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TESOL Virtual Seminar

Peter Sakura presented *Social and Environmental Responsibility Toolbox: Practical Techniques and Strategies for Teaching EFL and Training EFL Teachers*, part of *Integrating Social Justice into Teacher Education and Classroom Practice*, a TESOL webinar by the Social Responsibility and Teacher Education Interest Section. Access through [this link](#).

TESOL ER-PLN Leadership Team

Chair Peter Sakura teaches English learners at Western Washington University. His research interest is climate change education.



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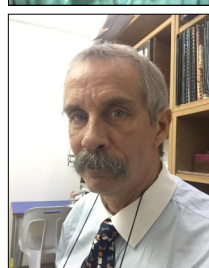
Member-at-large Alexander Nanni holds an M.Ed. in TESL from Rhode Island College and an Ed.D in Curriculum, Teaching, Learning, and Leadership from Northeastern University. He is teaching at the Preparation Center for Languages and Mathematics at Mahidol University International College in Thailand. His research interests include project based learning and content and language integrated learning.



Member-at-large Joseph Serrani is an instructor and level coordinator at the Preparation Center for Languages and Mathematics at Mahidol University International College. He has worked in various community development programs in South East Asia. His research interests include sustainability education, content-based instruction, and the role of technology in language acquisition.



Online Discussion Facilitator and Moderator rob clément is a teacher trainer in East Malaysia with over to 40 years of experience teaching and learning in nine countries on four continents. He joined TESOL in 1983 and has been a regular attendee at TESOL conferences.



Member-at-large Earlene Gentry is active in conservation in North Carolina. She has presented at TESOL on environmental education in Egypt.



ER-PLN Networking Session at TESOL Chicago, March 2018. Conference-goers met to discuss environmental education.

TEACHING ESL WRITERS RESEARCH THROUGH ECO-COMPOSITION

Ashley N.E. Murphy, Mary Newbegin, Teresa Cusumano, & Kayla Landers—Lehigh University

The research paper is one of the most dreaded assignments for college students, as noted by Heilker, Allen, and Sewall (2004). First-year college students often find writing research papers a daunting task; first-year international students, who are navigating a second language and culture, are doubly challenged. Combining the personal essay with research can alleviate students' apprehension of research writing, and eco-composition provides an ideal lens for students to investigate their own experiences and experiment with "reading their world" (Graves, 2004, p. 89). Dobrin and Weisser (2002) defined eco-composition as "the study of the relationships between environments (and by that we mean natural, constructed, and even imagined places) and discourse (speaking, writing, and thinking)" (p. 572); movement from the personal to the external is intrinsic to the genre. While eco-composition assignments in first-year composition (FYC) can take any number of forms, this article examines one multimodal assignment: the combination of memoir and research paper.

FYC is a common requirement for college students, usually consisting of two required semesters of English classes. The purpose of these courses is to prepare students to write well-organized and accurately cited research papers that contain evidence of critical thinking. These courses are often taught by graduate students or adjunct professors; more often than not, these instructors have had little or no training in TESOL.

Lehigh University's (LU) international undergraduate ESL population is quite similar to other American universities, with the majority of students coming from China (58.76%) and the rest coming from 60 other countries (Office of International Affairs, 2017). At LU, first-year ESL students are usually placed in sheltered FYC courses, which are taught by instructional staff with a Master of Arts degree in TESOL or a related field rather than adjuncts or teaching assistants from within the Department of English.

In LU's sheltered FYC courses, as in most FYC programs, the first semester is devoted to teaching the writing process and American academic expectations around essay-writing, while in the second semester the focus is on research writing. Aligned with the mainstream FYC course outcomes, LU's FYC course objectives for the second semester state that by the end of the course, students will be able to create guiding research questions and complete research projects, find and evaluate scholarly sources using the library databases, synthesize ideas from sources, document sources by quoting, paraphrasing, and/or summarizing and giving credit to the original sources, choose words that precisely convey meaning in a tone appropriate to academic situations, and become an autonomous editor of their own work.

The FYC problem specific to ESL students is that, as Hyland (2001) stated, "after they mentally compare their texts with target 'expert texts' they may feel so overwhelmed by the distance between what they are expected to achieve and what they feel capable of doing that plagiarism seems the most realistic strategy" (p. 380). The eco-composition essay, which combines memoir and research writing, helps ease students into the research process. As Bishop noted (2004), "the assumption of many undergraduate writers is that the writing world is divided into fact and fiction" (p. 29). Writing exercises combining creative nonfiction and research, beginning with the student's own experiences, place the students in the role of experts of their chosen research topic. As Ellison (2009) wrote, "this assignment can bridge the gap between their fond memories, the natural world, and the university writing situation" (p. 33). Additionally, students find their lives experiences infinitely more intriguing, which provides a deeper connection with the essay content and increases student engagement with the writing task.

Brainstorming activities for eco-composition should ideally highlight the writing process and peer interaction, e.g. using a modified Think-Pair-Share activity (McTighe & Lyman, 1988) to list the natural spaces that helped shape who they are. First, students are given one minute of silence for quiet reflection, then 5-10 minutes to list as many of those spaces as they can, and 5 minutes to discuss these memories with a partner. Finally, students are given 10-15 minutes to freewrite about one of those natural spaces. Depending on their personal writing preferences, students sometimes choose to continue talking about their ideas with their teacher or a classmate instead. During the following class session, students are led through an accordion exercise in which they take their freewriting and expand it. Employing descriptive writing techniques, students are encouraged to attend to all five senses in their writing. It helps to guide them with probing questions such as: What sounds did you hear when you were there? What did the air feel like on your skin in terms of temperature, wind, and humidity? What could you smell?

Upon completion, they have written a strong, creative, nonfiction draft of their memory in a natural space. The next step in the process is to begin exploring areas of their memoir to research. For example, students could research the history of the place that shaped them—often these spaces aren't natural at all, but man made—, the psychological effects of nature on mental health, or the kinds of plant and animal life found there.

Nature memoirs provide limitless possibilities for creative inquiry. During the inquiry stage of the writing process for traditional research papers, students' inexperience with the library's journal databases often leads to the following complaint: "There is nothing written about my topic." This eco-composition assignment ensures that students will be able to find something about their chosen natural landscape by removing several of the constraints around research topics.

Students often initially decide to write a 3-4 page memoir that elucidates years of their lives. First-year college students sometimes need guidance to focus on details, descriptive as well as investigative. Thus, the authors recommend limiting students' memoirs to at most a single weekend or even just one afternoon. This intense focus on a brief moment in time invites students to closely examine their own history; the teacher as the writing coach guides the class, giving the students permission to "navel-gaze," and reaffirming the students' experience as worthy of study. Thus, eco-composition legitimizes students' personal experiences in an academic context.

To help students focus intensely on this one moment in a natural space, they are led through an in-class visualization exercise in which they reimagine their memories of their chosen natural place and capture those memories through writing. While at first blush expressivist pedagogical activities might seem unrelated to writing research, Burnham (2001) noted that "expressivist pedagogy encourages, even insists on, a sense of writer presence even in research-based writing" (p. 19). In addition to foregrounding the novice writers' personal experiences, expressivist classroom activities, like the visualization writing exercise described above, provide scaffolding for the writing process, and thus aid the teacher in emphasizing the recursive nature of writing.

The writing produced by blending descriptive memoir with traditional research can be quite nuanced and moving. Here is a minimally edited excerpt from one of our student's eco-compositions (Gu, 2016, p. 2):

I indulged my brain in the scenery of the island 69 kilometers from the Malaysian city that I saw countless times from Singapore (Pradhan & Sulaiman, 71). Palau Tioman, or Tioman Island, captured my heart at once. It was commonly told by the local that Tioman Island was founded because a dragon princess from the South China Sea decided to take her final rest here. It wouldn't be surprising that Tioman's beauty appealed to the princess. Its landscape was "filled with rolling hills and mountain peaks, sandy beaches and rocky cliffs." (Salleh et al, p. 173) As the sun was setting, seagulls chanted in unison against the shadow of ships and rocks. The 69-kilometer-long beachline (Othman et al., p. 173) was traced in rich orange-gold.

Gu weaves narrative description and personal experience with quotes and properly written paraphrased passages from peer-reviewed journal articles. The journey from personal memory to research paper results in a unique multimodal text wherein student authors, like Gu (2016), experiment with voice, tone, and genre.

As Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater described (2004), "while we should never focus exclusively on reading, the many voices, models, styles, and shapes that essays provide can offer inspiration, instruction, and even affirmation to student writers" (p. 70). Nevertheless, we, the authors, choose short creative eco-compositions to accompany this assignment. Some examples of professional eco-compositions we assign students to read include the excerpt describing the encounter with the giant water bug in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (Dillard, 1974) and the *Thinking Like a Mountain excerpt* (Leopold, 1949).

The eco-composition is the first major assignment in the course; it serves as a scaffold to more substantial research writing assignments. As the writing tasks grow more complex, and the students' foci move from the personal to the external, the readings too grow in complexity. One example of a longer work blending personal experience with research is *The Sixth Extinction*, in which Kolbert (2014) integrates creative non-fiction with primary and secondary research. If the eco-composition teacher had the luxury of choosing a textbook specific to her own FYC class, the reader *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity and the Natural World* (Deming & Davoy, 2011) contains a number of powerful nature memoirs by authors such as bell hooks and Jamaica Kincaid; it also comes with a free teaching guide.

Kunz (2016) concisely summarized eco-composition's intrinsic connections between writing and nature when she wrote, "writing is fundamentally ecological and always part of a dynamic system" (p. 40). This is an important analogy for writers: we are all located in a physical landscape which affects us, just as we affect it. Eco-composition helps novice writers re-see the places that have shaped them and nurtures a positive attitude towards writing as FYC students envision their future as research writers. The intentional integration of the personal and natural world accurately replicates what novice researchers must eventually do: lend their own observations and experiences to an already-existing framework.

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ER-PLN Article

SUGGESTIONS FOR GLOBAL ISSUES IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES

Greg Goodmacher, Keiwa College, Japan

A summary of an article based on his talk at the 4th UAD International TEFL Conference is below:

Universities and other centers of learning are joining with the United Nations and other international institutions to further the study of significant issues that are affecting the lives of people across the globe. Ministries of education in various countries want to have their students develop an understanding of the concept of global citizenship and the connections between the peoples of our increasingly intertwined world. In line with this, many educational institutions are including global issues education in their curricula. The English language is the predominant language of international business, globalization, medicine, international education, and politics. Billions of people are studying and using English daily. Can language teachers play a part in promoting global citizenship and creating a peaceful and sustainable world? This paper aims to answer that question and to address vital principles involved in the creation of activities and teaching materials that merge global issues content and language education. It will also provide examples of how teachers can combine content education and critical thinking skills in ways that develop grammatical knowledge and the traditional skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. If you would like to read the article that was published in the Proceedings of the 4th UAD International TEFL Conference, click [this link](#).



Greg Goodmacher currently teaches environmental issues and other global issues content-based EFL courses in Japan. After a failure that resulted from mistakenly choosing a textbook that did not fit the needs of his students, he started creating teaching materials, which led to the publication of *Nature and the Environment*, the first of six books about global issues. His latest content-based EFL textbook, *Cultural Issues & Environmental Issues*, aims to help students to connect their lifestyles with environmental problems and to take actions to solve or reduce them. Greg presents internationally on environmental issues, materials development, critical thinking, and language teaching because he thrives on the sharing of

teaching ideas with like-minded teachers. He also takes students on field trips connected to conserving and appreciating nature. <http://hotspringaddict.blogspot.jp/>

Call for ER-PLN Newsletter Articles

Please send us your environment-related articles or your own ER member spotlight for the newsletter. Include your name, email, affiliation, city, country, and an author headshot. Due date is **June 15, 2018**. Email alypka@mail.usf.edu

Join ER-PLN

Environmental Responsibility Forum has a new name. To join our group, log in to tesol.org, hover over “Connect to TESOL,” click on “Communities of Practice,” scroll down to “Professional Learning Networks,” click on “Environmental Responsibility,” click on “Join/Leave this professional learning network,” then follow the prompts from there. Members may also email petersakura5@gmail.com for a member welcome packet any time.

Join our Facebook Group

Keep current and see upcoming events at facebook.com/groups/tesol.erf/

Message from the Newsletter Editor

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our 2018 Spring newsletter! Please do not hesitate to contact me at alypka@mail.usf.edu if you have any questions or ideas about the content of our newsletter.

Have a great rest of the semester and see you at the 2019 TESOL Convention!

Best regards,
Andrea Lypka
University of South Florida