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DEVELOPING A PUBLIC VOICE: PLACE-BASED EDUCATION AS AN APPROACH TO EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This paper argues for developing education for sustainable development (ESD) as a specific focus area in the university EFL classroom, and suggests place-based education as a method to develop the attitudes and skills identified as critical to developing the discourse area of sustainability. This research aimed to determine whether engaging students with making connections between a local place of interest and personal identity stimulated personal agency within a global sustainable development (SD) discourse. Participants worked on group e-projects that asked them to identify a local place of importance, whether personal or civic, and redesign it with an aspect towards sustainability. Student attitudes regarding SD were gauged from pre-and post-testing using a modified version of the OECD's Global Competency Self-Assessment Survey, as well as student interviews and reflective comments. Preliminary results suggest that these attempts to introduce sustainability into the classroom through place-based education improved awareness and attitudes about global issues, and positively impacted abilities to participate in the SD discourse community in English. This is notable, as the sustainable development discourse community is increasingly important to nearly all university students of English, regardless of intended career track, and is worthy of inclusion as a specific focus of study.

Keywords

Place-Based Education, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classroom, Project-Based Education

1. Introduction

As new global challenges arose in the last half of the 20th century, education for sustainable development (ESD) was formulated as a response to those challenges. The students of today and adults of tomorrow will live in an increasingly interconnected world, in terms of global economies, our natural world, and cultures and migration. Educational reform to prepare students and universities for the needs of the future has been a feature of meetings and councils on sustainable development (SD) from the 1980s.

Recent papers have suggested that students in Asia are well-informed about SD issues and indeed express concern with the global future (Wee, Ariffin, Ng & Shabudin, 2017). While some researchers (Caniglia et al., 2018) promoted more skills-based approaches, such ideas as a digital transnational collaboration for sustainability, this paper pursues a methodology identifying attitudinal changes as pre-eminent in critical participation in SD issues.

While the use of ESD has expanded throughout all levels of schooling over recent years, it has largely remained a feature of curricula designed for classes in one's native language. Introduction of ESD into the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom often remains limited to scattershot topics at upper levels which, while instructive, often lack a cohesive set of goals and concepts. This paper details attempts to introduce ESD in the EFL classroom at a language university in southern Taiwan, specifically by the use of place-based education (PBE) exercises, primarily in the form of project-based learning. Students were participating in a three-year General English program required by the school which covered the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Student responses to using PBE as a method to address ESD were measured through qualitative measures such as interviews and survey comments, as well as one quantitative measure, a novel adaptation of the Global Competency Self-Assessment Survey from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Overall, student responses were positive and indicated an increase in awareness of issues as well as increased confidence in the ability to participate in the English-language discourse surrounding SD issues.

1.1 Research Questions

Within the EFL classroom, SD ideas make an appearance at different levels in varying levels of engagement. Students studying the Oxford University Press *Q: Skills for Success Level*

5 (2nd Ed.) (near the top of their series) for example, will sample SD issues throughout its eight reading and eight listening units geared for upper level students, and includes issues such as voluntourism, nature reserves, global citizenship, Fair Trade, the UN Global Compact, public space, alternative transportation programs, energy issues for the future, language and seed preservation, and recycling (Caplan & Douglas, 2015; Earle-Carlin, 2015). All in all, it is heartening to see this amount of coverage of SD issues. Unfortunately, texts like these tend to package these ideas very disparately, with the result that the concepts are not put in conversation with one another and the interconnectedness of SD issues is overlooked. Some students, whose knowledge of sustainability may be limited to environmental concerns, may not even know that the topic is in fact one of concern to SD. At lower levels, not surprisingly, the SD issues covered decrease in number and complexity, with Level 4 containing a handful of topics of SD interest and Level 3 containing even fewer. So how do we begin to introduce SD to students at lower levels? And when SD issues are included at higher levels, how do we teach them in a less piecemeal fashion and with a more cohesive approach that acknowledges the inherent interconnectedness of SD issues themselves? Place-based education has the potential to be successful in both situations. This project was geared primarily for upper-level EFL students, though appropriate modifications could be made for lower-level students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Education for Sustainable Development

Recognizing the need to address the threats to global peace and the specters of inequality and degradation of the natural environment, the General Assembly of the United Nations established The World Commission on Environment and Development in 1982. Its 1987 report, *Our Common Future*, was published in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission, and gave us the most concise definition to date for sustainable development itself: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” (Brundtland, 1987). In further consideration of the issues and their solutions, in 1992 the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro produced a detailed roadmap, named Agenda 21, which outlined desired international agreements on climate change and biodiversity, and a statement of principles on forests (UNCED, 1992). It was one of the first such agreements that also specifically addressed the role of higher education in preparing for sustainable development.

More recently, in 2015, a substantive framework for change was provided through UNESCO’s Global Action Programme (GAP), notably Education 2030’s Agenda for Sustainable

Development, which outlines 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The fourth of these focuses on quality education—not only as a goal in itself, but also as a means to accomplish the other SDGs, thereby recognizing the critical role of education in reaching sustainability goals, and calling on all countries to ensure, by 2030, that “all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development” (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 20). Studies have confirmed the importance of the inclusion of quality education to achieve these SD goals. (Nazar, Chaudhry, Ali, & Faheem, 2018). These ideas have been expressed by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) slightly differently, by replacing *development* with *patterns of living* such that the Brundtland definition becomes “patterns of living that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” (2014, para 2).

Education at all levels addressing those patterns of living is termed as education for sustainable development (ESD), and while it has no one specific definition, a well-considered one would be expressed similarly to this definition from UNESCO Bangkok, which defines ESD as: a learning process (or approach to teaching) based on the ideals and principles that underlie sustainability and is concerned with all levels and types of learning to provide quality education and foster sustainable human development – learning to know, learning to be, learning to live together, learning to do and learning to transform oneself and society. (UNESCO, Definition of ESD, n.d.)

Educational authorities have advocated the introduction of sustainable development (SD) issues into curricula, but it is nearly always within L1-instructed environments. The goals outlined in this definition, however—learning to live together, to do, to transform—are goals that can exist side by side with language learning, not divorced from it or only sporadically introduced. For many university EFL students, learning English is viewed as a way to broaden the scope of their engagement with the world, including expressing opinions about the policies that will guide our future. In order to express those ideas on a global stage, an improved ability to do so in one of the languages governing the conversation would be instrumental, and could have a profound effect on the ability to improve sustainability. The better we develop SD concepts, vocabulary, and ways of relating to other actors, the better equipped our non-native English speaking students will be to participate in global solutions.

2.2 Place-based Education

A number of studies have identified PBE, especially place-based writing, as a way for composition to consider the interactions between place, individuals, and their communities (Azano, 2011; Gruenewald & Smith (Eds.), 2008; McInerney, Smyth, and & Down, 2011; Pahl & Roswell, 2010; Sobel, 2014). Recognizing the value that self-reflective writing can bring to the EFL classroom (Maher, 2015), some teachers use a personal essay alone as a means to engage students with places of personal importance. Elliot Jacobs focuses on the natural environment in his class, constructing a writing prompt as: “Compose a personal essay that explores some aspect of the relationship between your identity and a place.” He found that this type of personal reflection on space acts to “position students to take action by bearing witness” (Jacobs, 2011, p. 50) and by doing so makes connections between place, personhood, literacy, and democracy. Although the prime component of the exercise was a turn inward as a personal essay, the result for the Jacobs was that the act of student writing about themselves and a place of importance for them in fact allowed them to “extend outward” and exert their voice in new modes of writing and in new spaces (p. 50). To Jacobs, this mode of place-based writing is personal in that it creates or reaffirms a bond between students’ personal stories and natural landscapes, and acts to link personal experience and the public realm. Carolyn Matalene argues that this type of writing “teaches students that they have the right and responsibility to add their own unique voices to the American conversation” (as cited in Jacobs, 2011, p. 52). As such, placed-based writing is itself focused on interconnectedness and democratic participation (Jacobs, 2011, p. 52).

So for natural environments, this personal essay serves as evidence that supports contemplation about ideas of sustainability. But what of an urban environment? Notably, Esposito’s (2012) place-based classroom writing experiences, which address the urban enclaves of her NYC students, found similar results. She notes that students begin to see that their urban spaces are locations from which democratic participation also arises. Unlike Jacobs, however, Esposito’s place-based writing is composed of two elements—a personal essay and a public application. The second component was to create a public service announcement (PSA) which addressed an issue relevant to the space around the students. The project outlined in this paper also includes a public application component, and is described in detail below.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

This study examined the use of PBE as an ESD tool in an English classroom in a language university in southern Taiwan. Most students participating in the interviews and the Global Competency Self-Assessment Survey were second- and third-year students participating in a three-year General English program required by the school, and were near the top level. Students were generally drawn from all areas of Taiwan and several other Asian countries, and could draw from their experiences in other cities and natural environments. Many previous studies have used PBE as a means to explore identity and sustainability issues in rural, often economically disadvantaged areas. Students are often led to understand their locales, oft-overlooked by more generalized educational practices, as having larger connections, and themselves to have connections to their locales. In this study, the locales of interest were public spaces in an urban environment and on a university campus.

3.2 Instruments

In order to evaluate the development of ESD in this EFL classroom, a unique assessment was developed. The OECD, in its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) initiative, developed the Global Competency Self-Assessment Survey (OECD, 2018). Although there are good reasons to use the questionnaire, there are some reasons why it is inappropriate for use in the EFL classroom. First, it was developed as a measurement connected to a teaching segment which would be redundant with any classroom exercises. For use as an assessment, then, it was necessary to separate the student survey from the teaching segment. Second, some of the items dealt with issues that would already be addressed by university EFL students, especially those students such as these who were studying at a dedicated language university. For example, assessing student attitude about being open to communicating with speakers from other countries or attitudes about a broad worldview seemed unnecessary for students at a language university whose likely career track would lead to translation or international business. A third drawback of the assessment was its length, which was deemed too long to gain reasonable feedback from students. Accordingly, the survey was shortened in length and omitted extraneous questions about language. Finally, the survey was translated to Chinese before being presented in a bilingual version to students.

Qualitative results were collected via an open-ended question at the end of the assessment, as well as from open-ended student interviews conducted after the completion of the project.

3.3 Procedures

During the first half of the semester, students followed a more traditional university EFL



course, which was composed of reading, writing, listening, and speaking exercises drawn from a textbook. Significant time was spent in group discussion of the concepts from the textbook. The first half of the course ended with a midterm exam. After the midterm, the PBE project began, and students formed groups of four for the 8-week place-based project. During weeks 1-2, the concept and functions of public space was introduced through relevant texts. Groups then discussed and chose a space to work with. One cohort was asked to find a public space in the surrounding city (pop. 3.5 million), while another cohort was asked to consider a public space on the university campus. Groups were asked to analyze the space through both observation as well as by surveying the users of the space. Groups then considered what they had learned and were asked to rethink and redesign the public space to better utilize its elements and improve its functionality. Weeks 3-5 had three main components. In the first, students were shown how to construct a questionnaire in English, and then worked in groups to make a bilingual survey to give to the users of the space. Students also viewed portions of William H. Whyte's 1980 film "The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces" (Whyte, Municipal Art Society of New York, Street Life Project, Direct Cinema Ltd., & Bainbridge Brass Quintet, 2005) as a reference on how to observe their public spaces. The second main component asked students to present a summary of one of a number of TED Talks (<https://www.ted.com/>) that had been identified by the instructor as ones which offered ideas of successful or unsuccessful use of public spaces. During weeks 6-7, groups created an environmental impact assessment (EIA) for the space, and were asked to consider the relevance and impact of SD issues on and arising from their chosen spaces. Groups used classtime to visit their spaces, and with the guidance of the instructor, complete the other deliverables of the project. Groups were encouraged to present their redesigned spaces using a free online computer-aided design (CAD) platform in English, such as Sketchup (www.sketchup.com). They also made an estimated budget for their planned changes. These deliverables were presented orally in a presentation, textually as a short paper, and visually through a poster which introduced all their work, as well as including QR codes linking to their designs. The posters were then exhibited as part of an exhibition open to all students during the final week of the project. During the exhibition, students groups could explain their ideas and gather feedback on their designs. By doing so, students were able to participate in a conversation on local public spaces and gain a sense of agency for their ability to influence the spaces they inhabit.

4. Results

Both quantitative and qualitative results suggest that this type of place-based element in the EFL classroom was successful in improving student awareness and engagement in SD issues

in regard to the spaces around them. Further, students saw the place-based exercise as an appropriate and empowering form of education which enhanced their ability to participate in SD issues by virtue of their improvement in the English language lexicon for SD.

4.1 Quantitative Results

Students were asked about the improvement in their English competency after the placed-based project. Results were collected based on a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, and are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Weighted Average on Student Perspective on English Competency (n=96)

English Competency Item	Traditional Classroom	Placed-based Project
This section helped me improve my English.	3.63	3.88
I felt a sense of achievement in English in this section.	3.27	4.00
I learned how to do useful things in English in this section.	3.50	4.08

As shown in Table 1, positive responses were found for these items measuring perceived English competency. Most notably, students derived a significant sense of achievement in the project compared to the traditional classroom, which suggests potential effects on student beliefs in their own agency for change in terms of SD issues. More detailed responses about student perspectives related to specific SD issues were collected through the modified version of the Global Competency Self-Assessment Survey from the OECD’s PISA initiative. Two major areas were measured by this assessment: knowledge and skills, and self-reported attitudes, each of which was further broken down into smaller goals. Table 2 lists the general areas covered by the modified survey.

Table 2: Constructs in Modified Global Competency Self-Assessment Survey

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	
1	Awareness of global issues
2	Self-efficacy regarding global issues
3	Adaptability
4	Perspective-taking
SELF-REPORTED ATTITUDES	
1	Openness towards people from other cultural backgrounds
2	Respect for people from other cultural backgrounds
3	Global mindedness
4	Engagement Regarding Global Issues



5	English Global Competency Activities at School
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Source: (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2018)

General awareness of several issues pertinent to SD was measured via questionnaire before and after the place-based project. Table 3 presents the completed responses (n=99) for those students who completed both pre- and post-testing. Results establish a baseline for the general understanding that students have about SD issues. Items either appearing consistently in the news, such as global climate change, or as recent hot news items (migration and malnutrition) attracted the most attention and were best known by students. A place-based element of English study had only a slight effect on awareness of SD issues.

Table 3: Mean Scores for Awareness of Global Issues

Awareness of global issues <i>(Scale:1: I have never heard of this, 2: I have heard about this but I would not be able to explain what it is really about, 3: I know something about this and could explain the general issue, and 4: I am familiar with this and I would be able to explain this well)</i>	Weighted Mean	
	PRE	POST
Climate change and global warming	3.06	3.08
Global health (e.g. epidemics)	2.39	2.45
Migration (movement of people)	2.61	2.65
International conflicts	2.58	2.63
Hunger or malnutrition in different parts of the world	2.91	2.97
Causes of poverty	2.64	2.66
Equality between men and women in different parts of the world	2.67	2.58

Student ability to participate and to use English in conversations regarding SD issues was measured, and is presented in Table 4. The original questionnaire was modified to include asking whether or not students could use their learning language in addition to their native language to discuss a wide range of global issues. Results showed a general improvement in student ability to participate in conversations about global issues, whether in their native language or in English. Not surprisingly, all mean responses were lower for English than for speaking in their native languages. Reported gains in English learning, however, did outpace gains in native speaking ability. A likely reason for this is that native language terminology is already fairly developed for most, but it also suggests that the place-based learning element perhaps drew attention to issues and their English lexicon despite not being a direct subject of the project.

Overall, the relatively low scores indicate that, although students may be aware of SD

issues, talking about them is far more difficult, regardless of language used. This confirms the need to better equip students for participation in conversations regarding SD issues, both in English and in their native languages.

Table 4: Student-Reported Sustainable Development Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy regarding global issues <i>(Scale: 1: I couldn't do this, 2: I would struggle to do this on my own, 3: I could do this with a bit of effort, 4: I could do this easily)</i>	Weighted Mean	
	PRE	POST
Explain how carbon-dioxide emissions affect global climate change <i>...using English</i>	2.72 2.42	2.77 2.51
Explain a connection between prices of goods and working conditions in the countries of production (for example, textiles, coffee, or cocoa) <i>...using English</i>	2.54 2.18	2.56 2.22
Discuss the different reasons why people become refugees <i>...using English</i>	2.66 2.42	2.74 2.51
Explain why some countries suffer more from global climate change than others <i>...using English</i>	2.70 2.33	2.81 2.37
Explain how economic crises in single countries affect the global economy <i>...using English</i>	2.33 2.06	2.36 2.15
Discuss the consequences of economic development <i>...using English</i>	2.36 2.14	2.49 2.29

The strongest gains from the place-based learning project came in term of the skills of adaptability and perspective-taking. Given the nature of the project, students were consistently taking into account the function of their public spaces and how to design a more fulfilling place for citizens or students, and it is likely that they would need to make many changes in the project after considering the viewpoints of others. This is confirmed in the reporting for the issues of adaptability and perspective-taking, as shown in Table 5. Items were measured on a five point Likert scale, and a comparison of pre- and post-testing shows positive trends for each in terms of developing the skills that have been identified in the PISA assessment as being crucial to successfully addressing the sustainability issues that the future may bring.



Table 5: Reported Scores for Adaptability and Perspective-taking

	Strongly disagree (1)	2	3	4	Strongly Agree (5)	Weighted Mean	
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?							
Studying English in this class has helped me to...							
Adaptability							
...change my behaviour to meet the needs of new situations.	0.00%	0.00%	18.18%	53.54%	28.28%	4.10	PRE
	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	45.45%	43.43%	4.32	POST
...adapt more easily to a new culture.	0.00%	0.00%	4.04%	74.75%	21.21%	4.17	PRE
	0.00%	0.00%	4.04%	67.68%	28.28%	4.24	POST
...be capable of overcoming my difficulties in interacting with people from other cultures.	0.00%	0.00%	6.06%	50.51%	45.45%	4.47	PRE
	0.00%	0.00%	3.03%	47.47%	51.52%	4.57	POST
Perspective-taking							
...look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.	0.00%	3.03%	12.12%	42.42%	36.36%	3.94	PRE
	0.00%	0.00%	12.12%	44.44%	37.37%	4.01	POST
...try to look at both sides of a situation.	0.00%	3.03%	8.08%	64.65%	24.24%	4.10	PRE
	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	59.60%	29.29%	4.18	POST
...try to imagine how I would feel if I were in someone else's place before criticizing them.	0.00%	3.03%	16.16%	46.46%	34.34%	4.12	PRE
	0.00%	0.00%	12.12%	50.51%	37.37%	4.25	POST

Student responses were also collected for attitudes affecting SD issues. The most noteworthy differences between measurements taken before and after the place-based project came in the enhancement of student global-mindedness, shown in Table 6. Notable changes occurred in student responses to measurements asking about global citizenship, responsibility for others, and a belief in themselves as agents of change.

Table 6: Collected Responses for Global-mindedness

	Strongly disagree (1)	2	3	4	Strongly Agree (5)	Weighted Mean	
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?							
Global-mindedness							
I think of myself as a citizen of the world.	0.00%	0.00%	21.21%	63.64%	12.12%	3.79	PRE
	0.00%	0.00%	8.08%	58.59%	30.30%	4.10	POST
When I see the poor conditions that some people in the world live under, I feel a responsibility to do something about it.	0.00%	3.03%	30.30%	51.52%	9.09%	3.48	PRE
	0.00%	2.02%	20.20%	65.66%	12.12%	3.88	POST
I think my behaviour can impact people in other countries.	0.00%	12.12%	30.30%	36.36%	15.15%	3.39	PRE
	0.00%	6.06%	23.23%	42.42%	25.25%	3.78	POST
I can do something about the problems of the world.	0.00%	9.09%	12.12%	66.67%	15.15%	3.97	PRE
	0.00%	6.06%	7.07%	50.51%	35.35%	4.15	POST
Looking after the global environment is important to me.	0.00%	0.00%	6.06%	51.52%	30.30%	3.76	PRE
	0.00%	0.00%	7.07%	53.54%	32.32%	3.97	POST

4.2 Qualitative Results

To further assess student learning, post-activity oral interviews were conducted concomitant with the assignment completion, and written feedback was collected after the assignment was completed in an open-ended comments question as part of the survey. Student responses could be clustered around several concepts. Responses have not been edited.

- **Positive attitudes toward group work in general.** A number of comments addressed how the project engaged students in the EFL classroom in general:

“I was very nervous about how much work we had, but the group works together well and we got it done. I learned to trust on my group members.”

- **Positive attitudes toward SD learning and/or place-based learning.** Most student comments toward these ideas were positive and conflated the ESD and PBE elements:

“I never thought I could change a place, but now I know that it is possible.”

“I love this! It was hard but it teach me how I can change the city to make it better.”

“The project changes how I see public places now.”

- **Some positive attitudes mentioned only the ESD element:**

“I think it was great and now I know a lot more about sustain developing.”

“I know about saving energy before, but I don’t totally understand what SD was. After this project, I know more.”

“I loved it much better than the textbook stories.”

- **The challenging but rewarding nature of the assignment.** Some resistance was at first apparent, as most students had neither written about a specific space, nor had experience using the digital tools, but most students seemed to take on the idea that actual change requires actual work:

“At first I thought I'm here to learn languages and I'm not good at computer but then teacher gave me encouragement to finish. I am proud of our work on the project.”

“It took me so many hours to get my part right (CAD) but now I know how to do it and I'm really proud of my work”.

“I’m excited that I learned some real world tools.”

- **SD engagement.** A few comments were reflective regarding the positive and negative aspects of the process of engaging in SD issues in a public sphere.

“I feel frustrated that we made a really good design for our space, but important people didn't see our work.”

“The project help me see how people with good ideas can cooperate to change.”

“Change is hard but worth it.”

“Our city has so many places to change. I don’t know if anyone will listen to our ideas.”

5. Discussion

The role of education in preparing students for a new set of global challenges through ESD has been somewhat widely constructed, and while it is pervasive throughout universities,

what it means may vary broadly depending on whether one is studying engineering, business, environmental science, hospitality or law. What is common to all of these disciplines, however, is that SD education has been promoted as a necessary study, and is itself a strategy to accomplish SD.

Using a place-based educational project as a means to engage students in SD issues in the EFL classroom was successful in a few key areas. In terms of developing the skills deemed necessary to our future ability to address issues of sustainability, the 8-week project showed that students engaged over a longer period could improve in their general awareness of SD issues. Some improvement was noted in their ability to use the English lexicon of SD, as well. Much of the enhancement of ESD abilities came in the form of attitudes about one's role and efficacy for change as well as the skills needed to accomplish that change. After the project, students were more likely to acknowledge that they were valuable agents of change in creating sustainable places locally, and perhaps globally as well. Some student comments rightfully acknowledged the difficulty in motivating certain actors and public policy makers. There also may be a slight disconnect between how students view their ability to participate in local solutions versus global solutions. Students responses to two similarly worded questions on the survey indicated that they were much more likely to believe that their "behaviour can impact people in other countries" than that they could "do something about the problems of the world." This attitude, however, is not significant to whether the project could inspire interest in SD issues, as the project itself begins from the local and extends to the global.

In what may be the most significant result of projects like this, students also reported that their abilities to participate in such conversations improved through the enhancement of such skills as adaptability and perspective-taking. While it is unclear whether or not *any* group project might also accomplish this, coupling these skills with increased awareness of SD issues, a globally-facing mentality, and improvement in the English lexicon of SD is not insignificant.

Whether at home, school, or in a public space, our lives are shaped by the places that we inhabit and which moves around us. As Esposito has noted,

Place influences our interactions by shaping the genres, texts, and languages we use as writers and readers. Therefore, writing that's tied to place and community encourages students to seriously consider the effects of these interactions, their intended audiences, and underlying purposes. It also helps them think independently about their involvement in these communities. (p. 70)

While most place-based writing is focused on more personal accounts, this place-based project also engages students in thinking about their involvement in their communities. So while

many EFL texts may involve SD issues in terms of reading and collecting knowledge, it is the action of writing that produces a concrete expression, an insertion of a student's belief into a discursive moment in society. And that need not be limited to a native-language classroom.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

Student participation in a place-based project in the EFL classroom was evaluated for its effects in engaging students in issues of sustainable development. A survey indicated that the project was useful in enhancing student awareness of global SD issues as well as the English lexicon governing much of the dialogue about those issues. Improvements in skills such as adaptability and perspective-taking were also noted, as well as attitudinal changes in global-mindedness. Overall, such a place-based project was shown to develop significant student interest in SD issues at a local level, and as such may be more valuable for ESD than EFL textbooks which cover global issues without significant local context.

6.2 Limitations

The results presented here in this preliminary study are positive, but suggest that they could be further confirmed with validity testing of the modified version of the Global Competency Self-Assessment Survey, as well as an expanded group of participants, as these students were at the upper levels of the English program, and undoubtedly were more capable of more challenging SD vocabulary.

6.3 Scope of Future Work

In addition, future research should incorporate an expanded group of participants at lower English levels at the university level, as well as at even lower levels, where work suggests positive effects even for younger children (Roohi, 2018). The author is currently working with elementary school students in English education in Taiwan to gauge the effects of EFL education that centers on ESD.

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