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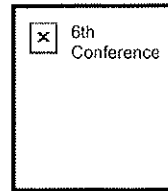
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Service Learning and the Non-Native Speaker Of English

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When I added the Service Learning component to my ESL 100 class at Kapi'olani Community College, my overriding goal was to increase my students' awareness of the community where they live and study. Because this is also an expository writing class, I hoped that students' competencies in writing English would also improve. I expected that the students who worked on the newsletter would also have greater awareness of writing for different audiences than the teacher. The projects met those goals and more.

ESL100 is an expository writing class for students whose native language is not English. It meets all the college requirements of the traditional English 100 class. Students must complete this class with a C or better as a prerequisite to many other classes on campus or to transfer to the University of Hawaii--Manoa. Students normally write a minimum of four essays in a semester, including one research paper and one in-class essay. Participation in service learning is mandatory in this class.

Students in the class are from Japan, China, Korea, Vietnam, Laos, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan, with an occasional student from a European or African culture. The largest culture represented varies by semester. During Spring semester 1997, two sections of the class with 45 total students contained 45% Chinese, 23% Japanese, 14% Filipino, and 9% each Vietnamese and Korean. Some of the students are international students who will return to their home country. Most, however, are either immigrants or naturalized citizens who plan to remain in Hawaii or the US. Because Hawaii is so multicultural, it is quite easy for students to remain in their own little cultural niche without needing to interact much with another culture. The service learning project takes them out of that niche, at least for a little

while. Recent demographic information for Kapi'olani Community College indicates the student population is 21% Japanese, 17% Filipino, 17% Caucasian, 10% Chinese, 10% Hawaiian, 16% other, and 9% mixed. Residents of Palolo Valley where most of the service learning projects for this class occur are primarily Samoan, Indonesian, Vietnamese, or Laotian. Only once has an ESL100 student lived in the valley; although many students report that relatives or acquaintances live there.

Currently the students choose from four projects: publish the Palolo Pride newsletter for Hawaii Housing Authority--Palolo, tutor in math and English at Jarrett Intermediate School, tutor reading for fourth graders at Palolo Elementary School, or tutor reading for K-3 students at Ala Wai Elementary School. Students choose based on their schedules and their interests. During spring 1997 semester, the class meeting times conflicted with the after-school tutoring at Jarrett Intermediate School, so that option was not available.

The class meets in a computer networked classroom and uses the computers at almost each session for regular discussions, for peer critiques on student essays, and for submission of written work, including their reflective journals. The network allows the class to be grouped for synchronous (online) written discussion. Service learning is mandatory in the class because I want to be able to conduct synchronous discussions about their service learning in class as part of their written reflection.

Very early in the semester, we have an online discussion about what service means in their culture. This is one of only a few times that a discussion group is formed by culture; Japanese discuss service in Japan, Korean students discuss service in Korea, etc.

After students select their own project, the groups are divided by project to discuss what they plan to do first. This discussion allows me to allay some of the fears students might have and to give them encouragement. This discussion provides a means for me to answer questions that many students would hesitate to ask in front of the entire class but that many would have. After their first exposure to the project the groups discuss their project and their reaction to it; such discussions are then held about three more times, the last at the end of the project for a "what have I

learned from this" discussion. Students also write in their journals after each contact with the project. These journals are collected via the computer at the end of the semester. Students are urged to refer to what they have written in the journals for their online discussions and most do.

The research essay is a data collection project about families where students may use their service learning contacts as subjects for their questionnaire. The in-class essay usually is the final exam for the class, and I usually ask that they write about a particular aspect of the class, sometimes their service learning project. This semester, for example, students were asked to write about what they have learned from the project.

The Palolo Pride newsletter project has an editor and section editors who oversee the work of the reporters. I select the editor(s) based upon student performance. The groups select the section editors. Sections included community, school, children, and recreation. Section editors and reporters arrange an interview with a contact person whose name and telephone number I give them, conduct the interview, write the story, and then revise as necessary to meet my requirements. The editors assist in putting together the final product outside of class time, learning to use ClarisWorks for desktop publishing. Reporters use ClarisWorks to write and edit their stories. One section is the Keiki Corner, an activity section designed for pre-schoolers. Students use Adobe Superpaint to create this activity.

This project more than meets my goals. Student impressions of both audience and perspective alter as they work on the story. Initially, they look at the assignment as something they need to research for themselves. One student indicated that his first task was to go to the library, when actually he first needed to telephone his contact to arrange an interview. Another chose the sports section because he wanted to write about his favorite sport. Both needed a different perspective to the task. Their first drafts tend to be written in the first-person, "I went to the library and interviewed the librarian." They must revise so that the essay reports on an activity or event which residents of the valley need or want to know. In the process, of course, the students learn a great deal more about the residents of the valley and what takes place there.

At Jarrett Intermediate School, students tutor in whatever subject the tutee needs help. This is usually a homework assignment, often in math or English. This after school project does not always meet the schedules of my students, sometimes conflicting, as it did this semester, with the class itself.

At Palolo Elementary School, students assist a fourth grade classroom teacher, Jim Edens, primarily with reading. The tutors listen while the fourth graders in their group read aloud, assisting with pronunciation, correcting words, etc. Tutors work in the classroom with the teacher, usually two hours a week. The tutors also assist with other areas of classroom management, sometimes correcting papers, etc.

A new project this semester has students assisting at Ala Wai Elementary School with their Title I reading program, Betsy Itoga coordinator. About 30% of the students at this school are ESL students just learning English. Student tutors work with from one to four ESL students in kindergarten to third grade classes with their reading. The tutors take their charges to a location outside the classroom, sometimes even outside, to read to the students or for the students to read to the tutors. Then they discuss the story read.

Students begin the projects with a great deal of apprehension about their ability to complete the tasks. The following excerpts from a synchronous discussion before one class began work on the newsletter indicate their trepidation. Names have been altered to maintain anonymity as well as to indicate student's culture.

Mrs. Cook: Discuss what you think you will be doing as you work on the Palolo Pride Newsletter. Talk about both your expectations and your fears.

Japanese Boy: I really worry about my writing skill. I hope it will be meaningful experience for me. I am looking forward to talking to people and listening to their story.

Chinese Girl: It is difficult for me to interview a person who I don't know at all especially I have to speak in English because my speaking is not very well.

Japanese Boy2: Me, too. I also worried about interviewing someone.

Chinese Girl: I think this activity is a good chance to learn something about how to write a newsletter and how to interview a person. When this activity finished, I hope we could have a chance to sit together and talk about our experience.

Students have similar reservations about tutoring. Excerpts below from the tutoring group occurred at the same class time as above:

Mrs. Cook: Discuss what you will be doing as you work at Pablo Elementary School. Talk about both your expectations and your fears.

Korean Girl: This is my first formal community service in my life!! No wonder I am excited in doing this!! well . . . I have worked for the disabled children in hospital long time ago. there I just played with them. . I think in Paolo elementary school, I am part of responsible for the education of the children. (what a mission, hehehe)

Chinese Girl: Since I signed up at this school and my job is to read for the students. I think I will be reading stories for the students. I expect the class will be kind of noisy because little kids would love to play around. I just hope they will listen to me when I am reading. I scare that they will laugh at me or won't listen to me.

Chinese Girl2: I think I am going to have reading class with some four-grade students. I am wonder why they need help in English?

India Girl: Well I am not too good in English either and never do tutoring so it will be my first experience.

Japanese Girl: I am afraid of meeting energetic little kids who might remind me how old I am. I hope we and the students over there can get along well soon.

They end the service learning projects with increased awareness of their own capabilities and confidence in their abilities in using English as the following excerpts reveal. At the end of the semester, the newsletter group had this discussion about what they learned from their experience:

Chinese Girl: What I learned from working with the newsletter was how to collect information from the library and work together with the other students. In my group, there were three persons working together. We shared the work that we had to do. My job was to collect things like puzzles which the children might be interested in.

Japanese Boy2: I learned that in our community some people try really hard to make our society better place to live. For example, my patina and I went to YMCA to interview and a guy told us that they are helping many kids not to join gangster. They also helping working mothers. YMCA takes care of those mother's children. YMCA is open for anyone who wants to join their events such as basketball tournament etc. Anyway I learned there are some people who work for their community.

The tutors had a similar discussion:

Japanese Girl: I had a great time with kids. Do you remember most people said they were scared before we started this service. I think it was not so bad to help students to understand math and English.

Japanese Girl2: First of all, I learned to be patient and I found myself could do that with somebody else's children. Second, I learned to help other people made me feel good.

Chinese Girl2: I learn that I have to be patient with kids. Teaching the kids is not an easy job.

Chinese Girl3: I don't think so. They are so nice. I remember the first time when I came to the class, some kids

even shook hands with me.

Vietnamese Boy: The tutee speak English very good, but some words they don't know how to spell. They don't know how to write a complete sentence. They make noisy, but they are friendly.

Japanese Girl1: I definitely do the tutoring if I have a chance to do so. I am thinking to go back to Jerret if they are going to have the session next semester. I went to Jerret Inter. I didn't have any rude kids there and it was kind of interesting to know what 6th, 7th grade learn.

It is obvious from these discussions that as a result of the service learning projects the students have learned much more about the community where they live. They are even seeing the larger community as their own now. Similarly, the students now have much more confidence about their abilities to be successful with their use of English. They are no longer hesitant about what they know; although most would also readily acknowledge what their problem areas are. One young man commented that although

the students at Jarrett spoke better English than he did, they did not know how to write as well.

The impact of service learning on student writing abilities is less easy to document, but I do see the difference in their attitude toward and awareness of audience. Similarly, confidence is a large factor in the ability to use a language for what ever purpose, so their increased confidence should also be apparent in their writing.

I will continue to include service learning in the ESL 100 course, but problems do remain. One of the biggest problems is the time it takes for both me and the students. When students work 20+ hours a week outside of class, little time remains for the service project. I also must make time outside class time to meet with students to publish the newsletter. Often we must plan around times when the classroom is available, compounding the difficulties. The time necessary for classroom teachers to respond to telephone messages and for me to get back to them causes a delay in getting projects started.

Student transportation to and from the service learning site is another problem. Many ESL students must rely upon bus transportation, and while the bus is readily available to and from campus, it is much more difficult to make the transfer to Palolo Valley. Of course that trip also takes time.

Student reliability is sometimes another problem. Students sometimes fail to understand that they must keep the appointments that they make, or to notify the teacher if they are not going to be in the class. Due dates also must be kept flexible because of the difficulty students have with making schedules meet the schedules of their interviewees. The teacher has to be flexible to deal with this lack of structure.

A final problem arises from the turnover in the agencies we work with. Often the contact the student is directed to interview is no longer with the agency or is working in a different area. ESL students who are hesitant to talk to native speakers face to face find it even more difficult to understand people on the telephone. They often don't know how to interpret what the message they are given really means. And when they try to explain it to me, even more of the message disappears. We must work out a way to keep better track of who the contact in an agency is.

Nonetheless, I believe the positive results outweigh the problems. One student's response to his service learning experience summarizes why I will continue service learning.

Some students may think of this service learning program is wasting their times, but is a requirement for the class in order to pass, they still have to go to participate in the program. For myself, I am one of those student before. [The previous semester.] It is because I am a full-time worker and have to go to school, which means that I already don't have much spare times for myself and if I have to do the service learning program, my spare time will end up even less. That's why I don't like the program earlier. But, since I am a tutor and work with the kids in Palolo Elementary School, I have a different kind of thinking about service learning. It is fun when I worked with those kids, and I feel that it was a good experience for my life.

For this service learning, I have to go to their class every Wednesday at 11 a.m. My job there is to help the kids with their spelling, writing, reading, and pronouncing the words. From this service learning, I learned how to teach

the kids with their assignments, how an elementary school teacher is to teach little kids new things that the kids would never know before. The kids are still young; they always like to talk to each other and how is the teacher to get the attending [attendance] from those kids. All these things, we are not about to learn just from the book. We also have to learn it from the outside world .

The servicelearning program is really helping me a lot in my knowledge, way of learning, way of thinking, and my personality. I got to learn more happening in our community. I know what is going on in our city. The service learning program has changed my own thoughts about this program. My personality has been changed a little bit too. I usually don't like to talk to people or help others, but after the service learning I talk more and help others. One thing I never learn before is I don't know how the elementary school system works in Hawaii. I never went to elementary school here, so I was interested in the difference between here and my home country. After the tutoring, I saw that the way of the student learning here is totally different from mine. The way of the student studying here is more relaxed than what we are.

According to my service learning project, I learn how to use my knowledge to help people. Even if I only have limited knowledge, I still can help other people who need help and our community. I feel that's great. It is because I understand that it is not only money that can support the community; our knowledge also can be a big part of the search for support of our community." --Simon

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