

Web-chat Date: April 12, 2011

Topic: ESP on Earth Day and Environmental Issues

Abstract:

In honor of April 22's International Earth Day, we would like to survey possible effective ELT classroom activities EFL teachers can organize for their students. In this web-chat, we would like to discuss some useful ideas on how to successfully integrate an English for a Specific Purpose (ESP) unit with theme activities covering a myriad of fun sub-topical issues, as well as environmental conscientious lesson plans and activities to reflectively engage students in response to earth day. What are some of the interesting and interactive lesson plans you believe might be suitable for EFL classes? What language tasks could students specifically engage in and practice so they can improve both language skills and environmental content understanding? As EFL educators, what have you successfully done in the past? What are some of the good ESP practices that teachers can consider doing? How long should such a particular thematic EFL activity be for a class? What type of authentic activities can EFL students carry out? What type of hands-on and electronic resources could teachers consider to help design successful lesson plans? Do you know about GLOBE (<http://globe.gov/about>) and iEarn (<http://www.iearn.org/about>) and National Geographic (<http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/edu/>)? Check out these web sites and share others with us. Google Earth Day 2011 and see what you get. What are your thoughts on this Earth Day idea?

Transcript:

Damon Anderson: Welcome everyone. We will begin our chat in about 20 minutes. Please feel free to post any pre-chat comments or questions.

Damon Anderson: Good afternoon everyone. There are 8 logins currently. We were not sure how many would participate today as today is the day before the Thai Songkran holiday and is school break for many places. So, thank you all for participating today. Let's begin our chat.

Eaindray: Hi RELO! Mingalarpar from Myanmar!

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: The best classes need quite a lot of scaffolding (teacher support--especially in written form--for students). But this takes a lot of time. How can teachers give proper scaffolding within the constraints of their busy schedules?

Phanisara: Welcome everyone. Songkran is Thai New Year. So for us we would say Happy New Year to all.

Damon Anderson: Welcome Eaindray.

le tran loan phuong: Happy New Year, Phanisara!

Phanisara: I agree with Eaindray. Especially with project based learning and with more complicated English tasks and topics, students do need to have more scaffolding and direction especially in the beginning stage.

le tran loan phuong: i'm loan phuong from Vietnam

le tran loan phuong: very nice to see you again.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Hello, all. And it's also a holiday in Vietnam (the Vuong Hung kings) and the day before Khmer New Year here in Tra Vinh Province.

Damon Anderson: William, I agree with you about the need for scaffolding when using some authentic materials. I feel that scaffolding should be an integral part of the activity, beginning with the directions. The timing of the activity should include time for scaffolding.

Phanisara: To expound further on Eaindray. Teachers need to know what type of activities to give and when. Planning the lessons well, teachers can actually save time, not feel like they have too little time to deal with.

Eaindray: Same to You! Tomorrow is our Myanmar New Year known as Thingan, Water Festival!

Ni Phyo San: hello everyone

le tran loan phuong: that's right, William.

le tran loan phuong: you know our culture so well

Eaindray: Nice to see You all!

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: What might be some differences between 1) using ESP (English for Special Purposes) for an entire course on environmental issues and 2) in using ESP for just a single class?

Ni Phyo San: Same to you, Phanisara

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Friends taught me how to say "Apposatay Chol Chnom Thmay" = "Happy New Year" in Khmer.

Phanisara: So I guess Happy New Year to all for this region of ours.

Tresha: So...Happy New Year, everyone!

Phanisara: William, I believe the ESP lesson plannings can be for a short time of two to three weeks or the whole semester. Depending on how you structure the class; and the content and linguistic sections you tend to divide up in teaching and integrating the topic for the project based ESP English classes.

Damon Anderson: William, to answer your ESP question, in an ESP course you are looking at how to use English to express the needs of someone working in that field: how to write lab reports, write an

abstract, read a professional document in that particular field. Whereas in a class, you are looking at making the short-term information accessible to the average student who may not be familiar with that field.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Have people used ESP in just a single class before? I might have but I'm not sure. I'm now using it in an entire course but don't know if I've ever done it in a single class.

Damon Anderson: William, you may have done it with a single class when you did something related to geography, or to recycling.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Maybe it would be possible to give this Earth Day ESP topic a New Year's twist. Here are possible topics such for a class: 1) What are some environmental damages that might happen during New Year Celebrations? 2) How can we use traditional culture (celebrating New Year) to raise awareness of the environment?

Ni Phyo San: Well, William, I think ESP on environmental issues for the whole course should be dealt with the specific participants like those who are interested in promoting the change in environment or for the one lesson_ we can do it for the general students like EGP.

Phanisara: ESP can be carried out in an interesting ways. The topic that is flexible enough for language teaching and flexible for the students to derive creative activities and subtopics to carry out their own inquiries.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Damon, that's a good point. I have done classes on recycling and also on not littering. The focus in the latter was more on 1) adjusting to the laws of a new culture than on 2) environment, but it was still ESP.

Eaindray: I agree with Phanisara.

Ni Phyo San: So William, what kind of course are you doing now?

Phanisara: I love your two topics idea William. It does help with getting the students to think about how their daily activities and major holidays can affect the bigger environmental crisis.

Damon Anderson: Earth Day is about raising awareness of environmental issues. The lessons to raise the students' awareness do not have to be heavily technical or complex. Look at some of the links above. The one on songs is an example. Just teach a simple song.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Ni Phyo San, how would you use EGP for an Earth Day topic like this for just a single class?

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: My ESP course now is teaching English to faculty from many departments outside the English Lang Dept. Most have a focus on agriculture, aquaculture but also law, etc. There are many possible connections between the Agriculture Dept and ESP environment.

Phanisara: A simple song. A simple interview. A simple diary writing. To create general awareness. Yes. I agree; it can be as simple tasks about the issue in English. Or it can be difficult depending upon the students we are dealing with.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: a. Have students use video cameras (or cell phone cameras) to make short public service announcements (PSA) about the environment. As always, it's crucial to 1) give students some written guidelines, rubrics, and examples and 2) to do so in the previous class. Explain what a PSA is and how long it should be.

Ni Phyo San: Ok how about like bringing a photo which is needed to be taken care like deforestation.? Then with a discussion and end up with a group activity as a homework. But this can also depend on the level of students or something else.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: In Chicago, several of us teachers have used simple video technology to help students make such PSAs. It can work every for very, very low level students. And it's also great for higher level ones.

Phanisara: Total agree Ni Phyo San.

Damon Anderson: When talking about things that can be emotional for the students or are affecting them in a dramatic way, I would suggest looking at the link in the Web Link box regarding Considering the Affective Domain. It has some very good points.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Ni Phyo San, I really like the idea of starting with a photo. It motivates students, focuses their attention, and since they can point, it helps lessen the problems some might have with vocabulary. And it's cheap! Any photo from a magazine can work.

Phanisara: Great idea William. Video now is so much fun. Students are probably better at using the technologies than the students. But they will totally love the activities. And will learn much from it.

Damon Anderson: I think Khun Nina meant that students are better at using the technologies than many of the teachers (at least the older teachers).

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: e tran loan phuong, we're both in Vietnam. Do you have ideas about how you'd like to use the environment as a topic in Vietnamese ESL/EFL/ESP classes?

Eaindray: RELO! What related sub-topic should be included for Earth day in order to raise the awareness of the learners of EFL?

Damon Anderson: Eaindray, you should choose topics that are relevant to students in Myanmar/Burma.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: And Phanisara, the great thing about a PSA is that it's short. If there's little time, students just practice 10 minutes and make a 2-minute video. If there's more time, they can do rough drafts, get feedback from teachers, share them with other classes etc.

Phanisara: :) Yes exactly Khun Damon. Students are better at using technology than teachers. Allow them to be creative in establishing their own talents practicing English through project-based learning.

Ni Phyo San: There are so many interesting photos on the geographic education link and we can do several lessons plan with those or we can also ask students to do self studies on those and let them come up with their own opinions on how our earth has been damaged and how we can improve that or brainstorm them on whichever possible ways to solve these problems out.

Damon Anderson: Eaindry, you could do something as simple as have students become aware of how much trash and garbage they and their families produce in two days. Then have them think of how they could lessen that amount.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: And Eaindray, you might try to approach it from two different directions. First, try a topic that is CLEARLY connected with the environment (water pollution, traffic, garbage, etc). But also 2) try a topic that might not at first seem to have any connection with the environment but encourage students to explore the environmental links. Possible topics here: my commute to school, New Years Celebrations, cell phones, eating in restaurants vs eating at home

Tresha: I guess I will start with a photo, and give students some vocabulary words to help them to start talking about what they think since I'm teaching grade 4 and 6.

Ni Phyo San: How about you, Damon, any better idea on today's topic?

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Ni Phyo San I know Nat Geo has great photos. I haven't seen this site. Did it also include lesson plans or will we teachers have to make these ourselves? Lots of sites now include lesson plans etc to make life easier for teachers.

Eaindray: Sometimes the students are still interest in language across thematic plans but I have out of related sub-titles? So how can I deal with it beyond my sharing?

Phanisara: Eaindray, sub-topics can be something like what has been generated through the provided side link (which includes sub-topics like Pollution, Ozone Layer, Deforestation, Global Warming, Recycling, Hybrid Car, Alternative Energy:

http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Environmental%20problems_worksheets.pdf

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Thanks Phanisara!

Laura Mizuha: Eaindray - give them standard guidelines that can be used accross themes

Eaindray: Thanks so much for your guidance, Phanisara!

Phanisara: When teaching ESP on environment, if we don't focus on the sub-topics, we can focus on the CONCEPT, ethical issues on HOW and WHY we should or should not do to protect and reserve energy to make a safer stage for our environment.

Laura Mizuha: I teach writing mostly, right now... and an assignment was problem solution essay

Laura Mizuha: in this frame work, which is transferable to topic and most academic fields, you have to clearly state the overlying problem.

Ni Phyo San: <http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/edu/> There are free educational resources for teachers. I think you can plan your own interesting lesson plan with your students.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: And Laura, did you let them choose the specific problem or did you give them a list to choose from?

Laura Mizuha: describe specific examples, solution, refutations, etc.

Phanisara: You're very welcome, Eaindray.

Damon Anderson: Everyone, the links in the Web Links all work. Just select one and then select browse and you will go there. We have one for National Geographic listed.

Eaindray: Yes, focusing the concept is a great idea for awareness raising lessons.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Laura, I think that's a very good point. Students benefit from clear guidance. Without that guidance they will rarely, for example, deal with refutations. But requiring that as part of a paper helps them develop higher order cognitive skills.

Laura Mizuha: William, this was not in reference to environment, so I gave them a complete example, then a list of other example topics, but ultimately let them choose their own topic.

Phanisara: I agree with Khun Laura. CLEARLY state the problem issues and even to explain well the tasks and the concepts will be totally useful.

Ni Phyo San: Out of those lessons, sometimes if it is lucky for the environment, students can grow more plants in their town or houses. For example, About 1000 plants were grown in Kalay, the town which is in Chin State in our country on the earth's day.

Laura Mizuha: William and Eaindray - you can scaffold it down. Poster, speech, PSA, labeled pictures.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: And Laura, when you say you gave them a complete example, does that mean you give them a complete example essay (one that would get an A)? I know that giving students such example essays before they start their own writing is very helpful (although time consuming the first time we teach a class).

Phanisara: Thank you for letting them choose their own topic, Khun Laura. Making choices and critically thinking about their own learning tasks are not very common yet for Thai students.

Laura Mizuha: HAHA... Nina... I did let them choose, but many chose from the list I provided also.

Phanisara: Good project Ni Phyo San. After they grown the plants, did they do or require to compose anything in English also?

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Ni Phyo San, I think the "1000 plants" would make a great subject for an experiential learning class: students could go out and observe and interview. They could also translate. This raw material could be used for generalizations and testing.

Laura Mizuha: Yes William, I gave them a complete essay. Adapted from one I 'borrowed' from the internet.

Damon Anderson: Ni Phyo San, what a great project. Anytime you can link learning to such real life, learning becomes easier and more sustainable (in terms of memory).

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Laura, great to give them a complete essay. And great to borrow it from the Internet. No need to always re-invent the wheel.

Eaindray: Ok, Laura! Understanding these concepts support the IS students in their academic writing tasks -2. It's really useful for them.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Tresha, at what level are the children you teach? I don't mean their ages but about how much English can they understand and use? Photos are good since they work with all levels.

Ni Phyo San: Well Laura, that wasn't my project. They are from the monastic school and they made it. What I mean is we can copy that to make our lessons fruitful for us.

Phanisara: At least they choose....even with teachers directed.....maybe later....the next step then they can create their own list to choose from. After having enough schema/background knowledge about it.

Laura Mizuha: thanks Eaindray, that way when you switch topic, you can carry something over.

Tresha: William, I have mixed leveled students, some know basic conversations, some are quite good at free talk, and some may have trouble answering daily questions.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: One thing that I'm doing with my ESP class that might be useful here is to create our own reader. This is time-consuming but if it's for something that repeats (and Earth Day comes every year and the environment is a favorite topic), it can make sense to invest the time needed to make a reader.

Damon Anderson: Great idea, William.

Phanisara: Thank you Ni Phyo San for sharing a useful site.

Damon Anderson: Tresha, using rubric and collaborative groups is a great way of working with such a differentiated class.

Tresha: Well said, William!

Ni Phyo San: mai pin ray, phanisara.

Tresha: Thank you, Damon. I think I'll try to do that!

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Ni Phyo San, this tree planting project suggests all kinds of possible sub-topics. 1) what was the purpose, 2) what are the plants like 1 year later 3) what things lead up to this project, 4) since these were monks, did they get any inspiration from Buddhist practice or texts, 5) how was it financed, 6) how could students make a publicity campaign for it for next year, etc.

Tresha: Good rubrics will be very important!

Phanisara: Creating your own readers!! That's a great idea William. Relevancy and students' ownership come into play, definitely.

Damon Anderson: When the sub-topic related to Earth Day is about local issues, it is easy to develop project-based learning and for students to want to take ownership.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: With my current ESP class, the reader involves short sections (3-5 sentences) about each of their departments. This is why it's ESP: focusing on helping them learn English with the special focus of dealing with foreigners about their own field. Some entries describe the discipline, others describe the office and workers, some describe things needed for applying for grants, etc. But it's all written at an intermediate level and all designed to be chunks they could easily use in writing or conversation.

Tresha: I might group Ss heterogenously to create readers!

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Tresha! So true. We teachers often know where we're going but forget that our students don't. Example essays like Laura gave or rubrics like you mention, are very important. Especially BEFORE students start writing or creating.

Tresha: Thank you, William!

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: And Damon, another great benefit of using local content is that it means we're almost certain to be able to use those materials, lesson plans, etc again and again. And each time we can change them a bit to improve them. And using local content makes collaborating with local teachers much easier.

Ni Phyo San: William, it is good you thought about the follow up cases. The purpose is to avoid deforestation and it can also improve team work or a kind of unity. It can also mean doing good deed for the next generation. They can do it every year. And it shows that even them could aware of the global warming and they do something for the environment.

Phanisara: Totally agree with William and Tresha. And sometimes rubrics and other effective ESP lesson planning take time, but it is well worth it in the long run.

Laura Mizuha: William it sounds like your class is truly ESP... but must be difficult with different feilds in the same class and different texts, as I understand.

Sakulrat T.: According Khun Nina, "Making choices and critically thinking about their own learning tasks are not very common yet for Thai students", I agree. And as a student, I wonder how I encourage myself and my friend to do that better? For the environmental issues taught in classroom, for example, I felt that we are taught only the way to make it (theory; composition, presentation) more than TO MAKE IT IN REALITY. Moreover, there's no further activities after class to encourage students to grow some plants or other things. I wonder if creating communities that care about environmental issues among ASEAN youth via Facebook or Twitter could be more effective in raising awareness about natural environment and communicating in English as well. Should teachers encourage this campaign?

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Laura it can be, but since the class is low, that makes it a bit easier. I don't have to write as much (since student can't really handle longer texts). And the reader has three sections; daily life, work life, Vietnam. Only the middle one varies by department. The other two are pretty much the same for everyone.

Phanisara: Super idea Khun Sakulrat. Teachers and students can create a project like this together. Both on and off line activities.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Sakulrat T.I for the critical thinking, I often come back to Bloom's Taxonomy as an easy 6-step way to make sure we don't just spend all our time on knowledge and understanding facts (2 lower levels). We want to make sure we give Ss questions on comparing, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating.

Eaindray: Yes William, teachers need to know thoroughly. Then Tr could lead the destination successfully.

Laura Mizuha: Ni Phyo San and Sakulrat - Again I mostly teach writing, but it sounds like a persuasive essay. problem, (solution) call to action and the step to do it.

Ni Phyo San: To deal with language plus environmental issues could be limited as it depends on what level of students we have or what their purposes are. Anyway, at least, we can make them aware of our earth with a few lessons and let them aware of those problems.

Phanisara: Very well put, Ni Phyo San. Anything we can do through our profession to help making lives better and a better world we can all live in.

Laura Mizuha: Call to action can be small. Problem deforestation -> buy only recycled paper.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Sakulrat, you could use Facebook or Twitter or also blogs to help students share. In my experience with blogs, I had to require students to start the blog and to post and to ask questions of other and then to answer them. But once they got started, it worked pretty well. They were shy at first though. But a blog, FB or Twitter can be a good way for them to feel like they're really writing something important: they get real readers after all.

Eaindray: What a Good ideas, Sister Ni Phyo!

Phanisara: LOVE the REAL readers idea, William. SO TRUE.

Damon Anderson: I agree that using Twitter and Facebook to discuss and get students engaged with Earth Day issues and activities is a great idea! Students not only share within a class, but also within a larger community that way. It may be more rewarding and motivating for them.

Ni Phyo San: Thanks, Eaindray.

Damon Anderson: Well folks, believe it or not, we only have about 7 minutes left. This has been a great exchange. Does anyone have any ideas for a topic for our next web chat?

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: And here's one idea for us. Many of us are going to affect not just our students but the the ways other teachers learn to teach. We might want to make rubrics NOT for students but for these teachers in training or professional development. A short 1-page rubric that describes how we would actually teach such a class. Some questions with Yes/No answers all designed to nudge teachers to more interactive methods, methods that help students produce more (and more accurate and more meaningful) language

Ni Phyo San: only 5 more minutes to go. Anyway have a good holiday to all of you.

Eaindray: William, we can even use today chat with tr training through pannel disussion or role play of interview for Earth Day's awareness raising.

Phanisara: I guess we can all encourage each other to do more of the authentic learning and deal with real life issues out there. So students can be a competent language users ready to solve authentic professional and real life issues once graduated.

Damon Anderson: Good thought, Eaindray!

Sakurat T.: Great ideas, everyone. Thank you so much. I forgot to tell you that I'm an intern at RELO Thailand and I'm just an university student. The ideas about teaching everyone shared are kind of interesting to me as I never experienced the teachers' point of view before. So I asked if I can use technology to encourage my friends in this issue :)

Ni Phyo San: It is very interesting to share with your ideas, different situation _ different opinions. Thanks to all.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Possibe topic: Learners often are overwhelmed at the work required. How to give them "mile marks" so that they can see the progress they are making.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: This was a useful session. And it went fast!

Laura Mizuha: thanks everyone... Happy New Year!!!

Ni Phyo San: Good, William. It is a kind of rewards for the students.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Possible topic: Writing class is probably the most time-consuming for teachers. How to use rubrics, exemplary essays etc to free teacher time.

Tresha: That's a great thought about the 1-page rubrics, William.

Laura Mizuha: i have some rubric ideas and samples to share.... especially for writing.

Phanisara: We need more students like you Khun Sakulrat. To use technology more wisely and discuss and work out real world problems. Great thinking!!

Damon Anderson: We have done rubrics in the past, but could revisit that topic if you all like.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: i'd love to share laura!

Tresha: Happy New Thai Year to All!

Ni Phyo San: Any topic could be interesting to be shared.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: Im also using Edmodo.com now to post and share.

William Wolf, ELF, Tra Vinh, Vietnam: email me if you can.

Ni Phyo San: I 'd like to see your ideas, Laura

Phanisara: THANK YOU everyone. Once again such a joy to join with you on the ELT web chat.

Ni Phyo San: Damon , do you have any interesting idea to teach a writing class?

Eaindray: Thanks everyone for sharing! Hope to see you again!

Phanisara: Happy New Year everyone. See you Tuesday May 10th for the next web-chat.

Damon Anderson: Ni Phyo San, I have lots of ideas and experiences to share regarding teaching writing.

Damon Anderson: Well, our chat is finished now. Happy New Year to you all!!!

Ni Phyo San: Phanisara, have a happy new year. And good bye everyone.

Tresha: Damon,

Tresha: but you need more time?

Ni Phyo San: How about next time, Damon?

Sakulrat T.: Thanks everyone! Have a great New Year.

Damon Anderson: We can choose writing as a topic for our next chat.

Damon Anderson: Happy New Year everyone. If you have water spraying in your country, hope you don't get too wet. Cheers!

Tresha: Sounds great. A hard one.

Ni Phyo San: Looking forward to it, Damon.

Damon Anderson: The chat is now closed. Thank you all for participating.
