

Reading the Past for the Future: Exploring Undergraduate Students' Environmental Consciousness through a Place-Based Ecocritical Approach of Using Shakespeare's Plays

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Abstract

This study reports a one group intervention design using drama and a place-based ecocritical approach to promote university students' environmental consciousness and biocentric thought, and offers educators a step-by-step classroom practice which engages students in exploring changing conceptions of nature as exemplified in the early modern socio-ecological ideology reflected by Shakespeare's play texts. A series of drama activities focusing on the thematic topic of nature is arranged for the course entitled: "Approaching Shakespeare: On page and on stage". Fifty university students, enrolled in this general education course in the academic year of 2015, participated in this investigation. Three major class session designs are introduced: (1) textual interpretation of two crucial scenes excerpted from the plays *King Lear* and *The Tempest*; (2) drama game and role-play; and (3) fieldwork in the local community. Empirical evidence is collected from students' classroom discussion, group presentation using photo-images, and a final written report on their personal notions and reflections about the modern wilderness and landscape. Data collected from classroom observations and discourse analysis

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of students' perceptions revealed: (1) the community-based ecocritical approach is effective in fostering the critical thinking which empowers students to take action and responsibility regarding environmental issues; and (2) drama activity deepens students' observation of human intervention and evokes the perception of the lifeworld as relationships. This study concludes that a post positivist ecocritical pedagogy fosters a biocentric worldview and cultivates a culture of care for the environment.

Keywords: ecocriticism; environmental education; pedagogy; sustainability; Shakespeare.

Introduction

Cultivating a vision for change is the primary task of the contemporary educational revolution. As our planet suffers ongoing conflicts and eco-crises derived from a disintegrating environment dissected by socio-economic ideologies and political boundaries, central to this task is the transdisciplinary reconstitution of our fragmented knowledge from the cacophony of compartmentalized academic subjects and cultural identities. Postmodern pedagogy adopts the environmentalist standpoint, and emphasizes the competency of cross-disciplinary thinking in perceiving the lifeworld as relationships (LaChapelle, 1991; Littledyke, 2008).

This paper reports a one group intervention design using drama to enhance undergraduate students' understanding of human impact on nature in a broader context. The postpositivist approach of using drama activity has been noted to foster students' critical, in-depth understanding (Christie, Miller, Cooke, & White, 2013; Cotton & Winter, 2010). Research has emphasized this aspect of the postpositivist approach as a stimulus for engaging students in predicting the possible future impact of human actions (Cotton & Winter, 2010; Littledyke, 2008; Oulton, Dillon, & Grace, 2004); however, relatively little research has examined the potential of using drama as a retrospective to heighten awareness of the cultural and intellectual progress that endorses the anthropocentrism which has resulted in the environmental degeneration experienced in today's world. This study further proposes a method to unite dramatic strategy with ecocritical pedagogy which aims to encourage students to adopt a critical attitude when exploring culturally shaped notions of "nature". Innovative ecocritical thinking has been advocated in nature writing for decades, yet remains underdeveloped in pedagogical practice and empirical research (Garrard, 2010). Tracing the changing norm of human conceptions of nature is expected to facilitate an insightful understanding of the ideology and ethical values that affect human behavior.

This experimental study bridges students' exploration of the notion of nature in a cultural time-span from early modern conceptions to their own real-life environmental context. They initially engage in an ecocritical reading of Shakespeare's plays and explore the conceptions of nature and wilderness constructed in these early modern literary texts. Dramatic activities which help students to deepen their observations are then performed. At the end of the course students display their perceptions about nature through photo-images, and write their reflections on the modern day treatment of nature in their final presentation. In this study, the community-based ecocritical pedagogy is used to channel students to search for the wilderness/nature experienced in their daily surroundings. Students' learning progress is observed in response to the following two questions: (1) What are their interpretations of nature/wilderness as portrayed in the early modern literary works? (2) What is their personal experience of the modern wilderness?

Lifeworld as Relationships — An Exalted Mental Condition

Postpositivist learning integrates affective and cognitive domains, focuses on critical thinking, empathy, care, and the beauty of nature as a whole (Christie *et al.*, 2013; Ho, 2016; Littledyke, 2008). The postmodern approach of ecocriticism, which is dedicated to finding "an ecological way of seeing" (Lyon, 2001, xiv), explores the ways in which human lives are intertwined with the condition of the landscape to which they are bound. The idea of "seeing" is a powerful catalyst for "contact" with what has been ignored, covered up or malfunctioning under human manipulation. Becoming conscious evokes an "exalted mental condition" (Slovic, 1992, p.3) that consolidates one's sense of place and responsibility for the community (Wang, Chang, & Tsai, 2014). The capacity to "see" is vital to situating individuals in both local and global conflicts and to arouse care about them.

The representation of nature in literary texts reflects human values in

relation to the physical environment (Matthewman & Morgan, 2006). The ecocritical approach draws attention to human domination and raises questions concerning the instrumental orientation of the culture-nature relationship (Bennett & Royle, 2009). Becoming aware of the “ir-rationale” of human intervention cited in cultural productions facilitates critical thinking in promoting a new ideology (ecological, socio-cultural, economic) and new conceptions (expressions, literacy, lifestyle) for change (Juujarvi, 2006; Littledyke, 2008). Based on the pedagogical characteristic of ecocriticism, this study further explores students’ interpretations of the idea of nature as depicted in Shakespeare’s dramatic works.

Literature as the Agent of Change

Literature, by reflecting the ways of the lived world, unvaryingly engages a cross-disciplinary reading in integrating the rational and emotional spheres of experience which construct its value systems and human-nature relationships (Brody, 2005). Research has shown that literature is effective in moving one to empathic thinking (Green & Brock, 2000); it provides readers with vicarious experience and a personal bonding with the characters and events depicted in the works. Literature therefore helps one to detect problematic relationships and to become conscious in mapping out its suppressed causes.

The approach of using the literary genre of drama strongly engages with learners’ life experiences (Littledyke, 2008; McNaughton, 2004). The form of drama, combining storytelling and action, demands from readers intensive and continuous engagement in a variety of situations and dialogue with their own self-reflections. In this study, we use drama activity in two phases: first, in identifying the notion of nature affected by social ideology, and second, in reflecting on the consequence of human action and alternative paths to their desired vision for the human-nature relationship.

The complexity of the concept of nature is famously denoted by the

cultural studies critic Raymond Williams as the essential quality, guiding force, and condition of the physical world itself (1983, p. 219). The cultural conception of nature is paradoxically identified as life-nourishing while simultaneously fatally destructive (Williams, 1983, p. 212). The ambivalent power of nature is constantly observed in Shakespeare; a significant example being Friar Laurence, who speaks of nature's binary power: "The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb. / What is her burying grave that is her womb" (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.9-10).¹ The complexity and uncertainty of the notion of *Natura* is explored throughout Shakespeare's theatrical career in his masterpieces.

Shakespeare's dramatic texts were written during a crucial historical period, witnessing both the human expansion and colonialism which has led to drastic changes in the physical world. The plays also bear witness to the human reconstruction of nature; as observed by historian Keith Thomas on the subjugation of nature: "Human civilization was virtually synonymous with the conquest of nature" (1996, p.25). Nature has since been marginalized as a wilderness in contrast to culture, and as impeding the development of civilization. Shakespeare's theatrical creations, which display the irreducibly ideological strategies of his era for shaping the world, provide a rich social context for exploring the subordination of nature as a human attitude.

Attitude Change Method: Community-Based Ecocritical Approach

Attitude Data Collection — Students' Learning Portfolio

Participants. Participants of this study are university students (n=50) enrolled in the general education course "Approaching Shakespeare: On page and on stage" in the academic year of 2015.

Student portfolio. Students' learning progress is documented using 3

¹ References to Shakespeare's plays have been standardized to *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition* (2008).

methods: class observation, interview talk, and written text. The data include students' learning experience from the drama activities, their discussion of the socio-cultural context of the plays and issues relating to our present age, and photo images and reports concerning the human-nature interactions witnessed in the local community.

Filed trip report. The final field trip activity involves the following steps: (1) basic instructions are given to the students, such as: photographing scenes in their daily surroundings which represent their mental image of the wilderness. The photo images should witness to Lear's human madness and isolation, and the world he prophesizes as the destruction of humankind. (2) Students are given two weeks in which to take photos; a class for group presentations of their findings is arranged afterward. (3) In the presentations, students share their photos and observations, and write short passages of their overall reflections that conclude the entire series of activities.

Class Activity Design — Nature in Shakespeare

A class session on the topic of nature is arranged as part of the course, "Approaching Shakespeare: On page and on stage", followed by student presentations. The students engage in a series of activities, including reading the original play text material, performing the scene depicted, conducting fieldwork in the local community, delivering a group presentation of their findings, and writing up their reflections. The session takes three to four weeks to complete. Table 1 shows the 3 major components of the series of activities.

Table 1. Thematic units and drama activities designed for Nature in Shakespeare

Class activity	Topic
Playtext-reading (4 hours)	Lear in the Storm (<i>King Lear</i> , act 3 scene 2) Caliban's Dream (<i>The Tempest</i> , act 3 scene 2)
Drama game (1 hour)	Lear in the wilderness — Storm in the classroom
Final presentation (3 hours)	Lear in the wilderness — Junk Lear (photo image, writing reflection)

Session 1. Play text-reading: *King Lear* and *The Tempest*.

The first activity comprises input from reading two crucial scenes from Shakespeare: the storm scene in *King Lear* and Caliban's dream in *The Tempest*. The rationale of using these two specific plays is that Shakespeare intensively discusses the nature-human interconnection and dominant worldview of his time. *King Lear* sees human struggle contained by nature, while in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's final masterpiece, slavery and the human power to control natural elements in creating "climate change" are the major themes. Moreover, the powerful, emotionally-charged scenes depict two very different characters: Lear (a king in exile; a tragic hero) and Caliban (an enslaved native islander; a monstrous, marginal figure); their suffering and struggle provide a rich dramatic experience that students of varying disciplines have had rare opportunity to encounter before.

Text 1. Lear in the storm (*King Lear*, act 3 scene 2). The first session of play-reading explores the storm scene in *King Lear*, which considers the early modern perspective of nature. Divided into small groups, the class looks into the early modern conception of nature as revealed in the play. They first engage in a close reading of the scene depicting the drastic force of nature which leads to the catastrophes in the play. Below is the sample passage used for the class activity, excerpted from the crucial scene where the king is

stripped of his title and land. The significance of the scene is that it reveals, as the play develops, Lear in his madness and tirade, confronting the storm on the hearth:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
. . . And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
Crack nature's moulds, an germens spill at once,
That make ingrateful man! (*KL*, 3.2.1-9)

Lear's call for "crack[ing] nature's moulds" concerns both human destruction and nature's force. The line offers a good opportunity to engage students in talking about their personal definitions of nature. The passage evokes both strong physical and mental images warning of the inter-dependent relationship which exists between nature and humanity; the collapse of nature will also destabilize human sanity and ethics, and the order of a functional system.

Furthering students' investigation of Lear's situation in wild nature, Leopold's definition of wilderness (1949) is introduced for comparison of the changing paradigms of nature in early modern work and in contemporary thought. For instance, the line "wilderness is the raw material out of which man has hammered the artifact called civilization" (1989, p.188) is discussed to encourage the students to consider the meaning of wilderness and wasteland in relation to human impact.

Text 2. Caliban's dream (The Tempest, act 3 scene 2). The second part of the play-reading engages students in a passage depicting the sound of nature in *The Tempest*, which is considered the Bard's final masterpiece. This play offers a background study to explore the shift in the meaning of nature in

human intellectual progress. The wild storm and unruly nature which Lear confronts are now “tamed” and regulated by human intervention in *The Tempest*. In this play, the harsh climate of the island is caused by the protagonist’s use of dark magic. Two opposite attitudes toward human intervention are here recognized. While the play celebrates human domination, there is also anxiety concerning the abuse of knowledge and power. This is significant for a modern audience as it suggests a warning about the threat of extreme weather due to excessive orchestrating of the natural environment by human action. The ending of the play is also unusual in terms of its renouncement of abandoning human artificial control. The act of restoring the island to its natural order shows perhaps the earliest awareness of environmental remediation.

In *Tempest*, the natural world of the elements is represented by the character Caliban, a native islander with a fishlike body form. It offers an engaging exercise for asking students to interpret Caliban’s ambiguous identity and physicality through casting an actor or designing a costume to express their mental image of the character. Discussion then focuses on the hierarchical order which shows nature as “primitive” and as “property” under human command. This session focuses on the sound arrangement heard in Caliban’s dream. For Caliban, the world is mapped by “sound” (Neill, 2008, p. 48) rather than human speech. Caliban is acceptably seen as a monster full of words of curse yet, when he speaks of his island, he delivers one of the calmest, most lovely acoustic passages of Shakespeare’s plays. The students are encouraged to read this passage aloud and imagine Caliban’s dream for his island:

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices

That if I then had waked after long sleep
Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
I cried to dream again. (*Tempest*, 3.2.130-38)

This passage, which was spoken to the world twice, opening and closing the 2012 Olympics, guides students to see the possibility of change. In the past, Caliban has been condemned as barbaric, threatening, and subversive; in the postmodern reading he represents the freedom to dream, the origin of humankind (Beer, 1985), and an inner emotive force. The “noise” of the isle indicates the existence within nature of a different linguistic system co-existing alongside human speech (Neill, 2008). Engaging students in an ecocritical reading of Caliban’s lines opens them to adopting a more biocentric viewpoint in approaching complex environmental issues.

The play-reading session concludes with a summary highlight that, despite the attempt to demonstrate human-centered power, the irrational dissection of the land portrayed in *King Lear* and the colonialist slavery in *Tempest* end in failure. Both scenes show that the unstable human condition is rooted in the disturbed ecological order, and promotion of the anthropocentric perspective is countered in both plays by anxiety about destabilizing the wholeness of the eco-system. After all, the station of humans is found within, not above, nature.

Session 2. Drama activity: Lear in the wilderness.

The following activities of the series engage students in taking action. The full session is called “Lear in the wilderness” and contains two phases: the action game called “storm in the classroom”, followed by real world exploration in the local community.

Drama game: Storm in classroom.

Objective. This activity explores the power of nature that Lear attempts to confront. Students act out both sides of the conflict through role-playing an uncontrollable nature that refuses to be commanded and could destroy the entire human race, and King Lear in his fearful experience of chaos.

Instruction. The storm scene can be created in the classroom or campus area; the drama game involves the following steps: (1) Vocal practice. All students read the lines: “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow! / You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout / Till you have drench’d our steeples, drown’d the cocks!” The plosive words of the lines are electrifying to read and effective in helping students to express their ideations physically. (2) Physical movement. The storm is expressed through students’ self-created body gestures and vocalizations. All students practice the metaphorical storm through clapping, whistling, rattling, twisting and stretching their bodies; they also create the tortured Lear’s physical posture. Through body movement, they imagine and manifest the struggle from both sides. Figure 1 shows the students in action. (3) Performing the storm scene. When students have mastered the lines and finished designing their movements, the performance starts. This activity can be conducted with both small and large classes. In groups, one or two students act out Lear as he struggles, while other students representing the storm adopt various positions, either at different corners of the classroom, circling Lear, or clutching the struggling Lear by the head, shoulder, waist or legs in “sculpturing” the human confrontation (Fig 1). The classroom storm takes only a brief time to perform and is easy to operate; moreover, the emotional tumult and physical tension are powerful in moving students to profound reflection. Just as Lear sees his folly in the wilderness, they gain new insights into aspects of nature and its untamed expressions of power too.



Figure 1. Drama activity: Students playing the storm scene in *King Lear*

Session 3. Community-based investigation: Junk Lear.

With the developed personal refined notion of nature, the students are ready to explore their mental image in the real world. The next part of the series of activities encourages the students to continue investigating the notion of a modern day wilderness and its relationship to human intervention in the local community. As depicted in the storm scene, Lear is in an unsheltered, marginal place as a result of his dissection of his land. The activity is nicknamed “Junk Lear” by students, which defines the search in their part of world signifying desolation and human folly, yet still preserving the truth of the original life system. The aim is to open the students to see the unsustainable patterns of management practiced in our own society, corresponding to Lear’s realization in his experience of the wilderness.

Analysis

Students’ discussions and reflections are investigated using discourse analytical approach in outlining their notions of nature (Gill, 2000). The

approach examines both text and context, in this case the content and functions of students' discourse. Moreover, discourse analysis is concerned with the "action orientation" and "social practice" (Gill, 2000) of meaning. Observing the process of "seeing" the nature/wilderness described and reflected by the students facilitates new perspectives and inquiries. Two major analytical dimensions are engaged in categorizing students' learning experience. (1) Students' experiences and responses are analyzed based on the emergent key themes, mainly regarding ecological, socio-economic, psychological, and cultural dimensions, through which students construct their conversation and responses. (2) Students' interview material and final reports are analyzed focusing on their interpretations of the significance of the objects captured in the photo images, their notions or mental images of the wilderness, and their evaluation of the action and change observed in the daily environment. The task of this study is to identify students' awareness of the reality of an ideologically constructed nature and the formulation of a new eco-attitude underlying the discourse.

Results: Students' Exploration of Environmental Consciousness

Redefining Human and Nature Relationship: Students' Responses and Reflections

Students' responses to role playing the storm scene.

At the end of the drama activity a "chill out" time should be arranged; while the students relax, they are encouraged to talk about their experiences performing the part of nature, finding their human place in nature, and the perspective they engaged when playing out the intense confrontation. Two major conceptions of ecological thinking significantly emerged from students' reflections.

1. Nature has a life of its own.

In the role of nature, the students who personified the storm found

Lear/humans to be trivial and powerless. They were surprised to find that, instead of being intimidated or submissive, they intensified their strength of action in response to Lear's harsh violation of the natural order. In acting out the confrontation, they became aware of the interactive relationship between humans and nature, and aligned themselves with wild nature. This recognition departed from the conventional negative image given to nature as unruly threat to human life.

2. Human beings are part of nature.

In the role of Lear, students experienced powerful, emotional resentment. The drama game also elicited rich reflections from the students. Following are some significant student response examples which underscore the emergent consciousness conceived in the theatrical wilderness:

- “Initially when I read the scene, I thought the lines were saying that the wind was quite strong in the storm. . . . then when I performed the line, I felt unease and shame; acting out Lear's regret, I finally realized that it was about humans' own actions of blocking and punishing ourselves” (I-1).
- “It was both nature's and the body's explosion. Humans' false perception of nature could lead to most horrific consequences” (I-2).
- “There's a power so overwhelming and I became invisible and absorbed. The role of nature was supposed to be the backdrop; however, I found that the storm always 'naturally' dominated the central stage and my position as Lear was actually the backdrop” (I-3) .

This phase of the drama activity also serves as a warm-up preparation for the second phase. The new insights achieved by students from performing the wilderness will be developed further in the following community-based exploration.

Broken landscape: reflections on the students' presentations and written texts.

In their written passages, the students' observations and final reflections particularly focus on the main perspectives: disturbed wilderness, values of wilderness/nature, and action for change. Figure 2 shows examples of the students' photographic observations.

1. Disturbed wilderness, mutating nature: recording social and industrial footage of the intact land

The scene most featured in students' observations to represent the madness and chaos of modern day Lear in the wilderness concerns the excessive development of human society, with backhoes, dumps, and disposal of mechanical products as objects representative of the wasteland. The students, like Lear, recognize that mutated nature is the outcome of misguided human management:

- "The disordered nature is the result of the current false social structure, emphasizing unrestricted economic development and city expansion" (S28).
- "Man-made artifacts are actually representing human powerlessness" (S20).
- "The use of the land is evaluated from a singular dimension of globalizing and profiting while ignoring the regional environmental condition and inhabitants" (S25).

Another facet of students' focus is the broken landscape caused by extreme weather or over-exploitation of natural resources, exemplified by objects such as bare mountains. Students remarked that the messy landscape reveals the fragmented condition of human identity: "Is it us or nature? The messy, mad, sad natural environment" (S36); "abusing nature is humans' self-defeating" (S14); "our world becomes a wasteland; we see the lack of our civilization, such as the violated human right, suppressed by a power game"

(S20). Being present in the scene of the modern day wilderness, students perceive themselves as becoming aware of the empty, segregated, and deficient relations that provoke the tragedy of human-shaped nature.

2. Values of the wilderness

Witnessing the disappearing of the wilderness, students also focus their discussions on the necessity of the wilderness: “wilderness is the ‘values’ of our world” (S28); “a resting place for our mind and spirit” (S33); “human value is rooted in how we treat nature; the wasteland is originally our homeland, and the wilderness is supposed to be our inspiration and redemption, not enemy or obstacle” (S16). Reconnecting to nature is recognized as the resolution to reconstructing our value system.

3. Alternative ending — managing humans’ place within nature

Students also thought about how it could be different for them not to be trapped in Lear’s plight. In their reflections, long-term and holistic thinking was persistently mentioned in reference to modern management practices. In their considerations of sustainable ways of living, students remarked:

- “We might be capable of taking the land from nature but are unable to survive the consequence. We need to find ways to co-exist with nature” (S33).
- “We keep on constructing in order to prevent natural disasters; but why don’t we take an alternative view and leave our land without disturbing it? Leave it to its natural way?” (S20).
- “We should repair our hearts, than we can repair our environment” (S48).
- “Taking in the voice of the local residents to present making wrong policy and false decisions” (S12).

New ways of behavior and engagement to promote social equity are suggested:

- “The priority of managing a company should consider the ecological-social interacted structure, rather than money, that will allow long-term development;

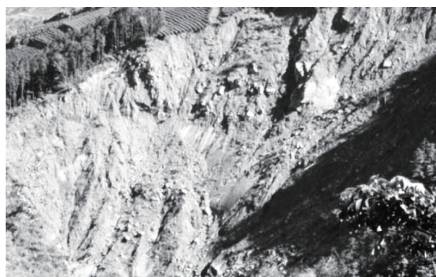
as, in our world, nature is more intensively affected by social policy than ever” (S25).

- “I visited the aboriginal tribes and I learned their cultures and methods of living with nature, instead of messing up the nature with hatred” (S17).
- “Preserving the wilderness and nature is closely related to poverty and social injustice, which force people to destroy their living space” (S46).

Apart from establishing an emotional link to the land and community, the inquiry undertaken during the thematic class session allows students to take an ecocritical viewpoint in analyzing Lear’s tragedy in a broader, multi-dimensional context. In their responses, the students exhibited the mentality of altruistic thinking and comprehension that diversity is essential to maintaining both eco-system and human values. In their vision of wilderness, these students picture the world they anticipate.



(S20)



(S33)

Figure 2. Broken landscape, Junk human-being Lear: Photos captured by students to represent their notions of disturbed nature, modern day wilderness

Discussions

Student learning progress and the impact of using an ecocritical, community-based approach are discussed below.

Empathetic Effect in Drama Activity: Reconnecting Ecospheres

This study finds that the use of a thematic drama session on nature is

effective in developing environmental awareness and an ecocritical attitude. Drama, with its form of dialogue, strongly engages one in personal conversation with the knowledge input, with the situation one encounters, and overall, with one's condition of existence. The role-playing exercise helps the individual to detect the interests of other people, see conflicts and dilemmas, and learn how to make personal choices (Oulton *et al.*, 2004).

Engaging students in an ecocritical interpretation of Shakespeare's dramatic works facilitates reconsideration of the characters' uneasy relationship with nature. An interesting comment made by the students is that everyone is Lear in modern society in terms of the dissected landscape and broken nature/human relationship. Their observations show that Lear's self-made destruction is still relevant for us living today. Students see the problems such a condition breeds occurring in their everyday life and consider the possibility of making a different choice. Through role-playing Lear's tragedy, instead of taking sides in conflict situations, students learn to see problems from multiple angles, anchoring their concern across inter-connected domains beginning at the personal circle (of family, friends, co-workers, local people) and organizations (professional and societal bodies) and reaching out to the physical world (natural environment). This is the competency that is vital for finding solutions to complex real-world issues (Huang, 2008; Wiek, Xiong, Brundiers, & Van Der Leeuw, 2014).

Based upon the learning and reactions of these students during the drama activity, the following pedagogical objectives are suggested for future course design and assessment. The students' perceptual development mainly appear in these aspects, which include: (1) looking into environmental issues from both the personal and public, and practical and ethical dimensions; (2) recognizing the pursuit of sustainable development at both the local and global scales; (3) showing an awareness and orientation for action supportive of initiating change in their daily place and working environment.

The Community-Based Ecocritical Approach is Effective in Promoting a Culture of Diversity and a Deep Ecological Mentality

In this study, engaging students in a postmodern ecocritical reading asks them to rethink the past that once emphasized subordinating nature as human property, as recorded in the plays. The early modern texts, which present the dominant human-centered worldview, are effectual in raising eco-conscious questions as the students live in the future these texts gave legitimacy, and have themselves started to see the devastating consequences human interference and manipulation have summoned upon the world.

The approach that integrates an ecocritical reading, dramatic interpretation, and lifeworld-based activity is productive in “releasing” the rich meaning documented in literary works. In this study, the multiple viewpoints preserved in the play texts are explored to investigate diverse value systems and the “unsustainable way” of land management. In the playwright’s social and political critique, the “sustainability” of human society is deeply rooted in its balanced, cooperating relationship with nature. The result of carrying out place-based ecocritical pedagogy also shows, to take the reading of “Caliban’s dream” as example, that students are enabled to consider the value of the undisturbed ecosystem, the beauty of linguistic differences, and the preservation of multi-cultures and ethnicities. Based on the drama sessions described in this study, thematic activity concerning the relationship between native and mainstream cultures will be further developed.

The postpositivist approach aims to inspire in students the critical thinking that empowers individuals to participate in community environmental issues which mitigate or prevent further deprivation of the landscape and its natural resources. Leopold points out the importance of getting personal in establishing an environmental ethic: “we can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in” (1989, p. 214). Emotionally and intellectually, the personalized experience draws students into

developing a deepened-self, an “eco-self”, which can identify with wild nature. Such self-realization is found by the students in the action process; as Naess (1988) maintains, this is the basis of genuine care for environmental protection..

Conclusion

This study has reached the following conclusions:

The practice of a place-based ecocritical approach is particularly effective in cultivating students’ critical attitudes in seeing the impact of human domination. In this study, the two specific scenes selected from Shakespeare’s masterpieces engaged students in connecting across time and space the theatrical world with their own personal experiences. The students are enabled to rethink human domination of nature from multi-dimensional viewpoints, including culturally shaped nature, colonialist deprivation of the land and lifestyle traditions of native peoples, and the technological manipulation and industrialized consumption of natural resources. Learning through literary texts therefore essentially proposes to connect very discrete subjects, and invites students to consider alternative methods for human development. “Reading the past, thinking the future” through literary works expands human vision and opens up the possibility for change toward a more biocentric, sustainable world.

Alongside the reading task and knowledge input, the drama activity allows students to explore environmental ethics in a very different but tangible way. In this study, the students show detailed observations of the interactions between human society and the natural landscape. The drama activity conducted prior to the students’ fieldwork is a vital component in preparing them to adopt a mentality of empathetic thinking and objective cognition. Through role-playing the confrontational parts, students have the opportunity to think through the problematic aspects of the nature-human relationship. This approach serves as an effective instrument for empowering individuals and communities to express opinions while retaining a mentality of empathy, which dissuades one from

making arbitrary decisions when facing conflict situations.

The ecocritical thinking developed through dramatic interpretation adds fresh insight to students' perceptions of environmental issues and the condition of local landscapes. In their final presentations, students show strong awareness that the existence of human society relies on ecological diversity; the disintegrating landscape caused by human interference indicates poverty and inequality, rather than an affirming progress. Place-based community activity is effective in encouraging students to explore in context the abstractness of nature and personal meaning within the ecological network. The place-based ecocritical approach to the nature-human relationship both encourages and engages students to conscientiously redefine a new culture of care for the wilderness within which we are all rooted.

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