

***Native-English-Speaking Teachers’  
Construction of Professional Identity in an EFL  
Context: A Case of Vietnam***

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Language teacher identity is an emerging subject of interest in research on language teacher education and teacher development due to the recognized reciprocal relationships between professional identity and professional knowledge and action. While a number of studies have been reported on the (re)construction of non-native English language teachers’ professional identity, relatively little attention has been paid to the professional identity of expatriate native-English-speaking teachers (NESTs). This paper reports on a qualitative study that explored the discursive construction of the professional identity of a small group of native-English-speaking teachers (n=5) working in an English Department of a Vietnamese university. Drawing on Wenger’s (1998) three modes of belonging – engagement, imagination, and alignment – the study examined the lived experiences of these NESTs in their new sociocultural context through in-depth interviews with each participant. The study indicates that NESTs’ limited socialization and non-participation into the local community of practices due to lack of collaboration with the local teachers constitute the major obstacle to the reconstruction of their professional identity. The findings of the study, therefore, could have implications in relatable contexts for better and more collaboration and cooperation between expatriate NESTs and local non-native-English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) given the growing interest in hiring NESTs in Asian countries.

**Keywords: native-English-speaking teachers, professional identity, EFL context, non-participation socialization, collaboration, Vietnam**

## INTRODUCTION

Although teachers' professional identity has become of considerable interest to general education researchers, it has only very recently emerged as an important subtopic within the field of bilingual and second language teacher education (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Two driving forces of this growing research agenda are the complex status of World English leading to the questioning of the colonial legacy of a 'native speaker fallacy' (see Canagarajah, 1999; McKay, 2002; Phillipson, 1992), and the marginalization of non-native speaker teachers (Braine, 1999; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Liu, 1999). Researchers have been particularly interested in the impact that the dichotomy of native-speaker/non-native-speaker has on teachers' professional identity (Liu & Xu, 2011). However, most of these studies focus on how non-native-English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) construct their professional identity (e.g., Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Monssu & Lurda, 2008; Tsui, 2007). While expatriate native-English-speaking teachers' (NESTs)' unfamiliarity with the local education context is a theme that echoes across both time and space (Choi, 2001; Griffin, 2006; Shin & Kellogg, 2007; Tajino & Tajino, 2000), the issue of how NESTs construct and develop their professional identities in the English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) context remains unexplored, with Trent's (2012) very recent work being a rare exception. Trent's qualitative study on the discursive positioning of eight NESTs in Hong Kong primary and secondary schools showed tensions between NESTs' self-positioning and being positioned by local English language teachers.

Given a growing interest in hiring NESTs in Asian countries resulting from the status of English as a global language (Jeon & Lee, 2006), this research void should be filled. This paper contends that knowledge of NESTs' construction and development of their professional identities in EFL contexts is another side of the coin of second language teachers' professional identity. Such knowledge will also

shed more light on the discourse of nativeness in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL).

### **Teachers' Professional Identity**

According to Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) although interest in researching teachers' professional identity has been increasing since the turn of the century, the concept is not clearly defined. They note,

... while it is clear that teachers' professional identity has emerged as a separate research area, it is, in our view, an area in which researchers conceptualize professional identity differently, investigate varying topics within the framework of teachers' professional identity, and pursue a diversity of goals. (p. 108)

In general education, the concept of professional identity is broadly defined in three different ways. Firstly, professional identity is viewed as teachers' concepts of images of self (e.g., Knowles, 1992). Secondly, professional identity is related to teachers' roles (Volkman & Anderson, 1998). Finally, professional identity refers to what teachers themselves find important in their professional work or lives based on both their in-practice experiences and their personal backgrounds (Tickle, 2000). Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) define professional identity as the combinations of the ways teachers see themselves as subject matter experts, pedagogical experts, and didactical experts (p. 751). Thus, at the risk of oversimplification, teachers' professional identity may be understood as teachers' perception of themselves as teachers and the way that perception is connected to their teaching behavior.

Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) have pointed out that the process of professional identity is an ongoing process of integration of the 'personal' and the 'professional' sides of becoming and being a teacher. These authors have also recommended that research on teachers' professional identity should focus on such aspects of professional identity as the ways "teachers relate to other people, and the

responsibilities, attitudes, and behaviors they adopt as well as the knowledge they use" (p.125). In this respect, professional identity is the outcome of an interface between the personal experiences of teachers and the social, cultural, and institutional context in which they function on a daily basis (van den Berg, 2002).

In the field of TESOL, guided by the feminist poststructural perspective, scholars (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997; Johnston, 1999; Simon-Maeda, 2004; Varghese, 2001) have come to the conclusion that both professional identity and personal identity co-develop as instantiations of discourses that regulate ascribed social values to all forms of human activity. Other researchers (e.g., Tsui, 2007) adopted Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory and Vygostkian-based sociocultural theories (Lantolf, 2000) in researching teachers' professional identity. Studies which adopted this theoretical stance offer complementary perspectives on the participatory aspects of learning and the continuous (re)construction of self and collective understanding that takes place in ESL/EFL classrooms.

In sum, understanding of how teachers construct and develop their professional identities enables researchers to gain insights into how "the theoretical, the professional, and the personal intermingle" (Edge, 1996, p. 25) in the process of teachers learning to teach.

### **The Discourse of Nativeness in TESOL**

Since the 1990s there has been a growing body of literature that has examined issues pertaining to native and nonnative- English- speaking teachers (see Moussu & Llurda, 2008 for details). Emerging from this literature is the plethora of legitimate criticism against the native/nonnative dichotomy. For example, Davies (1991) argues that, "the distinction native speaker-nonnative speaker, like all majority-minority relations, is at the bottom one of confidence and identity" (pp. 166-167). Put another way, the distinction between native-speakers and non-native speakers is fundamentally one of self-assurance and self-perception as well as the ways these attributes are perceived by others. Echoing (Davies, 1991; Brutt-Griffler and Samimy, 1999, 2001) argue that nativeness is not a linguistic identity but a socially constructed one. Other scholars claim that the dichotomy is a power-driven and political, rather than a linguistic one (Canagarajah, 1999; Phillipson, 1992).

Despite those attempts of critical sociolinguists and applied linguists to debunk the native speaker myth in the TESOL field, its tenacity still persists when it comes to actual English teaching and learning contexts in the real world (Faetz, 2011).

From a poststructuralist perspective, which is adopted in this study, identity “reflects how individuals see themselves and how they enact their roles within different settings” (Burns & Richards, 2009, p. 5). The poststructuralist conceptualization of identity as positioning within representation, not as essence, allows people to transform and reconstruct their given or produced identities within a new cultural and historical situation, and to imagine new subjectivities and positionalities (Norton Peirce, 1995). This conceptualization postulates that language teacher identities are more complex than the NEST/NNEST dichotomy. Therefore, this study does not limit itself to the exploration of professional identity through the lens of native speaker fallacy (Phillipson, 1992), which is defined as the belief that NESTs are ideal English teachers and are superior to NNESTs in terms of fluency, knowledge of idiomatic expressions, and knowledge of the target culture. Instead, the aim of this study is to develop a better understanding of the lived experiences of NESTs working in an EFL context of Vietnam, and the construction of their professional identities. Specifically, the study sets to explore the ways five NESTs come to understand themselves as English language teachers and construct their professional identities within and against multiple discourses at the particular research site of a Vietnamese university where English is taught as a foreign language. The study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. How does a cohort of NESTs, working in an EFL context, construct or develop their professional identities?
2. How do they appropriate, resist, and negotiate prevailing discourses in their teaching context?

## **THE STUDY**

### **The Setting**

The university where the present study was conducted is one of the most prestigious universities in Vietnam. One of the programs the university offers is English language teacher education. In addition, English is also taught as a minor subject to prepare the students for the English-medium programs of sciences and maths. Every year, the university employs approximately five native-English-speaking teachers for these programs. Candidates must be university graduates and have a TESOL certificate as minimal requirements. At the time when data collection for the present study began, there were five expatriate NESTs working for the university and all of them agreed to participate.

### Participants

Five American expatriates – all were involved in teaching English to university undergraduates majoring in English as a foreign language – agreed to participate in this study. Their profiles are shown in Table 1 below:

**TABLE 1**  
**Participants' Profile (NB pseudonyms are used)**

Participants	Gender	Qualifications	Teaching Experience in Vietnam
Evoide	Female	University degree in English literature; TESOL certificate	2 years
Martha	Female	University degree in teaching English as a second language	2 years
Sue	Female	University degree in History; TESOL certificate	12 years
Jack	Male	University degree in organizational management; TESOL certificate	2 years
John	Male	University degree in teaching English as a second language	2 years

All of them had studied Spanish as a foreign language while studying at their home universities. Both Sue and John had been teaching English to immigrant children in America for few years before arriving in Vietnam. They were chosen

for this study on the basis of their willingness to share their experiences with me because “understanding requires an openness to experience, a willingness to engage in a dialogue with one that challenges our understandings” (Schwandt, 1999, p. 458). On ethical grounds, early in the study the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were ensured that the final report would reflect their pseudonyms rather than their real names.

Regarding my relationship with the participants, there is nothing special except for the fact that we were working in the same university, but I did not have any power relationship with them.

### **Research Method and Procedures**

One avenue of research on second/foreign language teachers’ professional identity draws on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory (e.g., Trent, 2012; Tsui, 2007). These studies show that second/foreign language teachers need to reconstruct their identity to accommodate new challenges in the workplace and that the process is very complex, involving “institutional construction” and “personal reconstruction” of identities (Tsui, 2007, p. 658), and the negotiation “of meanings of teaching and learning” (Trent, 2012, p. 122). The study reported here follows this line of research.

Previous studies on professional identities suggest that second/foreign language teachers’ verbalizations of their experiences can provide a window onto their professional identities (e.g., Golombek, 1998; Johnson & Golombek, 2002). Thus, the main source of data for the present study was semi-structured face-to-face interviews which were conducted with each of the participants. Although I developed an interview protocol, I did not follow the protocol strictly so that I was able to maximize the opportunities for co-constructed understanding of teachers’ professional identities. A semi-structured interview allows the flexibility to explore how teachers’ professional identities “are shaped at the nexus of local practices and larger ideological influences” (Simon-Maeda, 2004, p. 407). All the interviews were audio-recorded and then fully transcribed for analysis.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis was guided by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) because this approach contributes insights into how research participants interpret different phenomena (Suddaby, 2006). It also helps to develop categories which are more anchored in data than in the researcher's assumptions, thereby avoiding the problem of researcher bias. Interview transcripts were reviewed multiple times, so that salient themes and tentative categories that appeared to be of potential relevance to answering the research questions were constructed from the data rather than from any *a priori* categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) on the basis of three types of coding procedures: open, axial, and selective (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In open coding, I read transcripts, highlighted critical instances, and turned these instances into concepts which maximally described and summarized them. To be more specific, I broke the collected data into meaningful units of analysis, which could be words, phrases, sentences or larger bodies of language data (Mavetera & Kroeze, 2009). This approach to coding allowed me to look for lexical patterns, which revealed a certain identity that the teacher was taking on. Having identified concepts and categories, I worked through transcripts to collect numerous illustrative quotes. Open coding resulted in summarizing and classifying participants' lived stories. In axial coding, I refined categories, amalgamated some, made connections between the categories, and expanded the categories in terms of their properties. Then, I reviewed an unmarked transcript to see if any new concepts or categories emerged and also to see if the identified categories made sense within the general context of the interviews. The constant comparative techniques of grounded theory were used throughout the process. Finally, the extracted categories went through conceptual selective analysis in selective coding and this led to the emergence of the core category, a conceptualization which had the analytical power to pull together all codes that help me to capture the process of professional identity (re)construction of each participant. The findings were discussed within the framework of Wenger's (1998) social theory of identity formation, according to which identity formation is resulted from three sources: *engagement, imagination,*



*and alignment*. Engagement refers to the way one gets a sense of self by engaging in practice while imagination is “the production of images of the self and images of the world that transcend engagement” (Wenger, 1998, p. 177). The third source – alignment – is the process of matching one’s practices with the community of practice in which one participates. This theory, as Wenger explains, views learning as a socially situated activity, and encourages an understanding of individual experience in the wider social and historical context of activity and development. As a result, it is appropriate to the purpose of this study, which is to gain insights into NESTs’ construction of their professional identities in a particular EFL context. Tsui (2007) also employed this theoretical framework in her case study of teacher identity formation. She claimed that this theory “provided a powerful framework for making sense of the processes involved” (p. 678).

## **FINDINGS**

### **Teachers as Partners in the Construction of Knowledge**

The NESTs in this study repeatedly framed their teaching within an overarching constructivist stance towards EFL education. Their participation in the act of teaching shaped their understanding that English language teaching should go beyond the goals of developing language skills. Evoide compared Vietnamese learning culture with American learning culture by saying that “in America” learning is students’ responsibility, “but in Vietnam it’s mostly the teachers’ responsibility.” She also noted that “teaching in America is somehow very innovative, not come up with and not strict to the curriculum.” She continued,

Vietnamese students you know want the right answer. Whatever the teacher said they just want to repeat it exactly. But American students often come up with their own ideas. So through discussion, I hope they will have their own ideas and I try to have them critically think. And after finishing the discussion, they often ask: Ok, teacher. What’s the right answer? – There’s no point. I just

want you to discuss and practice critical thinking. Such experience sometimes is a tension in the classroom, sometimes it's funny.

One of the meanings of teaching on which their professional identity construction centered is the construct of "critical thinking," which was mentioned frequently when the participants talked about their teaching. They saw the goal of language teaching as developing students' thinking skills and gaining new educational values, not just developing students' skills in using English for communication. Like Evoide, Martha and John believed that developing students' critical thinking skills is an act of "turning the bulb on," and "the tools for learning" the language. Such a professional identity positions these teachers as educators whose responsibility is to broaden students' horizons and to develop their critical thinking, not just as classroom language teachers.

I don't see myself just as a language educator.... I see myself as someone being able to broaden their [the students'] horizons to think differently or to see everything in a different way or from a different perspective (Evoide).

Outside the language, I think a big job of every educator no matter what they teach is developing [students'] critical thinking and getting students to learn to ask questions and figure out what they want to learn and have the tools for learning it. ... I think education is not necessarily about the content but more than the thinking skills. So as a language teacher, I use language as a means to achieve this (John)

These NESTs' professional identities were evidently developed through their lived experiences within the American liberal humanistic tradition which values a constructivist view of learning. So, they considered inadequate the teacher-centered, spoon-feeding, and memory-based approach to language instruction, which was dominant in the Vietnamese educational landscape. Sue stated that she "was frustrated to see how students memorize what the textbook has" without understanding it. In the classroom, she "challenge[s] the students' assumptions "and

encourage[s] them to “present different ideas – ideas that others do not have.” Although she knew the students did not like her approach, she believed “it is a good way.” Similarly, Jack identified himself as a change agent in the local learning culture. He said,

I feel I’m a teacher and I know that I bring something special to them [the students]. For example, I give them the opportunity that they won’t have without a native English speaker teacher. There are many fine teachers in this university, but being a native English speaker teacher, I know I can help them to go beyond their teachers and let them study on their own.

Like other NESTs, Evoidé refused to align her identity with the local one. She candidly stated,

I don’t change my teaching to fit local teachers because it fits with my identity. I see myself not just as a teacher, but I want to see them [the students] grow up as persons to be more educated intellectually. So I feel from heart that it’s important for them to think for themselves in a critical way and develop their own idea, not to have a good mark. I want them to grow up as a person. (Evoidé)

### **Learning through Enforced, Authentic Communication**

NESTs celebrated “enforced communication” and “authentic communication” as both the means to the goal of ELT. Martha realized that Vietnamese students “are quite strong in reading and writing. They know the word when they see it but cannot recognize the word when they hear it.” Drawing on her experience of learning Spanish when she was forced to communicate in the target language, she believed that the students should be put in situations where they were “enforced to communicate” even though “they do not feel comfortable because they are not strong in that [speaking].” She also believed that it was necessary for students to change their learning culture in order to become effective language learners.

The challenge is what will help the students most. They are familiar with something but it may be faster and easier for them to learn in another way. There is a need to make sure and I enforce them to communicate with each other [in English].

Evoide also related her personal experiences of learning Vietnamese while she was in Vietnam by enforcing herself “to have simple conversations” with the people she met in the market or elsewhere to the way she taught English to the Vietnamese students.

Jack, who was assigned to teach speaking and listening skills, found the local examination-oriented and textbook-centered approach to teaching and learning problematic and he associated his professional identity with a process-oriented, integrated approach. He used the adverb of location ‘here’, the phrase ‘my background’, and the personal pronoun ‘we’ to highlight his self-othering as well as his personal set of values, which were forged from a lifetime of social interactions in his home country and have since become an integral part of his professional identity.

From my perception, I could be wrong, here it’s much more important to pass the test or to finish a book than to be able to use the skills in different environments. And at least from my background, we really value an integrated approach to language teaching, but here this program may be more segmented. The skills are taught separately.

Especially, Jack made a clear distinction between learning English with local teachers and with NESTs in terms of authenticity. He said, “sometimes non-native speakers speak English in a way it is easier for Vietnamese to understand, but it’s less authentic.” He defined the meaning of EFL learning as learning in the natural environment through authentic communication. In fact, he appropriated his experiences of learning Spanish and Vietnamese. For him, learning the language outside the classroom in the natural language environment is more effective than

learning inside the classroom. Authentic communication, in his words, is “the most important thing,” and if the students “want the best, the best is to be authentic.”

That’s much more active learning, so it’s not just classroom. It is learning something, practicing it in class and go outside, talk to taxi-drivers, sellers or things like that. That’s what I encourage my students to do, find other activities when they can meet English speakers in English clubs or come to my house for a party sometimes or things like that.

By associating “authentic communication” and “enforced communication” with their professional identities, these teachers saw their roles as a motivational factor to the students to communicate in English.

I do see myself as a motivating factor, even when I have to enforce them to communicate in English because they cannot speak Vietnamese to me. So specifically, being a native- English- speaking- teacher is helping to improve their communication, motivation, particularly with communication, pronunciation and intonation. (Martha)

My advantage over local teachers is that I motivate students in speaking . . . Students are forced to speak English. So in terms of speaking and listening, they are forced and motivated to do so. (John).

Jack believed that as a native-English-speaking teacher, he himself provided the students with an “opportunity” to listen to him and to speak to him in an ‘authentic’ manner, which would be unavailable to them without him.

### **Struggle to Enter the Community of Practice**

The NESTs in this study tried to legitimize their access to the community of practice not only by participating in classroom teaching but also by socializing with the students. They invited the students to their home to practice English and to get advice from them on how to learn English better as well as to provide tutorials. Like the other participants, Sue believed that her presence as a native speaker was a great benefit to the students, and described how she socialized with her students.

In addition to time in class, I have time to meet my students outside class in a sort of English corner part-time, encourage them to come over to visit, go out for coffee together, so they interact with a native speaker. As a native-speaker teacher, I really want personally to be of the assistance to the department. ... I make myself available to do whatever. (Sue)

Sue participated in helping the students to prepare for English proficiency competitions or in professional development workshops for local teachers.

However, all the participants complained that they felt "isolated," meaning they had limited or no interaction with members of the local professional community of practice. They were aware that their teaching might not fit the students' learning styles and they wanted to learn from the local English language teachers in order to modify their teaching.

There are so many things that work well with Vietnamese teachers that I don't know. It'd be good for me to observe Vietnamese teachers... I'd like to see how Vietnamese teachers handle [classroom] problems and how they encourage the students to speak. (Jack)

Actually they did observe a couple of lessons taught by Vietnamese teachers and invited Vietnamese teachers to observe their own lessons. But these were rare opportunities and they felt frustrated that there was no post-observation discussion because Vietnamese teachers often left the classroom immediately when they had finished the lesson or the observation. Sue said that she felt like "there was no

exchange because they [local teachers] came to observe and then they ran away.” She added that when NESTs asked to observe the local teachers, “they don’t say ‘No’, but I can feel that they are not happy with it. I know that feeling as a teacher.”

Cultural differences and the language barrier were factors that limited their socialization and led to NESTs’ non- participation into the local community of practice. They believed that when they went to department meetings or to other extra-curricular, social activities, the local staff had to speak English, which is “their second language,” thus “it’s more work for them because it’s easier to talk to people in their own language.” The language barrier also constrains their communication with the students who were not confident enough to communicate frequently with them. Jack said, “being only a native [English] speaker in the [class]room who doesn’t understand the local language I don’t know what the students are saying and what’s going on in the building and what will happen. Sometimes there is news like classroom starts earlier that all Vietnamese teachers know but I don’t just because I don’t understand the language.” By ‘news’ he meant ‘announcement’, and the announcements about changes in the teaching schedules and other things are always made in Vietnamese on the campus, which is natural. For Martha, communication gaps rooted in the cultural differences discouraged her from communicating with local teachers.

It’s really good to see their [local teachers’] perspectives, but I found there are communication gaps. When I asked things like: ‘How would you do this?’ it was interpreted that I did not have any idea about it. I did not mean anything like that. I try to open up more discussion, but it doesn’t necessarily seem like that. It happens, so I think it’s kind of communication gaps in the way I ask questions. But they [local teachers] are friendly, approachable and willing to talk.

Interaction between these NESTs and local teachers is limited even in the staffroom because “there’s little time,” and “people just talk about someone’s going to get married or things like that” (Sue). NESTs themselves did not seem to keen on developing relationship or collegiality with local staff, either. Evoide said, “I focus on building relationship with students rather than with local teachers. I just really enjoy my students, enjoy kind of mentoring or training people younger than me.”

Although Sue had been teaching in Vietnam for 12 years, she managed to make friends with just three local English language teachers.

Because of these problems in gaining access to the local community of practices, all of them chose to participate in their expatriate community of practice in addition to their limited socialization with the local students. They observed other NESTs and shared their problems and experiences within the NESTs' community of practice where they could debate or ask questions, which was impossible "with Vietnamese colleagues."

## **Discussion**

Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning, which has been used by scholars to understand teacher identity construction (e.g., Trent, 2012; Tsui, 2007), is helpful for understanding NESTs' construction of their professional identities in a Vietnamese EFL context.

Their engagement in the practices of English language teaching included the emphasis on students' communication skills, critical thinking, enforced communication, and authentic communication. They believed that classroom-based, book-centered, grade-oriented instruction, memorization of words without understanding them, and interactions with non-native-speaker teachers in the classroom did not help the students to achieve the desired skills needed for their future life. For them, a more constructivist approach to English language instruction was "innovative." They believed that students learned better when they were put into authentic situations where they were enforced to communicate in English. By emphasizing 'authentic communication' as a means to proficiency in the target language, they equated learning a foreign language with learning a second language without considering the enormous difference in exposure to the target language in these two different learning contexts. Therefore, they identified themselves as students' partners in the construction of knowledge rather than givers of knowledge. Such an educational philosophy has never been part of the Vietnamese learning culture. They also saw their roles as motivators for the students to use English for authentic communication and to improve their English pronunciation.



These NESTs' professional identities were deeply rooted in their lived experiences with the liberal humanistic tradition of American educational discourse that views individuals as completely independent, free, creative entities. Their lived experiences of learning a second language (Spanish) while in America as well as the experience of learning Vietnamese in Vietnam contributed to the construction of their professional identities. Imagination entails transcending one's current realities in time and space. NESTs in this study moved beyond the immediate context of teaching English as a foreign language in a Vietnamese university, and equated learning English as a foreign language with learning the first or second language in the natural linguistic environment. So, they aligned their teaching practices with the discourses prevailing in their home country while resisting aligning them with the local discourses. This leads to conflicts between NESTs' idiosyncratic backgrounds and local conditions and learning culture where students are learning English outside the natural environment of the target language. Although they knew the students did not like the way the approached English language instruction, they maintained that it was best for them.

In addition to participation, another important concept of community of practice is that of non-participation. Wenger (1998) argues as follows:

We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through the practices we do not engage in. Our identities are constituted not only by what we are but also by what we are not. To the extent that we can come in contact with other ways of being, what we are not can even become a large part of how we define ourselves. (p. 164)

Largely due to cultural reasons, NESTs in this study did not participate in the local community of practice although they were willing and eager to learn from experienced local English language teachers. Instead, they secured their legitimacy of access to practice by socializing limitedly with the students and trying to familiarize the students with their own practices. While socializing with the students, they aimed to help them practice English, rather than to learn from the students so as to adjust their teaching styles to the students' needs and learning

styles. Thus, their legitimization of their access to practice is more relational than experiential (Trent, 2012).

These findings support what Johnston (2003) and Simon-Maeda (2004) have noted that the value-laden nature of the language teaching profession manifests itself in the philosophical attitudes toward students and the act of teaching itself that language educators adopt when describing their professional practices. The findings strongly suggest that it is necessary for NESTs to “problematize practice” by turning a skeptical eye towards assumptions, ideas that have become ‘naturalized’, notions that are no longer questioned” (Pennycook, 2004, p. 799). By believing that teaching in America is more “innovative,” NESTs were tacitly practicing what Holliday (2005) refers to as “culturalist chauvinism,” thereby reinforcing their professional identity of the “foreign Other” (p. 27).

The findings of the study reported here also provide further support for Trent’s (2012) suggestion that there need to be close collaboration and cooperation between NESTs and local English teachers. Such collaboration and cooperation will help both NESTs and local teachers to “critically reflect on past teaching and learning practices, to learn from shared experiences, and to generate plans for future policies on teaching and learning” (p. 121) so that both NESTs and local teachers can work together to share the ownership of meanings of ELT and to develop “alternative ways of seeing teaching and learning” (p. 122) in the local context. For this collaboration and cooperation to be in place, among other things, both NESTs and local teachers need “to be willing to be vulnerable” and both sides “really want to learn and work with others,” as suggested by Sue, a participant in this study. This also implies a willingness and ability on the part of NESTs to learn the local language to a reasonably high level of competence, so that they can share experiences with local colleagues on a more equal footing.

There are two important points I would like to make. First, I do not mean to criticize the NESTs in this study for their perceptions of teaching and learning as well their teaching behaviors shaped by those perceptions. What I would like to argue is that the limited collaboration between the NESTs and the local teachers resulting in NESTs’ limited socialization and non-participation into the local

community of practices seems to be the major obstacle to NESTs' deconstruction of their socially-imposed professional identity.

Secondly, it is important to note that the sample of participants in the present study does not "pretend to represent the wider population" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 104) of NESTs working throughout Vietnam, and so there can be no claims as to the generalizability of these findings. The only claim that can be made is that they illuminate the issue from the participants' particular perspectives.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study reported here is just a modest attempt to explore the construction of professional identity by native-English-speaking teachers working in an EFL context. Findings of the study imply that limited socialization and non-participation into the local community of practice due to the lack of collaboration between NESTs and local NNESTs discourage NESTs from deconstructing their professional identity, thereby remaining to be the Other in the EFL context. Therefore, it would be more useful to the field of TESOL to research ways for a locally situated effective and productive partnership between NESTs and local NNESTs than just being concerned with the ideological issue of 'native-speaker fallacy.' This kind of partnership will encourage both NESTs and NNESTs to deconstruct their socially-imposed professional identities so as to serve the students' needs better.

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