other. After graduation from high school, her family returned to Japan, but she decided to stay. She enrolled in the local university and was placed in the remedial English class because she failed the writing part of the THEA test. Reflecting on her experience, she said that if she had been taught the new curriculum she was currently teaching, she believed she would have done much better as an undergraduate student.

Research has shown that classroom environments play a prominent role in the identity formation of language minority students for better or for worse (Harklau, 2000). Andrea and Anita's respective educational experiences attest to this. Andrea's lived experience suggests that having a teacher that did not label her as a perpetual L2 learner of English but who encouraged her to engage in translanguaging, the ability to shuttle between languages (Garcia & Kleyn, 2016), helped her to counter the negative impact she experienced in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

Conversely, Anita's compelling experience speaks about the social dimension of the classroom. Sociolinguists have observed that ethnicity and linguistic features are resources used by speakers to construct their social identities. That is, among ethnic groups where a choice of language is available

for communication, individuals will choose the language that resonates with their ethnicity and social networks (Holmes, 2013). In Anita's class all the students were considered ESL, but because the majority of the students were ethnically Mexican, Spanish became the dominant language for communication leaving Anita to experience linguistic and cultural isolation. Although she eventually gained fluency in English, her identity shifted again when she was placed in the remedial class. Looking back at her past experience as an undergraduate student, she indicated that the previous curriculum limited her experiences with and knowledge of writing.

Andrea and Anita's prior lived educational experiences show that their professional identities were impacted not only by their own individual translinguistic experiences, but also due to the pedagogical practices believed and practiced by their writing instructors at specific points in time (Kroll, 2000).

## Factor 2: The Impact of Social Support

Social network theorists have noted that interpersonal relationships and the patterns formed by these relations serve as the building blocks of social life. An aspect that results from social relations is "social support," defined as "the positive (and negative) outcomes that people received from social relationships" (Shade Wilson, 2017, p. 64). Developing social relationships require NNESTs to successfully integrate themselves into new communities (Mantero, 2007). To do this, they must learn to negotiate and participate in meaning-driven activities. When asked what type of social support they have received that has shaped who they are as teachers, Michelle and Andrea noted receiving support from family. Michelle's parents showed her how to control her nerves in front of an audience; a skill she found useful in the classroom. Andrea's parents motivated her to attend college and her boyfriend (now husband) encouraged her to pursue graduate school and use her education as a platform to advocate for L2 writers. They also said that as TAs they sought and received the support of professors. Michelle shadowed a professor for a semester while Andrea often met with several faculty to discuss teaching strategies and materials. This analysis suggests that both Michelle and Andrea received social support in both areas, the personal and the professional, which might have contributed to developing a more balanced professional identity.

Not so for Priscilla and Anita. Priscilla mentioned that as a TA, she was assigned an instructor of record, but she never received support from that professor. Instead, she said that she asked other TAs for help which she received. Doing this seems to have helped Priscilla prevent imbalance in the cultural expectations of the profession pan which could have negatively impacted her

emerging professional identity. Nonetheless, one cannot avoid asking why she did not take the initiative to contact professors like Michelle and Andrea did. Perhaps due to her cultural background. Previous studies have found that cultural disconnect can inhibit identity formation (Hsu, 2009). An example of this disconnection is Anita's experience.

At the time of the first study, Anita was teaching three FYW courses. She was concerned she was spending too much time giving feedback—about 30 minutes per assignment—and was struggling. She took the initiative and met with the former female WPA to seek advice on this issue. According to Anita, the WPA told her she needed to give feedback to each student in each writing assignment. Anita explained that she tried to follow the WPA directive, but it was extremely difficult. With a sad tone she said, "Next semester, I am expected to teach five courses! Right now, I don't have time for myself, and I am very concerned about this. My life revolves around giving feedback. I love my job, but if I don't have time for myself that's going to affect my teaching." How Anita explained her situation to the WPA is not clear. Nonetheless, her compelling narrative suggests conditions of power and investment contributed to a failed communication with the WPA (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

While the WPA might have heard Anita, there seems to be a lack of investment in learning how Anita was doing as a first-time lecturer and to offer suggestions on how to give feedback to many students. The WPA, perhaps, focused only on aspects related to the cultural expectations of the profession—to give individualized feedback. Furthermore, Anita's cultural background impacted her ability to negotiate with her superior. She noted, "In Japan, people do not say what they think. This is considered to be polite." Had the WPA been cognizant that Asian cultures value silence as a virtue and that limited verbal interactions with superiors is a sign of respect, she could have offered Anita the social support needed. Anita's experience painstakingly illustrates an imbalanced identity scale where more attention is given to cultural expectations of the profession. By the time I returned to conduct the follow-up study, I was told Anita had moved to the East Coast and had left the profession despite the fact of receiving some of the highest student course evaluations among the participants. In the first study, student surveys administered in her classes revealed Anita's students perceived her as a highly professional and committed writing instructor.

The other two participants that had left the institution, but not the profession, were Michelle and Priscilla. However, in their case, it was their personal subjectivity pan that impacted their professional identity scale. At the time of the first study, both Michelle and Priscilla's respective spouses, who hold Ph.D.s in other disciplines, were looking for teaching positions

outside the area. Priscilla said, “I’m worried. I don’t know where we’ll end up and how they are going to look at me as a nonnative speaker. What if the English department says ‘Sorry, we need a native speaker, we cannot hire you.’” Michelle voiced similar concerns. Their experiences illustrate that alignment between the personal and the cultural expectations is never neutral or permanent. At any point when changes in social support occur or linguistic identity is the dominant identity-marker, they disrupt a NNEST’s professional identity scale.

While the decision to relocate is a personal one, the genuine concern faced by ‘visible minority women’ (Amin, 1999, p. 102) disempowered by the profession is *real*. Studies have shown that minority women scholars in TESOL perceive themselves as less than their NES colleagues and, when compared with men, must navigate more complex and multiple gender identities imposed by sociocultural, sociopolitical, and familial contexts (Thomas, 1999; Park, 2017). A recent study highlights that the rich and diverse literacy repertoires of migrant women in the US do not guarantee social or economic mobility; often, their literate repertoires go unrecognized and undervalued (Lorimer Leonard, 2017). Although the field has made progress, there remains a need for more visible recognition of women classified as NNESTs as assets and capable members in the profession (Alvarez, 2019).

### Factor 3: The Impact of Rank and Disciplinary Knowledge

Isabel Baca and her co-authors (2019) have claimed that “while identity is self-defined to an extent, it is also mandated by external forces and experiences in concrete, embodied terms” (p. 3). In academia, factors like rank and disciplinary background act as external forces that can both segregate communities and influence the formation of professional identity. When asked about their perception of themselves as members of the writing teachers’ community, all four lecturers expressed that they did not see themselves as ‘full’ members due to the absence of a Ph.D. degree. For instance, Rielle mentioned, “To some extent I do, but I feel I don’t have any authority in sharing what I think, what I’ve done, or what I’ve implemented because I don’t have a Ph.D.” On the other hand, Andrea, holding a Ph.D., felt a part of the profession, but struggled with adjusting to the new expectations of balancing teaching, research, and service. While these experiences are not unique to NNESTs, they underscore the impact of social structures, such as rank, on the construction of professional identity.

In addition to rank, the data indicated that disciplinary background also played a significant role in the formation of professional identity of the par-

ticipants. In this context, discipline is defined as a bordered and hierarchically organized intellectual community of practice formed by a network of individuals whose membership is determined by their acceptance of certain ideas, methods, procedures, habits of mind, epistemological assumptions, rhetorical conventions, genre practices, and publication/dissemination procedures (Hall, 2018). As Pennington (2015) notes, “a teacher’s disciplinary identity connects the teacher to a specific field and its areas of knowledge and research” (p. 61). To become a member, one must develop discipline-specific knowledge and a sense of allegiance to that discipline. These combined habits of mind and commitment significantly impact one’s professional identity.

Furthermore, Soo Hyon Kim and Tanita Saenkhum (2019) argue that in multidisciplinary departments, teaching becomes a prominent mode for communicating disciplinary expertise. When faculty members with related but different disciplinary knowledge are forced or compelled to relegate their disciplinary expertise to the periphery, their ability to establish a professional identity might be constrained. An alternative for such faculty is to develop an *openness to disciplinary identity reinvention*, defined as the imperative to push the methodological and conceptual boundaries of their discipline to foster disciplinary allegiance and connections with other fields (Rademaekers, 2015).

Most writing programs are multidisciplinary. They incorporate instructors from various subfields in English studies, such as literature, creative writing, rhetoric and composition, and/or linguistics. At the time of the study, the freshman writing program had adopted a writing-about-writing approach (Downs & Wardle, 2007), assigning TAs and lecturers to teach it. It is assumed that, over time, the four lecturers with an MAESL degree developed an openness to disciplinary identity reinvention. This reinvention is evident in Michelle’s statement, “As an instructor of rhetoric and composition, I have to learn the jargon of the discipline and make it my own.” Priscilla explained, “Before, I knew how to write a paper, but as a teacher of composition, I’ve learned about the rhetorical elements and conventions.” Their comments indicate a shift in their disciplinary identities, viewing themselves not as ESL teachers but as teachers of composition.

In addition to the curriculum, the WPA’s philosophy of avoiding a segregated community of writing teachers may have influenced the apparent shift in the lecturers’ disciplinary and professional identity. When asked about what type of support is given to NNESTs, the WPA explained, “I do a very strategic kind of support. I don’t treat ESL teachers any differently than TAs or lecturers because I am concerned with building a community of instructors that give each other feedback.” The WPA emphasized, “When a NNEST is coming in and they identify as ESL, I make sure their mentor has that back-

ground. But I don't tell them that because I don't want them to see themselves as ESL teachers but as writing, reading, and research instructors."

While the WPA's comment shows a commitment to create a more equitable community of teachers of writing, it also captures the difficulty of achieving this goal. By pairing a NNEST with an ESL faculty, the WPA might be unintentionally reinforcing the NNEST vs. NES and disciplinary divide. Furthermore, by emphasizing a type of community, that of writing instructors, the lecturers' ESL disciplinary knowledge is being relegated to a peripheral role hindering the development of hyphenated transdisciplinary identities. Such identities could enable them to see that their language-related expertise as ESL specialists is a positive contribution not only to their professional identity as composition instructors, but it is knowledge that instructors trained in rhetoric and composition, or other English subfields need.

## Conclusion and Implications

In this study, we investigated factors contributing to NNESTs' professional identity construction in FYW courses. The results showed that the impact of prior educational experiences, social support, and rank and disciplinary knowledge can either assist or hinder the balance between personal subjectivity and the cultural expectations of the profession. This balance is crucial for NNESTs to develop and sustain a professional identity.

How can we apply this research at the macro and micro levels? One course of action is for the field to fully integrate issues related to L2 writing, including NNESTs' experiences, into mainstream composition scholarship (Kim & Saenkhum, 2019; I. Lee, 2013; Matsuda et al., 2011; Racelis & Matsuda, 2015). A more inclusive scholarship should recognize, from the start, that becoming a writing instructor involves more than performing a writing teacher's role and having the right linguistic identity (Zheng, 2017). The notion of 'non-native English speaker' is a complex term and should not be used to create superior or inferior categories among educators. Instead, it should be used to acknowledge and value differences, not in worth, equality, or ability, but in prior knowledge, embodied experiences, and affective responses gathered across geographies, disciplines, and named languages (E. Lee & Canagarajah, 2019; Sánchez-Martin, 2020). In addition, more inclusive scholarship should continually interrogate and problematize this term. Recently, second language acquisition scholars have called for granting idealized nativeness to both NEST and NNEST by juxtaposing the nativeness of NNESTs' first and local languages against the nonnativeness of NESTs of local and minoritized languages (Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). Scholars claim that doing this can help



level the field. Furthermore, research investigating how to strengthen institutional and programmatic infrastructures to unify and reconcile the community of teachers of writing across racial, gender, and linguistic lines needs to be moved from the periphery to the center (Alvarez, 2019; Park, 2017)

At the micro level, writing and graduate programs could initiate two-way social support initiatives. Faculty and graduate students, including both NNESTs and NESTs, should engage in open discussions about their cultural backgrounds (Liu, 2010). This approach aims to challenge and change perceptions that contribute to disenfranchisement and stereotyping of both groups, ultimately fostering social justice on local campuses. Additionally, WPAs and graduate programs should prioritize the design of course assignments that leverage and build upon NNESTs' antecedent knowledge and literacy brokering skills. These individuals bring valuable insights into rhetorical tools and texts that may be unfamiliar in the U.S. context (Perry, 2009). As transnational literacy brokers with multiple ties and activities, their perspectives can reshape writing studies programs by highlighting the benefits of incorporating non-U.S. writing models (Canagarajah, 2020; Donahue, 2013).

In conclusion, NNESTs and NNESTAs should engage in constant critical reflection and remember that becoming a professional educator is not wrapped up in the ability to conform to the profession, but instead in *integrating* their ever-evolving professional identity to the chain of their other multiple rich subjectivities. Doing this can help maintain their identity scale balanced.

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