

Florida Studies

Florida Studies:
Proceedings of the 2009 Annual Meeting
of the Florida College English Association

Edited by

Claudia Slate and Carole Policy

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P U B L I S H I N G

Florida Studies: Proceedings of the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Florida College English Association,
Edited by Claudia Slate and Carole Policy

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To Steve Brahlek, Palm Beach State College,
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Assistant Editor of the FCEA Florida Studies 2005

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This volume was completed thanks to executive editor Carol Policy, who reviewed submissions and gave astute advice, and associate editor Karen Tolchin of Florida Gulf Coast University, who was indispensable as a sounding board and reviewer. Florida Southern College provided me a student assistant for the fourth year: English major Shay Lessman, who has the audacity to graduate this year, has been my right-hand man on all of the FCEA Proceedings that I have edited. With patience and unflappable optimism, Shay has once again pulled off a production miracle. He also attended the 2009 conference where he helped recruit submissions for this volume. I will have a hard time finding an assistant as capable as he has been. Finally, I am ever appreciative to my husband, Risdon, who as my model in all academic pursuits is my light and love.

PREFACE

This is my fourth year as general editor, and each year my respect for my colleagues increases. With courage and conviction, they submitted essays revised, and sometimes lengthened, from their Florida College English Association conference 2009 presentations for our consideration, taking themselves from that public arena to the possibility of an even broader audience. After these submissions were passed through a review process, the final selections were made, further edited, polished for publication, and organized into categories—finally arriving in the published form that you see here.

This volume contains a lot of variety, an eclectic mix of fine scholarship. The first section, Pedagogy, includes essays about using Florida's environment to its fullest in the composition classroom. Old Florida includes essays exploring Florida Cracker Westerns and slave shipwrecks off the Florida coast, as well as works by James Weldon Johnson, Rex Beach, and Zora Neale Hurston. Contemporary Florida is the largest section with essays that discuss, among other topics, Stephen King, Hunter Thompson, Elizabeth Bishop, and the "Dexter" novels. The essay in Natural Florida focuses on Florida ecocriticism.

These selections showcase the diverse and bold culture of Florida as they enrich and broaden the canon of Florida Studies.

—Claudia Slate, Editor
Karen Tolchin, Associate Editor

PEDAGOGY

WRITING ABOUT A FLORIDA ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE: CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS FOR FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION STUDENTS

SALLYANNE H. FITZGERALD

When I started teaching three years ago at Polk State College after having lived away from the state for many years, I faced a decision about the required research paper assignment. I wanted to assign a topic which would be difficult to plagiarize while also being relevant to students and interesting for me to read. Also, I wanted an argumentative topic because that is the final rhetorical strategy in the college course outline for ENC1101 and the basis for the papers in ENC1102. In addition, I wanted a topic which would be easily researched using various secondary resources. Of course, as a former California resident, I gravitated to environmental issues so popular with Californians, but also I noticed that both the local newspaper and many of the Florida media outlets published articles on the environment. In fact, the *Lakeland Ledger* published at least one article a week about a significant environmental issue impacting central Florida. Then, I visited our campus library and discovered that they had a video on the Florida environment done with a grant in the 1990s with the goal of promoting geology as a discipline. That video clinched my decision because it examined the entire state and gave information on a variety of issues impacting the Florida environment ranging from sink holes to hurricanes as well as radon, phosphate, and other natural events and Florida industries. So for the past three years, my 1101 and 1102 students have written research papers on a Florida environmental issue.

My students in both classes write between five and seven essays depending on the way I structure the syllabus. The next-to-last paper is primarily organized using a cause and effect method of development but also incorporating the rhetorical modes of comparison and contrast, narration, and description. They may also use other modes, but those four are required. The environmental topic easily incorporates at least those four modes and stresses the use of a variety of developmental strategies.

Then, for their research paper, students revise that essay to incorporate an argument. The first paper is three pages long with three sources required, and the revised paper which serves as the research paper is five pages with five sources. Many students use more sources and write more pages than the minimum. (The assignment sheets follow this essay.)

The Florida environmental topic challenges students while also helping them achieve some excellent papers. The challenges are primarily related to narrowing the topic, finding and using credible sources, and creating an argument. First, in narrowing the topic, students sometimes want to do something too broad, such as global warming or pollution. Both of these are much too involved for students to do an adequate job in 3 or even 5 pages. Convincing them to limit the topic has been difficult because they are attracted to such generalizations. On the other hand, writing on the red tide can lead them to have too narrow a topic because all of the sources say almost the same thing: red tide is caused by a specific algae and animals and humans feel its effects. Even expanding the topic to include the impacts of the red tide on the tourist industry leads to perhaps three pages, but certainly not five. Then, there really is not a convincing argument concerning red tide: finding a solution that is better than any other or arguing for or against a cause is just not logical. Finding credible sources is not so difficult if students use the PSC library website, but they prefer to Google their topics in spite of anything I can say. Doing that leads them to find sources which may or may not be composed by reliable writers. Last year, one student insisted that Newt Gingrich was the best source he could find to support oil drilling. He simply refused to acknowledge that Gingrich might have something to gain in publishing, in an election year, a book on a topic so controversial, and the student only reluctantly agreed to use additional sources to balance the argument. This student, like many others, had a difficult time understanding argumentation. In spite of two required books which develop argumentation, my own lecture, and many examples, some students simply cannot grasp the principles of argumentation. That does not even address the students who see argument as not appropriate for them to attempt. One young woman said to me, "I cannot do this paper because I never argue with someone. It is not my style to fight with others." Obviously, she missed both the book's and my point and confused argumentation with fighting over an issue.

In spite of these challenges, I have had some excellent papers using a Florida environmental issue as the topic. I have had papers on such topics as the Florida panther, the alligator, manatees, the Goliath grouper, water pollution, air pollution, Florida scrub, land tortoises, sea turtles, reefs, the

Key Deer, beach erosion, beach nourishment, sink holes, the Everglades, sugar cane farming, citrus canker, and pythons. Such a range of topics has allowed students who do not think critically to produce a paper while challenging those who are able to think more deeply. One paper on the honey bee surprised me by the way the student arranged the topic from the most obvious cause to the least and gave a solution for each cause to ameliorate the effect, ending with the most serious cause and advocating for a solution that would eliminate its effects. Another student who works for the phosphate industry wrote a paper in which he traced the history of phosphate and suggested that any problems with the mining have been solved by the industry. While I might disagree with his conclusion, he did give both sides to the success or failure of the industry to solve the environmental issues related to phosphate mining. Another student wrote about research into the stingrays in the St. Johns River explaining that they are like the canaries in the mine in that they warn us of the pollution that is present. He suggested ways that further research might help solve the problems revealed by the stingrays.

So the papers have ranged from rather obvious arguments to ones where more critical thinking has been required. But almost all of the students have mentioned a feeling of accomplishment as the result of doing the research and attempting to write the paper. They are frequently surprised at the success they achieve. Some have mentioned that they actually enjoyed learning new information and meeting the challenge of a paper unlike any they have previously composed.

The paper requirements are detailed on the two assignment sheets I have provided. But in addition to those, I follow these steps:

- I lecture on argumentation, assign pages in both texts about argument, have students analyze argumentative essays, and share former students' papers with the classes.
- Then, I ask them to free write about their proposed topic and to tell another class member about the topic. That class member is supposed to ask questions to clarify the topic.
- They present their papers informally to the class before submitting them for a grade and answer four questions about the paper: what is your thesis, what is your side of the argument, what is the opposing side of the argument, what was your most useful source. These questions are on index cards and rotate around the room so everyone asks one or more questions and every student must answer the questions after his or her presentation.

- We also peer edit the essay— essay 5 on the handout-- immediately before the research paper which they can then revise for the research paper.

All of this preparation is intended to give them plenty of assistance in composing their environmental argument.

So as a result of choosing a Florida environmental issue for the research assignment, I have found that rarely do I have plagiarized papers. At least, they have not provided me with downloaded essays someone else has composed. They still, however, have problems with citations: last spring I failed three students in 1102 because they did not credit their sources correctly and used the words from the original without credit even after being warned and allowed to revise, but that has been a rare experience. Students seem to be proud of the information they have learned and of their writing. I have learned a lot about the Florida environment and its issues and, for the most part, enjoyed reading the papers.

English 1101

Fall 2009

Fitzgerald

Essay 5

Purpose: To develop student ability to compose an essay organized primarily around cause and effect but employing the other modes of description, narration, comparison and contrast as well.

Topic: Choose an environmental issue impacting you or others in Florida.

1. Discover the causes of your environmental issue as well as the effects. Be careful not to think too narrowly nor too broadly about your topic.
2. Compose a thesis related to the causes and effects of the environmental issue you have chosen and use topic sentences for each of the paragraphs explaining the causes and the effects. The details in your paragraphs will come from your research and personal knowledge. You must use description, narration, and comparison and contrast in your essay.
3. Credit any source you use with 2009 MLA parenthetical citations and a Works Cited page. You will need at least three sources. These may be newspapers, the web, magazines, or even

interviews. Do not use Wikipedia. One source might be your biology teacher.

4. This essay will need to be approximately 500 words or three pages.
5. When you finish drafting your essay, carefully edit it to avoid fragments, comma splices, run ons, agreement and verb tense errors. Do not use “you” unless it appears in a quotation from someone else. The purpose of this essay is to inform the reader, not to give the reader directions. You may also choose to persuade the reader to take action on this issue, but you still will not need to use “you.”
6. You may also use this topic for your research paper in which you will need to **argue** for a solution to the environmental problem you have found or argue the causes and effects of the issue if there is a debate about these. You may turn in one paper for both assignments; if you use it for both, be sure it is 5 pages long with at least 5 sources and that it is an argument, not just informative. You should turn it in by the due date for essay 5 regardless of whether it is for one or two assignments. If you elect to turn it in later, you may not have an opportunity to revise it.

English 1101

Fitzgerald

Fall 2009

Research paper

Purpose: To develop student ability to compose a documented argument using secondary sources and employing cause and effect, comparison and contrast, narration, and description.

Topic: Choose an issue related to the Florida environment. This is probably a revision of your cause and effect paper although you may use a different Florida environmental issue.

1. The topic must have both a pro (for) and a con (against) side to develop.
2. Research your topic. For the final draft you will need at least 5 sources. These should be a combination of newspapers, books, magazines, and interviews. Do not use either an on line or a hard copy dictionary or an encyclopedia for the required sources. Do not use Wikipedia.

3. You should organize the paper using one of the three approaches to argument I will give you notes on.
4. Your paper will need to be between five and six pages long, plus it must have a Works Cited page. Use parenthetical citations following the 2009 MLA style sheet directions as we have done on every paper this semester. Double space your entire paper and use 12 pt. font Times Roman. You need a heading for body of the paper, and you need page numbers with your name attached to them for every page after the first one. Do not use a cover page.
5. As for previous papers, you should have an intro, conclusion, thesis, transition, appropriate grammar. Do not add graphs, charts or clip art unless you specifically refer to them in the paper and add comments about them.
6. This paper is due to me by the date on your syllabus. You may turn it in earlier if you wish a chance to revise it.
7. When you give your presentation on your research, do not read this paper. Instead, tell us about your paper giving us your thesis and the two sides of the paper.

HOW SOUTH FLORIDA'S ENVIRONMENT CAN POSITIVELY IMPACT STUDENTS' COMPOSITIONAL SKILLS

ELIZABETH GILLESPIE

South Florida is abundant with social and organic richness. It is blessed with natural beauty, tropical weather and diversity amongst its residents. Some of South Florida's most renowned physical elements are its beaches and the Everglades. Many residents of South Florida originate not only from all over the United States, but from all over the world. These unique elements enable individuals to have a myriad of personal experiences. College writing instructors in South Florida can utilize South Florida's environment and diversity in the classroom to positively impact students' compositional skills. Ideally, students will produce quality writing influenced by their physical and cultural environment, an approach known as Ecomposotion.

The term Ecomposition shies away from an explicit definition. This ambiguity ironically aids in defining Ecomposition, as it demonstrates that this is a type of composition that is fluid and dynamic, capable of being molded and implemented in distinguishable, relevant ways. Although "Ecomposition may look like an attempt by composition teachers and scholars to incorporate studies of the natural world into the writing classroom" (Keller 193), it encompasses much more than an incorporation of the natural world; to describe Ecomposition as such would be a "glaring oversimplification" (Keller 193). The rudimentary tenets of Ecomposition emerged during the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s upon publication of "Eco-logic for the Composition Classroom" and "The Ecology of Writing," by Richard Coe and Marilyn M. Cooper, respectively. Coe discusses the idea of "eco-logic" in the composition classroom, describing it as "a logic designed for complex wholes...a logical model appropriate for ecological phenomena" (Coe 232). Writing is akin to an ecosystem; its elements are distinctive yet share a symbiotic relationship with one another. Marilyn M. Cooper extends Coe's arguments by explicating the incorporation of ecology into the classroom

more thoroughly, stating that, "an ecology of writing encompasses much more than the individual writer and her immediate context" (Cooper 368). She clarifies this assertion further with the suggestion that "the system of ideas is the means by which writers comprehend their world, to turn individual experiences and observations into knowledge" (Cooper 369). A student's "system of ideas," in other words, could be shaped entirely differently depending upon the location or environment that he/she lives in. Ecocomposition accounts for the importance of both the cultural and physical environment in shaping students' work. Many great writers have produced quality composition almost directly as a result of the influence of their environment, notably "how the prison cell affected Antonio Gramsci, how specific natural places inspired Wordsworth, or how the teeming streets of London influenced Dickens" (Keller 202). Ecocomposition is a multi-faceted approach that encourages a holistic approach to writing while accounting for the present physical and cultural environment.

While Ecocomposition can be a veritable component in any composition classroom, it is an especially vital part of South Florida classrooms because of South Florida's physical and social environment. Physically, South Florida is likely the most famous for its endless beaches and beautiful sunsets, but it is not free from environmental problems: "Florida is a state riddled with environmental problems, a place dominated by conversations of location, of the intrusion of population, of growth, and of development" (Dobrin 15). This environment will undoubtedly influence student writing because "when students write, they write about their own environments" (Dobrin 17). Florida's physical aspects influence students particularly strongly: "the rhetorical construction of Florida affects what my students see when they see the environment, when they consider the geographies of the real and the simulated and the reality of the simulated. Boundaries blend here; separating the place from the writing, from the teaching, from the living is impossible" (Dobrin 16-17). Florida is well-known for many of its artificial or "simulated" aspects. For example, Disney World, Universal Studios, and South Beach all characterize Florida to a certain extent. However, these places are manmade and artificial, as well as representative of Florida's mass overdevelopment. It is easy to forget the "natural world" of South Florida and Florida as a whole because many students wouldn't be able to identify what "Real Florida" is in its natural sense. When students are unable to identify the "real" elements of Florida's physical environments, they will not be able to identify its major environmental problems.

One of the major environmental problems in South Florida is the destruction of the Everglades, a problem that is relevant because much of

the destruction has taken place within the last half of the century. During the first half of the century, the Everglades still retained their vastness and unspoiled beauty, a beauty that was fully explored by Marjory Stoneham Douglas in her book *The Everglades: River of Grass*, published in 1947. Douglas extols the beauty and uniqueness of the Everglades, declaring, "There are no other Everglades in the world. They are, they have always been, one of the unique regions of the world, remote, never wholly known. Nothing anywhere else is like them: there vast glittering openness, wider than the enormous visible round of the horizon, the racing free saltiness and sweetness of their massive winds, under the dazzling blue heights of space. They are unique also in the simplicity, diversity the related harmony of the forms of life they enclose" (Douglas 5). Stephen M. Davis and John C. Ogden acknowledge the importance of Douglas's work, stating, "Marjory Stoneham Douglas successfully focused national attention on the Everglades one-half century ago when she described its natural and cultural history in her book, *The Everglades: River of Grass*" (Davis and Ogden 3). Tragically, in the past half of the century the Everglades have changed dramatically. Davis and Ogden note the substantial degradation of the Everglades: "From a broad perspective, changes in the Everglades ecosystem during the 20th century have been threefold. The geographic extent of the system has been reduced. The spatial and temporal patterns of the major physical driving forces such as hydrology, fire, and nutrient supply have been altered in the remaining system. Abundance of wildlife has declined. Most conspicuous and alarming among the biological changes have been the plummeting of Everglades wading bird populations to less than one-fifth of their abundance during the 1930s and the near extinction of the Florida Panther" (Davis and Ogden 3). The Everglades face a genuine ecological crisis, a crisis that is real and relevant to South Florida residents.

Every major university in South Florida is located within a reasonable physical proximity of the Everglades, a proximity that allows discussion of the Everglades to be relatable and understandable to students. Discussion of an ecological crisis in Alaska or Australia generally will not immediately resonate with students in South Florida because these areas are not within students' immediate scope of experience, unless they originate from either of these locales. Since the Everglades are within students' immediate physical realm of experience, Ecocomposition can be seamlessly incorporated into college composition classes through the integration of Ecocriticism and service learning. Ecocriticism "in its focus on both literature relating to environmental topics and critical approaches foregrounding environmental concerns and concepts, provides some useful

theoretical principles for the Ecomposition teacher and researcher” (Ingram 210). Ecocriticism focuses specifically on the relationship between writing and the physical environment, a relationship that can be facilitated through the usage of “service learning.” Ingram asserts that “we can offer a more fully integrated composition experience when we include service learning in the course curriculum” (Ingram 211). Service learning involves more than just learning within the confines of the classroom; it involves interconnectedness between the classroom and the environment that surrounds it. By incorporating both service learning and Ecocriticism into a composition classroom, “the Ecomposition instructor can create courses that not only teach students to write, but that also encourage them to become a more fully aware and active species of student and citizen” (Ingram 211). Students that are “fully aware” and “active” are those who are able to harness critical thinking skills to their fullest ability, which will ideally result in soundly written, lucid, and engaging composition.

South Florida writing instructors can easily incorporate the environment problems that plague the Everglades into the classroom. By generating student interest and concern in this nearby environmental problem, instructors will provide students with the tools to become active citizens and skilled writers: “we can use education to develop a sense of interconnectedness by promoting the concept of sustainability... sustainability also takes into account issues of social justice, economic viability, humane practices, and long-term implications and consequences” (Ingram 215). The first step college instructors in South Florida can take to integrate interconnectedness between the environment and composition in the classroom is by raising awareness of the problem. This can be accomplished through the use of documentaries and informative articles. After generating awareness, instructors can provide students with writing assignment prompts that pertain specifically to their geographic location. A possible question for exploration could include, “Development and growth is unavoidable in Florida, particularly South Florida. Using essays that we have read in class, argue how we can balance this growth with conservation of South Florida’s natural environment, particularly the Everglades.” This prompt is both broad and specific; it is broad in that it allows for a plethora of different responses, and it is specific in that it engages students directly with a natural component of South Florida. The question also allows for all of the necessary components of a college composition paper to transpire; it calls for students to formulate an argument while making connections between assigned readings.

The major difference between this geographically specific assignment prompt and a more generic assignment prompt is that it relates directly to

students' own experiences and environment. Ideally, this will contribute to students who "write better paragraphs, enjoy their assignments more, and develop a greater investment in both the subject matter and their own learning processes" (Ingram 211). When students can make connections between their own world and their composition, they generally write better and more authoritatively. This authority puts them in a position of "privilege":

Writers who can successfully manipulate an audience (or, to use a less pointed language, writers who can accommodate their motives to their readers' expectations) are writers who can both imagine and write from a position of privilege. They must, that is, see themselves within a privileged discourse, one that already includes and excludes a group of readers. (Bartholomae 407).

Students who are in a position of privilege will be able to write better for both themselves and their audience because they understand what they are writing about, why they are writing it, and how it is relevant for their audience to read. One of the best processes to accomplish this position for students is Ecocomposition, as this process will always account for students' immediate realm of experience.

In addition to the physical environment, the social environment is also crucial to students' learning processes. James Berlin explicates this through this assertion:

for social-epistemic rhetoric, the real is located in a relationship that involves the dialectical interaction of the observer, the discourse community (social group) in which the observer is functioning, and the material conditions of existence. Knowledge is never found in any one of these but can only be posited as a product of the dialectic in which all three come together. (Berlin 488).

Ecocomposition is a process that relates to social-epistemic rhetoric because it focuses on the environmental origin of writing: "Writing is an ecological pursuit. In order to be successful, it must situate itself in context; it must grow from location (contextual, historical, and ideological)" (Dobrin 18). This location is not only physical; it includes the social group or community detailed by Berlin. Every physical and social aspect of location will help to form students' "system of ideas," ideas that will become part of students' constitution and reflected in their writing. Environments that are homogeneous or diverse will impact students' reality and context.

The universities in South Florida are among the most diverse institutions in the United States. As Hairston notes, there is a

tremendous increase in diversity of our student population...with changing demographics, we face an ethnic and social mix of students in our classes ...these students bring with them a kaleidoscope of experience, values, dialects, and cultural backgrounds that we want to respond to positively and productively, using every resource we can to help them adapt to the academic world and become active participants in it. (Hairston 186).

Students will likely encounter other students whose religious beliefs, ethnicities, and birthplace are different from their own. In a composition classroom, where the content is not as stringent as that in mathematics or science classrooms, the chance of biases and prejudices emerging is higher. Students in composition classes typically read different essays that address controversial topics. These essays generally present a thesis or argument, which students tend to agree or disagree with. Since class discussions of these essays are an integral component to the curriculum in college composition, students likely will volunteer opinions and ideas that will inspire or inflame other students. An instructor might have a class full of mild mannered, indifferent students, but this is not the usual scenario. There will likely always been at least two students who strongly disagree with each other. These differing opinions and beliefs can cause dispute, but an effective instructor will be able to harness these opportunities into learning experiences, which in turn will impact students' compositional skills.

These learning experiences would begin with the development of critical thought. Critical thought cannot originate in a vacuum; it is developed through both experiences and interactions. If students are routinely exposed to the same types of individuals and the same types of ideologies, their critical thought will stagnate, as there is nothing for it to develop into. Even if a student holds steadfast to his or her beliefs after interactions with other students, they will at least be exposed to different points of view. These different points of view will eventually translate into being able to anticipate counterarguments in formulating their own thesis. For example, a student may be staunchly opposed to rapid scientific advancement, including stem cell research and genetic manipulation of food, only because their religion is against it. In a diverse collegiate atmosphere offered by South Florida universities, this hypothetical student will most likely encounter students who feel very differently and will express these feelings in a class discussion. While the student may remain recalcitrant and refuse to change their viewpoint, they will at least

recognize the various arguments that other people have against their ideas. An awareness of these arguments will enable this student to think more broadly about their own argument, and as a result they will remember the opposition when writing their essays. Not only will a remembrance of the opposition strengthen their thesis in that they will anticipate counterarguments, this remembrance will also reinforce the student's skill in writing for various audiences. Being exposed to different viewpoints and ideas will ultimately aid students in furthering their own knowledge and strengthening their writing.

South Florida is renowned for its diversity and physical beauty. People who reside in South Florida differ in age, ethnicity, and religion. The student body in South Florida universities is just as heterogeneous as the surrounding general population, which can lead to possible conflicts in the classroom. However, effective instructors will recognize the potent influence of the physical and cultural environment on students. These instructors recognize the value of Ecocomposition and why it is particularly relevant in South Florida. South Florida's environment can have a positive influence on students' compositional skills, not detrimental. Exposure to different people and a diverse environment will enrich students' life experiences, which will in turn enhance their composition.

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THE ABSENCE OF LANGUAGE AWARENESS IN THE K-12 FLORIDA READING AND LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

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The national movement for outcomes-based education in the United States during the 1990s produced state standards for all core subject areas, including math, science, social studies, and English language arts. Adopted in 1996, Florida's Sunshine State Standards (SSS) exemplified the outcomes-based education movement, and they were recently revised as the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. State university professors of English in the areas of linguistics and rhetoric-composition (in Georgia and Florida), we have questioned whether educational standards should be aligned with a highly specific and narrow vision of the language variety called Standard English ("The Standards Movement").

In the present work, we focus our concerns about placing educational standards wholly in the service of the English standardization project on one deficiency in Florida's standards in particular: language awareness. We argue that the new Florida state standards for K-12 reading and language arts education lack the linguistic skills associated with language awareness and that the absence of this faculty (indeed, the *removal* of it during the revision of the SSS) makes the acquisition of various literary and rhetorical skills less likely because language awareness is logically and practically presupposed by other skills included in the standards. Furthermore, in light of Florida's linguistic environment, it is essential that students acquire language awareness in their K-12 curriculum.

Language awareness is the critical, metalinguistic knowledge that enables people to engage in contrastive analysis of different language varieties and thus to make purposeful communicative decisions about linguistic form.¹ Language awareness is metalinguistic because it is knowledge about language, for example, English inflectional suffixes. Language awareness enables contrastive analysis of different varieties because its categories—again, like inflectional suffixes—produce descriptions of language as opposed to prescriptions for language use. And

language awareness is critical because it does not emanate from the presumption that difference means deficit, the prejudice that the *other* variety is incorrect and is associated with other differences that signal and explain the linguistic deficit. The critical perspective of language awareness is a contemporary pedagogical implication of linguistic relativism, perhaps the founding principle of modern descriptive linguistics: different language varieties accomplish exactly what they need to in different ways. Different varieties, then, need to be described and understood as systems just as the privileged, standardized variety is assumed to be a system and not a random collection of errors, archaisms, and chance results (even though it is clear that the standardized “system” often contains these—a Florida *mangrove*, for example, from the proximate Portuguese source *mangue*, has nothing to do with a grove).

An awareness of linguistic difference and the ability to engage in contrastive analysis can be taught, like any other skill, by teacher-fronted drills or worksheets—not what we advocate, of course—or through active, collaborative inquiry. The *language* of language awareness skills and activities can be as general or as technical as teachers at different grade levels think appropriate. At a lower grade level, students might gain language awareness by investigating the vocabulary of each other’s families—what families call their grandmother (*big mama?*) and grandfather (*big daddy?*); what words they use for “throw” (*chunk?*), “diarrhea” (*squirts?*), “a container for storing pastries” (*safe?*), and “escort” (*carry?*); and what foods with peculiar names they might consume, such as *grits*, *collard (greens)*, *chitterlings*, and *hog’s head cheese*.² At higher grade levels, students might create dialogues featuring linguistic markers that signal conflict between characters.

The Absence of Language Awareness

Whatever a person’s particular perspective on standards-writing in general and these standards in particular, the Florida state standards for language arts constitute an impressive amount of work—about two hundred pages of knowledge having to do with the language arts. But we think something has been missed.

Let us start with a look at some of the skills in Florida’s new K-12 language arts standards that presuppose absent language awareness. The language arts standards consist of six strands: (1) reading process, (2) literary analysis, (3) writing process, (4) writing applications, (5) communication, and (6) information and media literacy (*Reading/Language Arts Standards*). These are consistent throughout the grades, and standards