Scaffolding Field Research in the Composition Classroom

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Class Context:
ESL 100 Composition I for Second Language Writers

- What is the English Language Institute (ELI)?
- Who takes ELI classes?
- What is ESL 100?
Assignment: Field Research Portfolio

- Goal: Help students not only develop academic writing skills, but also the ability to think critically and intellectually engage with cultural and social issues.
- Product: An organized portfolio including a ten page research report, a two page reflection, reflective worksheets, and original field research data.
- By conducting and writing up original research, students will:
  - Engage with a variety of academic texts.
  - Work through the process of writing and research.
  - Read, summarize/paraphrase, and properly cite relevant work from others to offer background and theory to support their papers.
  - Analyze their own data to develop grounded claims, backed up by the research and ideas of other scholars.
Unit Plan (~8 weeks)

- **Section 1: Introduction to Field Research (~1 week)**
  - Exploring the scope of research
  - Developing research contexts/topics

- **Section 2: Field Research Methods (~1-2 weeks)**
  - Ethnographic observations and field notes
  - Interviews
  - Surveys

- **Section 3: Writing the report (~2-3 weeks)**
  - Reading and summarizing sources to give context to the study
  - Synthesizing and analyzing data
  - Putting it all together

- **Section 4: Presenting on the results (~1 week)**
Section 1: Introducing Field Research

- Presenting research as a creative process that arises out of interests about the world; it does not have to begin with an “academic” topic
- Encourages students to draw on their own interests and observations to formulate relevant research questions
- Students first identify a context

![Recipe for success!](Figure 1: Ethnographic Process)
Section 1: Introducing Field Research

- Student responses:

“One thing I learned was that the resources or data is not only from academic things…So from daily conversation or daily life, this was the most surprising for me and very new knowledge cause I thought the data for the research must be from very academic resources like books or papers.”

“I think [ethnographic] research is looking at something that is not too special, like culture is nothing special to people in that culture, but just looking at it from a different perspective, even as an insider, to observe it as a researcher is like a different perspective. And creating something from that is research.”
### Field Research: Research Plan

Name: 
Research Title: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Statements</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descriptions:</strong> What people do/have done, how people talk, how people live, the history of place, etc.</td>
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<td>1. I want to know...</td>
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<td>2. I want to know...</td>
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<td>3. I want to know...</td>
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<td><strong>Perspectives:</strong> What people think, what people say about other people, how people express themselves, etc.</td>
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<td>1. I want to know...</td>
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I would like to explore...

How Japanese immigrants practice and spread their culture in Hawaii. Living in Hawaii, I’ve notice that Japanese immigrants do assimilate to American culture and the environment, but at the same time they try to keep their tradition and culture. People cook Japanese food, celebrate holidays such as Girls’ Day and New Year, and there are preschools and Saturday School that teach children Japanese language and culture. I’d like to learn more about specific ways in which immigrant parents pass on culture from their motherland to their children, as well as how children perceive those teachings.
Section 2: Field Research Methods

- Observations, Interviews, and Surveys
  - In-class opportunities to practice these skills (campus observations, practice interviews, practice surveys)
  - Relevant readings which discuss the methods, but also research projects which report on these methods
  - Organizing data and reflecting with the research sheet
Research Sheet: The Data

Date/Time/Location:  

Data collection method:  

Keyword(s):  

Summary of the data:  

Reflection or interpretation of the data:  

What did I learn? (that can help me understand my research focus or answer my research questions?)  

What questions do I want to explore next?  

How can I explore and answer those questions?
Research Sheet: The Data

Date/Time/Location: 3/1/17  Data collection method: Interview

Keyword(s): mistakes,

Summary of the data:

I asked the interviewee about how she feels after coming to Hawaii as an international student. At the beginning, she was not comfortable with the “American” way of teaching because it involves a lot of discussions, and English is not her first language, which leads to a difficulty for her to understand the lecture and join her classmates’ discussions.

Reflection or interpretation of the data:

I think most people from Asian countries have had a hard time with discussion in class. They were afraid of speaking because of different problems such as pronunciation, afraid of making mistakes.

What did I learn? (that can help me understand my research focus or answer my research questions?)

- Compare to the survey, I have two perspectives; everyone has their own method of learning, so there’s no a “better” learning system for everyone. It depends on yourself to know which educational system is better.

What questions do I want to explore next?

- What are some methods that they used to help themselves avoid making mistakes?

How can I explore and answer those questions?

- Get more opinions from different people
Section 3: Writing up the paper

- Working on the paper in parts; guided
- Finding, analyzing, and summarizing sources for inclusion in their own paper
  - Annotated bibliography assignment
- In-class data analysis and individual conferences
Section 4: Presentations

- Sharing results with an audience beyond the class
- Considering ways to connect their research to practical arguments
  - Encouraging students to share their work beyond the classroom
Additional Features of Scaffolding

- Research and writing as social practices
  - In-class brainstorming and analysis allows students to share ideas and work together, creating a researcher “community of practice”
  - Individual conferences and correspondence to discuss projects

- Project broken into multiple steps and drafts
  - Organizational worksheets that encourage students to constantly reflect on the process
Portfolio Assessment

- Alternative assessment which emphasizes the process of conducting and writing up research
Conclusion: Benefits of this approach

- Students engage in researching topics meaningful to them, developing unique projects from start to finish
- Students collaborate both with me and each other, demonstrating the social aspect of research and writing
- Students work through the entire process of research and writing, organizing and reflecting throughout
- Beyond reading and writing, students sharpen their overall communication skills through interviews and ethnographic participation, as well as engage with the local place
Questions?

- Feel free to contact me at ledmond@hawaii.edu if you have any other questions or would like any further information. I would be happy to share any of my materials!

Mahalo!