

## Language proficiency development of non-native English-speaking teacher candidates: A comparative case study of two teacher preparation programs in Canada and Israel

### Priority Research Grant

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### Detailed Proposal

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### Theoretical Background

Since language proficiency occupies a primary role in the subject matter knowledge of language teaching (Lafayette, 1993; Lange, 1990), the proficiency level of prospective non-native English speaking (NNES) teachers is of fundamental concern in ESL/EFL teacher preparation programs (Richards, 1998). Language proficiency is also perceived by non-native English teachers as their most crucial weakness when compared with their native speaker counterparts (Inbar, 1999, Mawhinney & Fengying, 1997; Medgyes 1994; Medgyes & Reves, 1994; Tang, 1997). Given that current teacher education models advocate the implementation of context-embedded programs (Johnson and Freeman, 1998; Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 1998), decisions regarding the role, format and intensity of proficiency instruction will vary depending on local considerations such as degree of language exposure and locally available human and didactic resources. In view of the increasing presence of NNES teachers in the English teaching profession worldwide and of the paucity of research on what constitutes effective proficiency instruction for these teachers, further consideration and examination of this issue is warranted.

Current interest in the area of NNES educators has generated research studies and discussions on the personal and professional ramifications of being a NNES educator (see for example Braine, 1999). NNES teacher issues are debated within the context of English globalization and World Englishes (Canagarajah, 1999; Gupta, 1999; Gnutzman, 1999; Nayar, 1994), linguistic imperialism (Pennycook, 1994 & 1998; Phillipson, 1992), and critical pedagogy and identity formation (Amin, 1997; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999).

Much of the research has focused on the espoused perceptions of native and non-native English speaking teachers regarding teaching-related topics, as well as their perceived self-efficacy vis-à-vis possible advantages or deficiencies teachers of either group may possess (Arva and Medgyes, 2000; Inbar-Lourie, 1999; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1994; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; McNeill, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Tang, 1997). In particular, these studies have indicated the need to evaluate English educators on the basis of their professional subject matter knowledge, conduct and expertise, rather than on their native or non-native speaker status (Liu, 1999). NNES teachers' inadequate language proficiency is seldom explicitly alluded to, cited usually as "self-perceived language needs" (Kamhi-Stein, 2000) or perceived deficiency. An exception to this

pattern can be found in the Medgyes and Reves (1994) study which draws causal effects between language deficiency and NNES teachers' perceptions, and in Medgyes (1999) who suggests acknowledging and fully addressing the language proficiency variable in teacher certification programs.

Language proficiency concerns among NNES teachers are perceived differently in ESL versus EFL settings. For example, the TESOL ESL Standards for Accreditation of Programs in K-12 ESL Teacher Education (2003) do not specify standards for teacher language proficiency. However, the Israeli EFL Teacher Standards document stipulates that teachers should "demonstrate proficiency in oral and written, social and academic English and serve as good language models for their learners" (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 6). No mention is made as to how this level of proficiency is to be attained by the NNES teachers who comprise the majority of the EFL teacher population in the country.

Following the NNES teacher discussion, two specific operational models for teacher education programs have been proposed, both relating to MA TESOL, US based programs (Brutt-Griffler and Samimy, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, 2000). Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999) offer a critical praxis perspective with NNES students engaging in critical examination of roles and identities, while Kamhi-Stein (2000) recommends an integrative approach whereby NNES practitioner issues are incorporated across the curriculum. The latter approach is designed to first identify the students' perceived needs in four areas including "perceived language needs" (Kamhi-Stein, 2000, p.10).

Other models have evolved from the notion of Content-Based Instruction (CBI), i.e., the integration of content and language skills, widely accredited for the effective delivery of both language proficiency and content knowledge (Brinton & Master, 1997; Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989; Echevarria Vogt & Short, 2000; Snow & Brinton, 1997; Met, 1994). Though most often implemented for K-12 learners, recent writings have attested to the successful use of differential CBI models for higher education as well (Kasper, 2000; Krandall & Kaufman, 2002). Since, as Stryker and Leaver (1997) indicate, a variety of approaches to CBI exist, the models used for higher education vary in intensity from total language immersion to partial immersion and infusion models. However, many questions remain to be answered regarding the effectiveness of the different models in improving the proficiency of NNES prospective teachers in ESL and EFL settings. These questions and issues include 1) actual gains and how they are assessed, 2) the manner in which language and content are integrated, 3) the degree of coordination of the content courses with specific voluntary or compulsory language improvement activities, and 4) the benefits of choice versus obligatory participation. An important element in addressing these issues is determining the degree of satisfaction of the various stakeholders in the program. The stakeholders include the prospective teachers, the teacher educators, and the English language proficiency instructors involved in language improvement activities as well as the host school teachers who monitor the practicum/internship component of the program and officials from the Education Department and professional associations.

Another major concern relates to assessing the prospective teachers' proficiency within the CBI framework. The literature on teachers' proficiency assessment focuses on general considerations in assessing teachers' target language proficiency and on specific CBI assessment contexts, whereby the language is used as a medium of instruction for delivery of content areas (for a review see Brown, 2002). The reviewed proficiency assessment procedures consist of formal tests, proficiency and competence scales, as well as classroom observation rubrics. These instruments are intended, however, for practicing teachers and are used mostly for summative rather than formative evaluation. To assess the level of proficiency at the beginning of the program

as well as possible gains achieved at various stages in the program, other proficiency measures are required. Such instruments would focus on the formative assessment of proficiency development, lead to interventions in teaching/learning, document learners' growth, comply with CBI constraints (Short, 1993; Turner, 1997), and employ dynamic assessment principles (Anton, 2003; Kouzlin & Garb, 2001).

### The two research sites

The description of the two research sites reveals that they are extremely different in the way they seek to support NNES teachers candidates in developing language and cross-cultural skills and eventually increase their chances of success either as EFL teachers in the Israeli context or as K-12 teachers in the Canadian context. We believe that by comparing these two very different situations, we will gain a better understanding of how best to respond to the needs of NNES teachers in different contexts.

### EFL context: Israel

Due to a decline in immigration from English-speaking countries to Israel, the proportionate number of NNES teachers in the country is on the rise and will most probably constitute the main resource for English teachers in the future (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999). The population of NNES candidates in English teacher education programs is diverse, with both Israeli-born preservice teachers and immigrant candidates who have been living in Israel for different periods of time. These candidates are native speakers of a multitude of languages (Inbar, forthcoming). Many of them find it difficult to attain the performance benchmarks prescribed by the Ministry of Education (2001) in terms of attaining high levels of English proficiency. In Israel, as is the case in many other EFL countries, English acts as a gatekeeper to higher education, social mobility, and access to technology. As a result, the English proficiency of teacher candidates is becoming an issue of concern and a number of models have been developed to meet the language needs of NNES candidates in the 27 institutions (five universities and 22 colleges of education) which certify EFL teachers in Israel.

The chosen research site (Beit Berl College <http://www.beitberl.ac.il>), located in the central part of the country, is the largest academic college in Israel, with some 7,000 Jewish and Arab students. The English department established in 1975 offers three EFL teacher education programs all implementing a content-based instruction model supported by targeted English proficiency classes. Candidates are accepted on the basis of an English proficiency test. The student population (approximately 200) is diverse in terms of age, ethnic and linguistic background and includes speakers of Hebrew and Arabic born in Israel, as well as speakers of other languages who have immigrated to Israel at various ages.

The three EFL certification programs are:

- A four-year B.Ed. track which integrates general education studies with EFL training and a school practicum (90 credits and a school practicum).
- An EFL certification program for candidates with a first degree in any academic subject which lasts approximately two years (45 credits and a school practicum).
- A year-long retraining program intended to familiarize new immigrant English teachers certified in their country of origin with the local EFL curriculum, teaching methodology, the local language and culture.

Seventy to eighty percent of all the courses in the programs are conducted in English. These include not only courses in literature, linguistics, applied linguistics and English teaching methodology, but also courses in education, such as educational psychology, educational philosophy, classroom assessment and more. They also include courses in language proficiency. An additional component for all candidates is a practicum which varies in intensity depending on the program. Table 1 presents the three programs in terms of duration and credit breakdown.

Table 1: The three EFL certification programs

English Content-	English Proficiency	Practicum	Total Credits*	Duration	Program
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Based course credits	Credits	(in hours)			
60	15	18	90	4 years	B.Ed.
35	4	6	45	2 years	EFL teacher certification
25	2	12	36	1 year	Immigrant teachers

\* in academic yearly hours

### ESL Context: Canada

With the increasing number of immigrants from non-English speaking countries, we have unprecedented numbers of NNES applicants to our preservice K-12 certification programs. According the registrar at OISE/UT there were 601 NNES applicants to our three pre-service programs. Of these 153 applicants were offered admission for the 2003/2004 academic year. We anticipate an enrollment of approximately 1300 across the 9-month Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and the 2-year Master's of Teaching (M.T.). In both these programs the majority of the teacher candidates are native speakers of English and it is only recently that the number of NNES candidates has increased to such a degree that many teacher educators and host teachers have begun to express concern over the lack of English proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills of some of these candidates. Many of the 200 teacher educators feel unprepared to respond to the needs of the NNES teacher candidates in their foundations, curriculum and instruction and related studies courses. However, some instructors have attempted to support these NNES candidates within the framework of their courses and many who supervise the practicum use various strategies to support the NNES students who may be struggling with some aspect of their practicum.

As a result of an overcrowded curriculum in these programs, the concerns have been addressed by providing optional courses, workshops, and discussions groups for the NNES students and by adapting certain program components to respond to the needs of these candidates. The language and culture support available for OISE/UT teacher candidates include:

- a one-day session of orientation/workshops offered the second Saturday of the academic year
- an initial 5-week/12 hour course with a combined focus on the culture of the Canadian classroom and the development of cross-cultural communication skills as well as oral and written skills. This course is completed outside of the regular pre-service curriculum and before the first 5-week practicum
- a pair of 5-week/12 hour courses completed outside of the regular pre-service curriculum and before the second 5-week practicum. One course focusses on the improvement of the oral communication skills necessary for success in the Canadian classroom. The other focusses on the continuing development of written communication skills to support the work of NNES in Canadian classrooms
- a support/discussion group that meets weekly or bi-monthly to discuss issues and strategies as well as share experience related to being a NNES teacher candidate
- a five-week internship placement at the end of the pre-service program focusing on intensive language and cross-cultural skills training. This internship experience is offered in collaboration with the Toronto District Board of Education, a school district eager to hire well qualified NNES teacher to work with its very diverse student body
- a series of online modules on topics including oral and written language as well as cross-cultural orientation

The Student Services Division coordinates these various language and culture support programs and provides counselling for NNES candidates as necessary while helping them to obtain funding to cover the costs of these additional program components.

### A comparison of the two contexts

The summary table below highlights the many differences between the Canadian and Israeli contexts which we view as an important strength in our proposed research.

Table 2: The contrasting characteristics of the Israeli and Canadian contexts

Characteristics	Beit Berl College in Israel	OISE/UT in Canada
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Country context	EFL – high levels of immigration from non-English speaking countries	ESL -- high levels of immigration from non-English speaking countries
Range of programs offered	4-year B.Ed. in TEFL, 2-year EFL teacher certification program, 1-year recertification for immigrant EFL teachers	9-month B.Ed. for K-12 teachers, 2-year M.T. for K-8 teachers
Program goals	Certification of EFL teachers for K-12 schools in Israel where for the most part Hebrew is the medium of instruction	Certification of K-12 teachers across disciplines for Canadian schools where English is the medium of instruction
Entrance requirements	All applicants are required to take an English proficiency test	Only NNES candidates with less than four years of consecutive schooling in an English speaking country are required to take a standardized English proficiency test such as TOEFL
Teacher candidates characteristics	Approximately 200 very diverse teacher candidates	Approximately 1300 teacher candidates where only about 10% are NNESs
Practicum	One extended practicum with one host teacher	3 five-week practicum sessions with different host teachers in different schools
English proficiency development model	Compulsory for all teacher candidates A subset of core courses are taught through the medium of English rather than Hebrew, the official language of the institution. Several proficiency oriented courses are compulsory every year of the program	Optional for NNES teacher candidates All courses are taught through the medium of English but little attention is paid to language by most instructors Several optional support services are available to NNES teachers including a self-help group, counselling, workshops, courses, and a special internship
Instructors	Several of the instructors are language teaching specialists who teach the proficiency oriented courses and may meet with the discipline specific instructors (e.g. Ed. Psych. Instructors) to consider the language proficiency issues in the content courses taught through the medium of English	The majority of the 200 teacher educators are not language teaching specialists but they do have access to support for working with NNES via the ESL Infusion Initiative The instructors running the optional language and culture support components of the program are hired on contract because of their expertise as second language teachers

### Methodology

Case study methodology (Creswell, 1998; Eisner, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990) with its emphasis on acquiring multiple data sources and triangulating data best suits our research program as our goal is to explore in what ways two different approaches to the development of language proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills have affected the NNES teacher candidates involved in these programs. Our case study will include a description of the two approaches along with an analysis of how all NNES teacher candidates are affected by them. This will be accompanied by 10 teacher candidate portraits that will allow us to gain deeper insight into the factors that affect how a diverse group of teacher candidates responded to these different approaches.

We will also administer a web-based autotabulating questionnaire to all NNES teacher candidates regarding their perceptions of what they have learned and how they have grown as a result of taking part in various language proficiency development activities at various stages during their academic programs. We also want to find out what their perceived needs are and how well they feel these needs were met. This questionnaire will be administered at the end of the 2003/2004 academic year. From this data, we will generate descriptive tables and graphs. We will administer a web-based questionnaire to all instructors involved in working with these NNES candidates to determine the instructors' goals for the English proficiency and cross-cultural skill development of the NNES candidates as well as their perceptions of the progress these students made throughout the year. We want to find out how effective the instructors perceive the various modes of assessment, instruction and support for NNES candidates to be.

We will also generate portraits of 10 teacher candidates (5 from Beit Berl and 5 from OISE/UT) selected from the various certification programs described earlier ensuring that these students represent a cross-section of all those NNES registered at our respective institutions

during the 2003-2004 academic year. These candidates will be monitored during the 2003/2004 academic year in terms of their proficiency studies, content area study, and school practicum. The data gathered will include actual performance measure such as course and practicum grades as well as their degree of satisfaction and feelings regarding their proficiency level and participation in various support programs.

Each of the 10 teacher candidates as well as one of their university instructors, one of their host teachers will be interviewed twice – once at the beginning of the year and once at the end of the academic year. In addition students will 1) be asked to keep a logs/journal/portfolio, 2) be observed in their dual roles (as students at the university and as teachers during the practicum) and 3) assessed using both oral and written assessment procedures developed for diagnosing and monitoring students' proficiency growth within the framework of this research study.

We will also request that the NNES teacher candidates complete course, workshop, and/or support group evaluation forms.

#### Implications for research and theory/policy/practice

This comparative case study will help us 1) to determine future policy initiatives impacting NNES candidates in our respective institutions, 2) to fine tune learning opportunities in the area of English proficiency and cross-cultural communication development, 3) to define a research agenda in this area and 4) help all stakeholders to know which strategies to adopt to reach the common goal of English proficiency cross-cultural skills development of NNES teachers.