



## President's Letter

Dear Colleagues,

As my term as President comes to a close, I want to express my gratitude to you, the members of NYS TESOL, and to everyone Executive Board as well as the endless number of people who have volunteered, in some capacity, to make this organization viable. I am honored to have had the opportunity to serve you and the organization.

Please join me in congratulating Ching Ching Lin, Vice President for Annual Conference, and her team for putting together NYS TESOL's annual conference, entitled: ***Empathy in Action: Social Pedagogy and Public Advocacy for English Language Learners***. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to learn effective pedagogical practices from nationally and internationally renowned professionals who have dedicated themselves to research on curriculum and instruction for multilingual language learners.

I would like to also congratulate and extend my appreciation to Sarah Elia, Ashley Fifer, Ching Ching Lin, and Carrie McDermott whose terms are also at an end. Like all the people who volunteer, these ladies exemplified their love for teaching and learning and their commitment to this organization. They devote their time while holding full time jobs and raising families. NYS TESOL cannot exist without the support of our dedicated volunteers.

In closing, I wish Ravneet Parmar much success as she begins her presidency. I am very confident that she is more than qualified to continue in our collective efforts to meet the mission and vision of NYS TESOL. I look forward to working with her and the rest of the Board in 2017–2018.

Sincerely,

*Anne Nguyễn Henry*

President

2016–2017



*Promising Practices* – This is an ongoing column featuring advice for effective teaching. Please send article submissions to the column editor, Ann C. Wintergerst at [promisingpractices@idiom.nystesol.org](mailto:promisingpractices@idiom.nystesol.org)

## **Developing Writing Skills with Elementary and Secondary ELLs**

By Jo Ann Miles and Debra Calluzzo

For the majority of English language learners (ELLs), writing is often the most difficult English language subsystem to develop. Teachers cannot assume that ELLs have had the exposure necessary to inspire writing, and literacy stimuli may be absent in the home environment. Some ELLs have difficulty putting pencil to paper as they often lack schema and cultural experiences needed to develop personal narratives and essays. Additionally, ELLs are at a disadvantage when writing because they work in isolation and lack the support received during a verbal encounter. Children, in particular, have not had sufficient time to develop their academic writing proficiencies commensurate with their oral language proficiencies. Cummins (1984) has documented this disparity in his linguistic framework. A task such as writing that requires explanation qualifies as decontextualized and cognitively demanding communication. Furthermore, New York State assessments have raised the bar, requiring children to write lengthy compositions, and ELLs often lack the stamina to complete this requirement.

### **Explicit Instruction**

It takes patience, discipline and repetitive practice to begin writing and even more to produce a finished piece. ELLs require a highly structured system of explicit writing instruction. Multiple exposures to a simplified text that uses specific language and conventional sentence structures are vital to written expression. A variety of graphic organizers and templates need to be employed *several times*. Repeated contacts with content specific words enable word learning and ownership. Kim (2015) emphasizes that ELLs need more instruction, time and opportunity for practice. The independent stage of writing is deliberately delayed until they have gone through this repetitious scaffolded process.

### **A Writing Formula**

ELLs benefit from a precise, integrated writing formula. This model can be adjusted according to grade and language proficiency levels. Children as early as first grade and at the transitioning level can write successfully using this model. All instruction and each subsequent activity have a specific purpose and guides future writing. The following model demonstrates this practice:



- Teacher reads simplified non-fiction content area text in story format
- Students retell story using a teacher-led audio-lingual drill
- Story language is presented in poetry form (Figure 1)
- Students revisit the initial story (broken into short paragraphs with subheadings), reading aloud both individually and chorally
- Comprehension questions and space for student illustration follow each paragraph
- Writing templates are presented for title, opening sentence, body (5 to 6 scripted paragraphs) and closing sentence to compose a first draft (Figure 2)
- Completed work is edited during a teacher-student writer's conference
- Students select a favorite part of their story to illustrate, accompanying the completed work. (Figure 3)
- Edited version is rewritten to produce a final piece that is then read to the class and displayed on *Our Writing Wall*.

### Scaffolded Instruction

This formula allows vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure to be presented in a variety of formats: teacher read, audio-lingual drill retelling, reading aloud individually and chorally, and silent reading. Mediums vary as well: entire story, poem, short paragraphs and with illustration. Fiction and non-fiction elements are blended together to allow the students to craft a more personal written expression. In the first paragraph the student might write: *The first day of spring is March 20 or 21. It can still be cold and windy.* In a later paragraph the student might write: *In late spring, you can rest in a hammock with a book on your lap.*

When the teacher retells a story, language features (such as syntax, verb construction and complete sentences) are modeled correctly. Punctuation is highlighted through oral bolding by using pregnant pauses and a kinesthetic signal to mark the end of sentences. Simultaneously employing an audio-lingual drill enables the student to transfer oral language into written expression (“say” it, “write” it).

A story theme can be augmented by presenting it in poetry form. Converting story language into poetry authenticates the experience and enables the students to write creatively. Poetry that encourages using senses prompts students to write descriptively in order to avoid stilted language (Figure 4). Paraphrasing excerpts from poetry and incorporating the language into a complete sentence is an effective writing strategy (Chiusaroli & Ober, 2016).

Two techniques that facilitate reading comprehension and inform writing are: 1) introducing paragraphs with subheadings to signal the main idea and organize future writing. Instruction in the function of subheadings aligns with the current New York State English Language Arts



assessments, and 2) asking a few comprehension questions after each paragraph permits the children to respond immediately, and provides immediate assessment for the teacher. Questions are carefully worded to generate a response in complete sentences with the correct syntax that can be reproduced in their writing.

Illustrations function as a form of writing as details drawn in illustration translate into details in their written work and enhance deeper understanding of new vocabulary. Two opportunities are afforded for illustration. Including spaces between paragraphs for illustration provides an interlude from the rigors of reading. Drawing their favorite part of the story serves as motivation to complete the final piece. Not only do the students enjoy this, but drawing provides seeds for creativity in their future writing.

Writing templates help to organize thoughts in paragraph form and with clarity. Scripted templates jog a student's memory for language features: vocabulary, grammar concepts, syntax and sentence structure, as well as the story subthemes. Written prompts guide the writing process (Graham & Harris, 2016).

Students self-monitor their writing as they read aloud during the conference. Reading aloud permits them to hear their errors and encourages them to "write like they speak" as they have been exposed to the features of language in several ways. Students are teachers when they self-correct their work as suggested by the New York State Pre-K-12 Common Core Learning Standards.

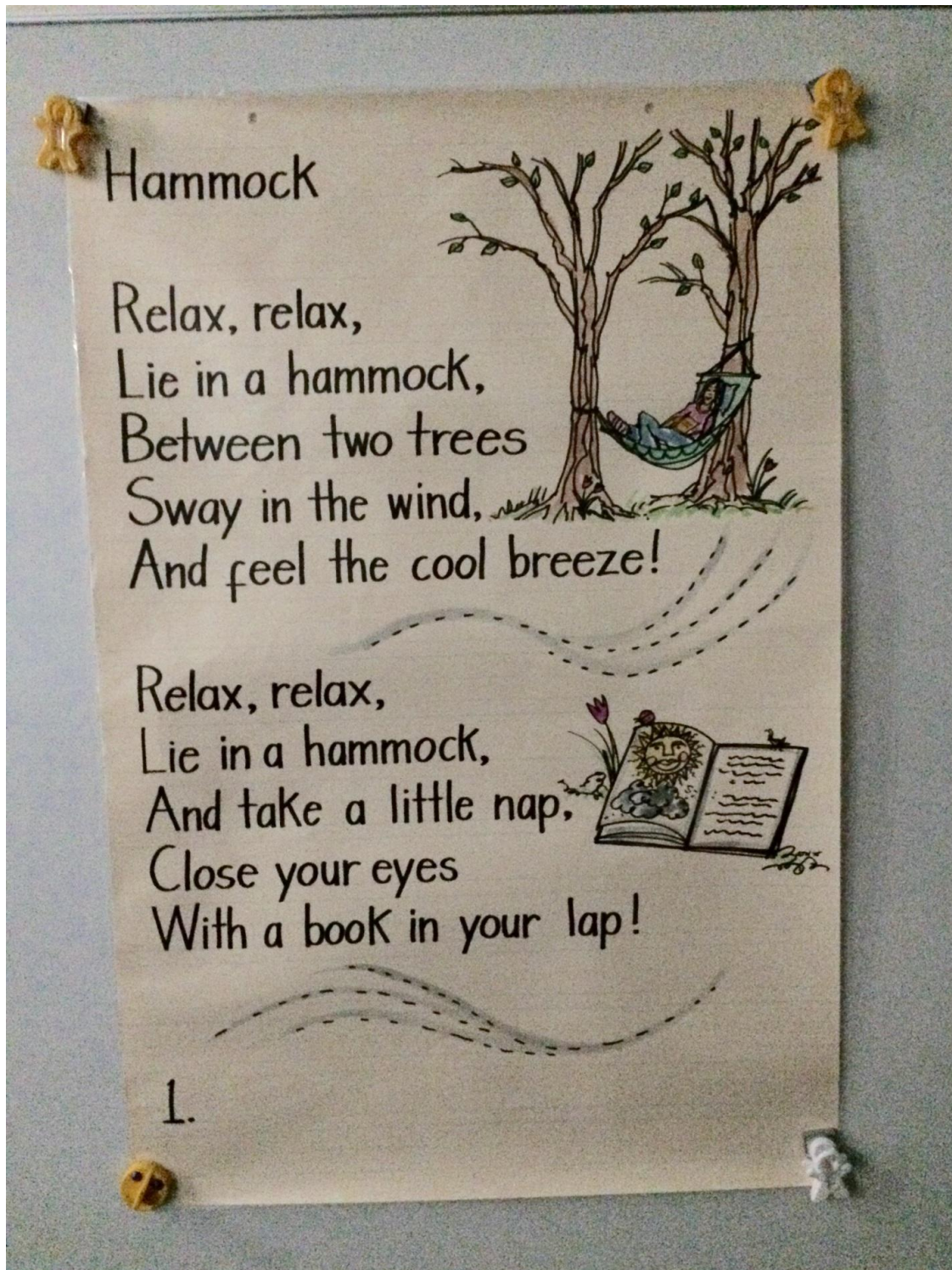
## Conclusion

Explicit instruction providing a saturation of vocabulary, language features and schematic experiences assists ELLs in becoming better writers. A scaffolded formula provides a comprehensive approach to facilitate writing and guides future composition. ELLs' writing can often be stilted and merely a regurgitation of facts. Embedding facts and language in multiple genres inspires creative writing. This instructional model addresses the disadvantages that ELLs face in developing language for writing in isolation because it provides the necessary feedback that is present in oral exchanges. Each piece of writing is a combination of facts and experiences that are seamlessly blended, producing an original work. Direct scaffolded instruction can enable ELLs to navigate the obstacles they face and embrace the components of good writing.





Figure 1





## Figure 2

Title\_\_\_\_\_

Opening Sentence\_\_\_\_\_

1. Write about when spring starts and what it is like.\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Write about spring rain.\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Write about animals and insects in spring.\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Figure 3

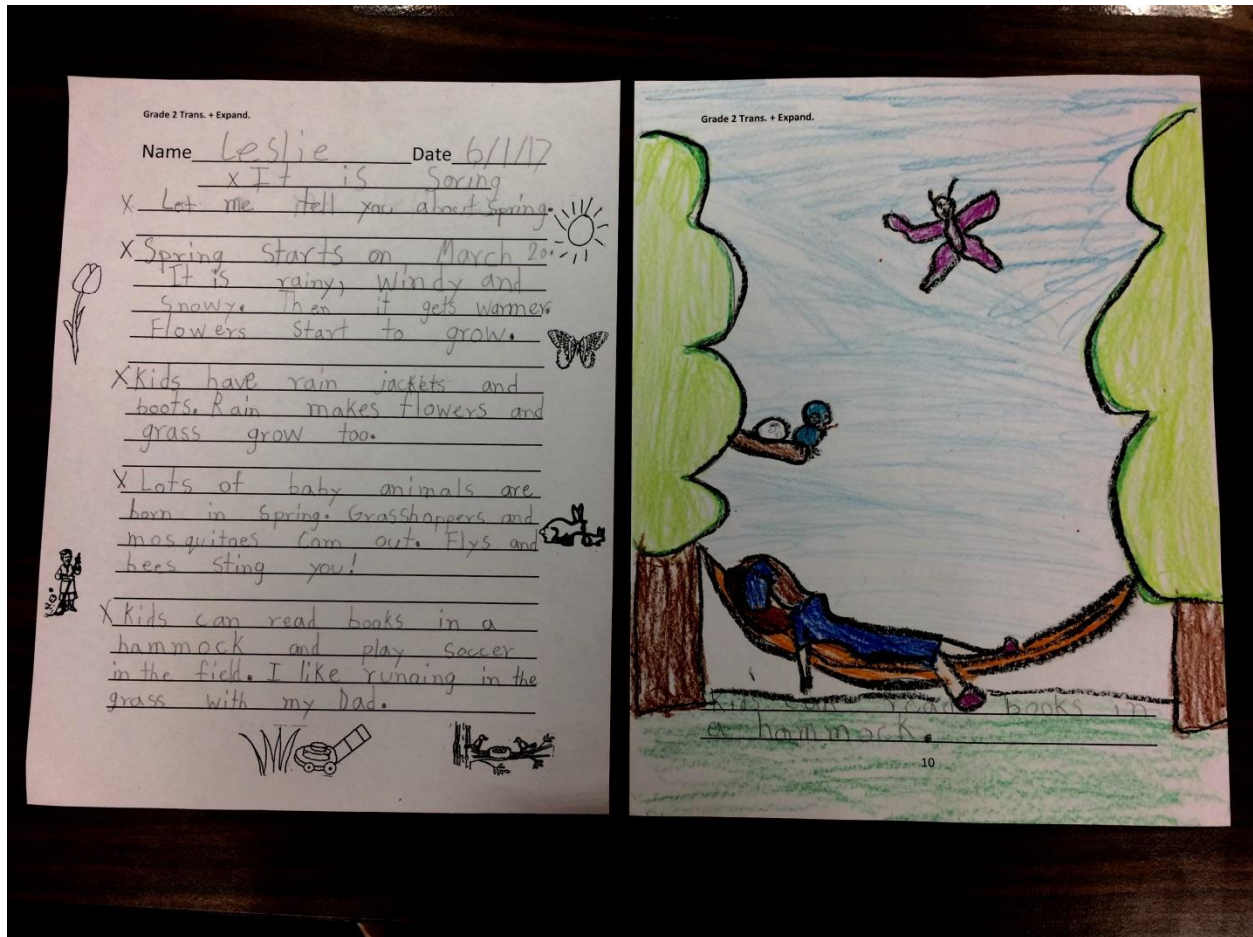
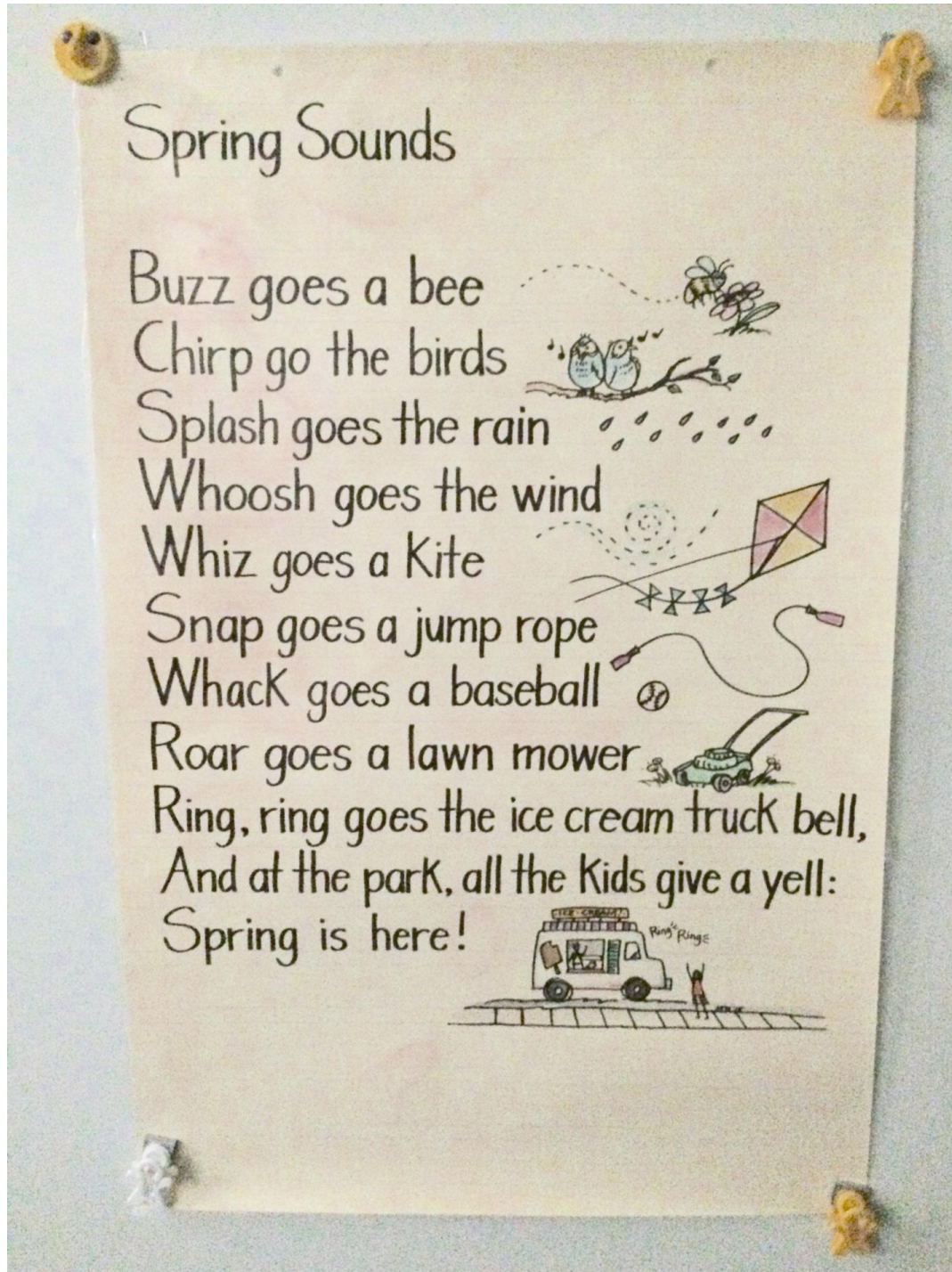






Figure 4







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## Thinking About Taking the Leap? What to Consider Before Teaching Abroad

By Maria Savva PhD

While there are certainly no demand shortages in sight for teachers of English within US borders, the spread of English as a lingua franca has seen the demand for teachers of English grow exponentially on a *global* scale (Brummit & Keeling, 2013). This has been particularly true in rapidly growing economies, like those in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Hong Kong where the demand for teachers of English continues to outstrip supply (ISC, 2012). Such conditions have created a market whereby teachers of English have a wide range of employment opportunities to choose from, spanning multiple continents.

International schools are overseas English-medium schools (K-12) that often have unusually high proportions of students who are non-native speakers of English due to recent increases in local population enrollments. While employment packages for such schools vary in value, most contracts are usually offered in 2 year increments and cover housing costs, return tickets back home during the summer months and, in many cases, a tuition-free education for any dependent children. Fast growing economies that are in short supply of teachers usually offer the most lucrative packages. While these packages offer great incentive, teachers are encouraged to consider several other factors to ensure the best fit.

### Different Country=Different Rules

The first thing that teachers need to remember is that when living and working in a different country their behavior will be governed by a different set of laws. This may seem obvious but teachers are often surprised by just how different laws can be from country to country. This probably isn't so much of an issue in Westernized countries, like those in Europe, but it can become a point of contention for those taking on teaching assignments in some of the more conservative Middle-Eastern regions of the world. Saudi Arabia, for example, holds women to strict dress codes and restrictions. Up until recently women were not allowed to drive. In a large swath of Middle-Eastern countries alcohol and tobacco are illegal and, in some regions, homosexuality remains punishable by death. If you are someone who takes issue with this, then choosing to teach English in such locations is probably not the best choice no matter how lucrative the package.

Safety is another important consideration. Be sure to check the US State Department website for travel alerts to ensure the location you have in mind is considered safe for Americans <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings.html>. Beyond formal advisories, teachers should also be wary of travelling to areas of the world that might hold significant anti-American sentiment. Research has shown that foreign teachers are often viewed by locals as



‘representatives’ of their home country regardless of whether or not the teachers are politically inclined themselves (Savva, 2016). As a result, teachers working in countries where US relations are strained may find that those frustrations are transferred to them directly.

## **Institutional Transparency**

Once countries are filtered for safety and fit, it is time to identify school(s) of interest. In most instances, international schools tend to fall in one of two categories: (1) Private not-for-profit or (2) private for-profit. Not-for-profit schools typically offer greater transparency because they are run by school boards that frequently include parents of students. This, of course, does not mean that teachers cannot have a positive experience in a for-profit school, but because this latter type of school is ultimately run by business-oriented owners and/or their families, the coupling of the provision of education with the desire for profit can be, arguably, a conflicting one. That being said, there are some very large and well-known conglomerates that have expansive networks of private for-profit schools worldwide such as GEMS Education (<http://www.gemseducation.com/>) and Nord Anglia Education (<http://www.nordangliaeducation.com/schools>).

Reputable agencies that can assist teachers in finding the right match include the Council of International Schools ( <http://www.cois.org/>) and Search Associates ([www.searchassociates.com](http://www.searchassociates.com)). The International Schools Review (<https://www.internationalschoolsreview.com/>) is also a helpful tool for job searches because it offers world-wide coverage of international schools through anonymous reviews posted by teachers who have actually worked in them. While it is not unusual to come across posts from disgruntled employees, the site is beneficial because it offers an unfiltered platform whereby teachers can share recurring issues of concern.

## **Reasons for Choosing to Teach Abroad**

There are many reasons why people choose to teach abroad. Most have a desire to see the world through something other than a tourist lens and, to this end, teaching abroad is ideal. Having worked in an overseas international school myself for seven years, I have seen my share of teachers come and go. I have seen single teachers arrive and quickly fall in love, some of them continuing their adventure to another country or choosing to return back home. I have seen newly married couples grow their families overseas, or others who choose to bring their teenage children along for a global experience and a private education that they could never afford back home. Still others have chosen to take advantage of teaching in the more conservative nations of the Middle-East where they often enjoy a relatively high, tax-free salary while saving to buy property back home. Indeed, while for some it is a short-lived experience, for others it can become a life-time of travelling the globe. Reasons and durations are invariably tied to the personal and family circumstances of each teacher. Whether a short or long-term experience, few who have had it question the imprint it has left on their life’s trajectory.





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## **Building Classroom Community through Collaboration**

By Jeanne M. Hughes, Ed.D.

I walked into my first composition class for International students and immediately noticed the separations. The classroom chairs had been set up in a circle, but now the circle was broken. Students were separated by culture and gender. There was one group from a common culture, but they separated themselves into two smaller groups. My first thought was—if we are going to be working and learning together, where do we start?

When planning activities in an ELL classroom, it is important to respect students' cultures and personal boundaries. While students value community membership (Ching, 2011), the building of the community has to create a comfortable environment for students (Jensen, 2005). The teacher can facilitate community building through interactions with students and activities in the classroom that begin on the first day of class.

My *Introduction to Writing for International Students* class meets four times a week. On the first day, students introduce themselves, and we learn names and pronunciations. Some students have given themselves American names, and we start with their preferred names. I like to give students the chance to share what they want to share. This is started through informal conversations. We then continue sharing through our first assignment: introduction presentations. These projects consist of a PowerPoint presentation and a written essay. The PowerPoint presentations include pictures of foods, countries, and families that can start conversations in the class. Students can also share words and characters from their native languages and explain meanings. I encourage them to discuss their native languages because their multilingualism affects how they express themselves. Seeing words shared on screen and discussing language helps students to see their shared experience of thinking in more than one language.

The second part of the introduction assignment is essay writing. When the students move from their visual presentations to essay writing, they have the common challenge of finding the right words to express what they are thinking in their own language. However, there is also the richness of voice that comes from “codemeshing” (Canagarajah, 2013), the mixing of languages. Students use their multiple languages to create unique ways of expressing themselves. When students share their writing, they can explain how they made their writing choices, which gets us all thinking about language in our composition classroom. The introduction projects allow students to learn about each other and see commonalities that can be foundational for building our learning community.



However, learning communities do not happen automatically. Guidelines for creating a respectful learning community need to be established for students to know the expectations for communication in the classroom. Students are given a reading ahead of time about this topic. They then write a response in their journal before they come to class for a discussion. At this point, we explicitly discuss how to be positive, active participants in class discussion. We talk about respect for others' ideas, but our conversation also introduces the idea that we are a community of learners, and part of our responsibility is to support the other learners in the class. Open, honest discussion and clear guidelines help to build the foundation for our classroom community. This is important because students who are unfamiliar with working in this kind of community need chances to communicate in an accepting, respectful setting and lessen their discomfort about working in groups.

Although the presentations where students show their pictures and share their stories begin dialogues, the communication will not continue unless opportunities are given. Not all students are used to working with others, and they are often concerned about their grades. Because of this, I have students work together often on low stakes assignments. That removes one barrier from group work because they are not being graded on the work of others, which can cause added stress. Instead, they can just focus on experiencing different ways of looking at their learning and making learning connections with others in the class.

Once the foundation is established, we can then begin to work together in various ways:

- Because our class includes reading and analyzing multiple essays, I will begin discussions by dividing tasks. I may ask one group to summarize the essay, another group to discuss the organization, and a third group to discuss the rhetorical appeals.
- When discussing grammar, I assign groups to teach different rules. The presentations do not have to be perfect. In fact, if mistakes are made, the presenters learn to rely on the audience for help to clarify specific points.
- Writing can be shared in small or large groups; students are expected to identify what went well in the writing and also offer suggestions for improvement.
- Informal discussions of critical issues that appear in our reading can begin as students enter class. They can start talking about their perspectives before our formal class begins. When that happens, I listen as they talk out their ideas.

Groups can be chosen by students at first when they are getting comfortable in the class. After that, we discuss how we can learn something different from each person in class, so we will vary our groups. Groups can be formed by picking a number, using the roster order, or arranging by order of arrival to class. There is no specific way, but if the same students always work together, I create ways to form new partnerships. This happens in class weekly, so students get used to





having conversations about their learning with different members of the class. Groups and partnerships that form organically from our classroom community help students develop friendships and a support system for learning.

When students with different experiences and from different cultures all arrive in one classroom, the focus should not just be on the subject I teach. Classroom communities teach students about their own learning. They get to discuss ideas, talk out problems, make assertions, and get feedback from other English language learners who are well-equipped to understand some of the questions and challenges that these students face in American undergraduate classrooms.

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