

***Implementing Environmental Sustainability Issues in  
English Language Teaching for Schools***

Laura de Almeida, Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz, Brasil

The European Conference on Language Learning 2014  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

This paper outlines the ongoing development of a teaching project entitled *English Language, School and Sustainability – Consciousness and Citizenship Relationship*. The program underpinning this project is the Institutional Program of Initiation to Teaching Service - Programa Institucional de Iniciação à Docência (PIBID) and sponsored by the Co-ordination of Staff Improvement at University Level (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – CAPES). The aim here is for undergraduate students to exchange learning experiences with a university lecturer and a classroom teacher at a public school in order to help them grow as classroom practitioners and researchers in a public school setting. This Project is based mainly on the assumptions of Freire's pedagogical theory (2001) about mutable reality depending on the participation of people around it. Also on Chaves' research (2011) which deals with the experience of environmental issues in a public school and community attitudes about it. By doing this we tend to develop not only the skills of all involved, but also help them to interact with environmental issues. As an outcome, this project tends to promote studies and debates on problematic environmental issues under the multi, inter and trans-disciplinary perspective. In regards to the community public school participation and the university, we aim to promote not only language acquisition, but also to make the project participants search for a change in behavior that denotes the formation of a better operating citizen.

Keywords: Learning, Acquisition, Environmental issues

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## **Introduction**

This article aims to show the actions of the teaching project entitled *English Language, School and Sustainability – Consciousness and Citizenship Relationship* (*Língua Inglesa, Escola e sustentabilidade relação de consciência e de cidadania*) sponsored by the Co-ordination of Staff Improvement at University Level (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - CAPES). This Project, part of the Institutional Program of Initiation to Teaching Service - Programa Institucional de Iniciação à Docência (PIBID), involves a university lecturer who operates as the co-ordinator, a public school English teacher as a supervisor and ten undergraduate students operating as the ones who put the project's activities into action in the public school classrooms during the English lessons. PIBID began in 2014 and will extend to 2016. In the first year of the project, the participants were in charge of five different class groups composed of around 170 students in total. This number does not include the whole number of students, but we aim to get a sample of the whole and work with it. The students are around 14 to 16 years old and study in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades at a public school in Ilhéus (Bahia/Brazil).

Developing a project in a public school is justified and necessary if one takes into account the social conditions where foreign languages are included in the formal curricula in Brazil. English is taught as a foreign language and only twice a week. There are about thirty to forty students in each class or more. Classes are conducted mostly using the mother tongue (Portuguese) and usually English is not connected with the other subjects and to the outside world.

Considering that the University has a very narrow institutional involvement with the issues of the world inside and outside the institution of higher education, and the current proposal for the training of teachers, that is, to prepare them for the current world problems and situations and find solutions or ways to deal with them, we believe that there is an institutional link to the development of this proposal. The research question that drove the initiative was: *How can we relate sustainable issues in the teaching of English as a foreign language in order to enhance motivation and learning for students as well as teachers in Brazil?*

Summing up, this proposal is interdisciplinary and aims to address the problem of the environment that has occupied a prominent place in the media and at conferences related to the theme. Besides, we visualize a curriculum approach of the language degree course with the scientific, technological, artistic and cultural to propose the development of this theme in the basic education teaching networks.

## **Theoretical foundation**

Among the many studies conducted on environmental education, our common thread runs through discussions about the subject addressed by a number of researchers such as Reigota (1994), who emphasizes that environmental education as an educational perspective may be present in all disciplines; Chaves (2011) who presents the environmental problems experienced in a public school in Itanhém (Bahia) and others. Regarding the necessity of preservation, we emphasize the reflections of Leonardo Boff (1999) which alert us to the need for a new paradigm of coexistence that fuses a close relationship with the Earth and

inaugurates a new social pact between peoples in the sense of respect and preservation of everything that exists and lives.

We have adopted the definition of environmental education by Reigota (1994, 10), because according to the author, "the environmental education should be understood as political education, in the sense that it claims and prepares citizens to demand social justice, national and planetary citizenship, self-management and ethics in social relations and with nature". From the concepts raised by the author cited and others which we may encounter, we build our theoretical framework for addressing environmental issues in schools.

After a theoretical introduction to the subject we move for a practical part of the ideas presented by the theoretical framework.

In this way, we observe the important role of the school in relation to environmental education. In addition, we emphasize the question of inter-disciplinarily presented in the premises of the EA (environmental education) for Dias (1998, p. 126), among which we highlight:

b) "Environmental problems are always complex and require the intervention of specialists from various disciplines for their solutions, in an interdisciplinary approach"

The question of the garbage generated in cities is undoubtedly one of the major problems in most Brazilian municipalities. Participation in the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress on Education of the State of Bahia (CIDEB) in the town of Porto Seguro/BA in 2011, with the theme "Education for a State without borders: From theory to practice", provided ways to tackle the problem, that is, the situation in which some municipalities like Ilhéus and Itabuna are in, also experienced by other cities, but it is possible to overcome the problem through transformative actions. This Congress met the ideas propagated by Cilene Chaves in her book on daily practices in environmental education. According to Chaves (2011), environmental problems affects everyone becoming a global challenge to all inhabitants of the planet. In the meantime there is the school that, following recommendations from the National Environmental Policy (Law 6,938/81), seeks work from the guidelines of the National Curricular Parameters (PCNs), incorporating environmental discussions in its teaching matrices.

The proposal of work with the theme of sustainability in teaching a foreign language covers other interdisciplinary issues and cross-cutting themes, as well as ethical issues, since it aims at contributing to the formation of the citizen by means of awareness of environmental problems faced by residents of the region of UESC, such as in Ilhéus and Itabuna. So, we chose a transformative education as put by Paulo Freire (2001, p. 36) when he says that being in the world means "transform and re-transform the world, and do not adapt to it". The present research is justified as arousing the political consciousness of educators can intervene in reality. Still, according to Freire, education can give people greater clarity to "read the world" and this clearly opens up the possibility of political intervention in reality so that it can rapidly evolve into a better world.

Finally, we will build our theoretical model by means of joint concepts, definitions about environmental education and the transforming role of the school in this context. We develop goals and apply the following items:

- 1) Work the reading and writing competence in the English language, with texts referring to sustainability
- 2) Promote studies and discussions on environmental issues under the multi, inter and trans-disciplinary perspective, aiming at efficient and effective development of programs and projects on environmental education in the English language
- 3) Analyze other resources in the English language such as movies and songs that deal with the subject of sustainable development
- 4) With regard to work in the community, public school and the University by sensitizing and educating participants to seek a behavioral change that fosters the formation of a more active citizen
- 5) Produce teaching material that deals with the theme of sustainable development in the English language

### **Method - Application of design and data collection**

The method is based on a self-assessment questionnaire to check what students from the public school are aware about on the topic of sustainability. With the implementation of the project, we first performed a diagnosis to know the reality of the school. With this knowledge we researched what students knew about the theme of sustainability. The following graphs are a result of the questionnaire applied by university students at the public school in Ilhéus on May 13, 2014. We note that:

1-Do you know what sustainability is?

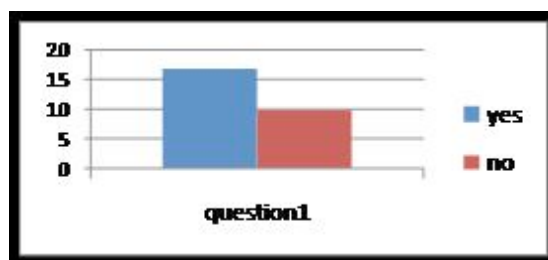


Figure 1. Graphic about the results of question1

The majority of the students from the public school claim to know about sustainability.

2 – Does your school develop activities on sustainable development?

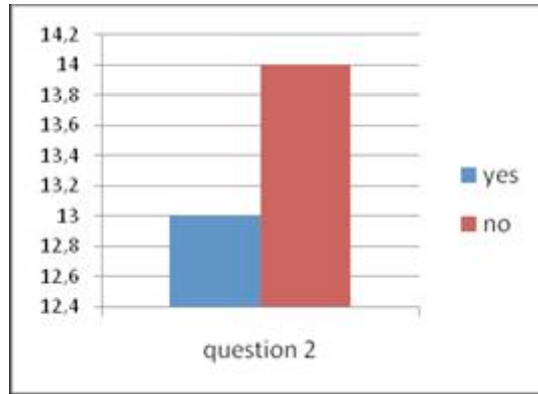


Figure 2. Graphic about the results of question 2

In this case, more students answer negatively about this topic being discussed in the school.

3 – Do you know any song in the English language that deals with this theme? (environment /sustainable development)

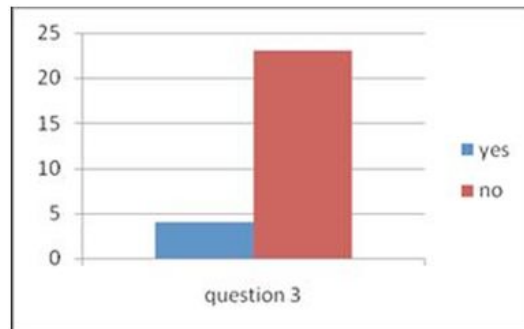


Figure 3. Graphic about the results of question 3

Above, many students answer that they do not know songs about this topic.

4- What do you do with the trash in your home?

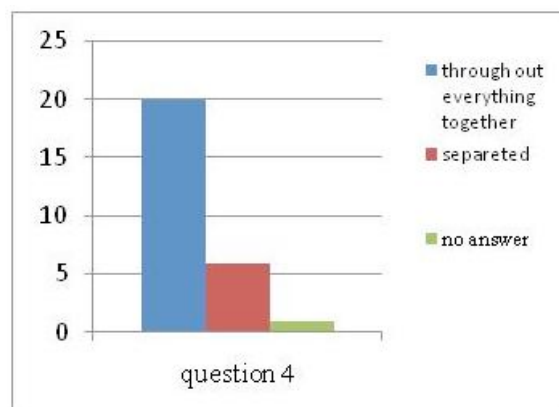


Figure 4. Graphic about the results of question 4

In the graph above, many students answer that they throw the trash out without separating it for recycling.

5-Do you have recycling in your city/neighborhood/school/ supermarket/shop/ somewhere you know?

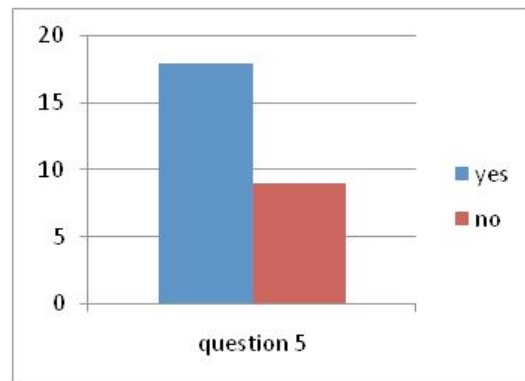


Figure 5. Graphic about the results of question 5

Now, there is a contradiction in the response to question 5 in relation to that of question 4: If there is recycling, why then do they not bother about separating the trash?

6-Do you contribute to preserving the environment?

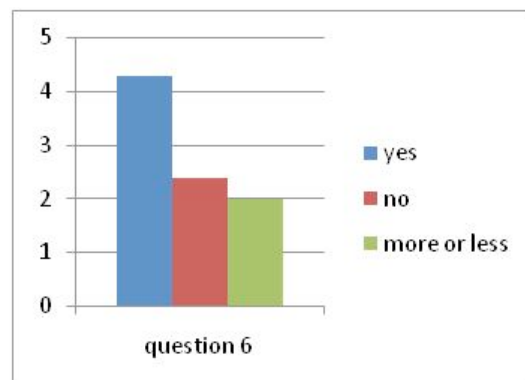


Figure 6. Graphic about the results of question 6

Another contradiction: How do they contribute to environment when they do not recycle the trash?

## Results and discussion

With reference to the survey on the knowledge of the subject by students of the public school we found that most young people know about the concept of sustainability. As for whether the school develops activities on sustainable development, we detected half-stated affirmatively and half negatively. We asked if they knew any song in English that deals with this theme (sustainable development of the environment) and the survey found that most did not know. As for what they did with the garbage from their homes, we found that most throw all the trash out unseparated. Also, we asked if they have recycling in their town/ neighborhood/school/supermarket/shop/or somewhere that they knew of and the majority responded affirmatively. On the question of whether they contribute to preserving the environment we found that the majority do not participate. Based on

their answers and on the community reality of this town (Ilhéus), we can affirm that currently there is no recycling collecting policy. This is one of the contradictions in their answers. The students claim they help the environment, but at the same time there is no environmental policy in that town. Trash is collected all together and not separated. So we can conclude that they do not have deep knowledge on this topic.

Based on the assumptions above, we decided to apply some activities on the basis of ways of changing this reality through selected texts and recreational resources. In regards to movies and songs we note the existence of more music than movies under this theme.

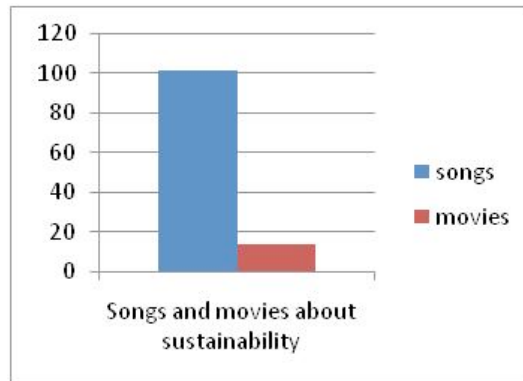


Figure 7. Graphic about the results of the research about songs and movies

For this reason, we decided to develop the theme of the project through songs. We found that there are more songs related to sustainability than movies, which is why we chose a song to be analyzed. One example of this is the analysis of the song “Mercy, Mercy Me” by Marvin Gaye: The situation of pollution in the skies, seas and radiation, among other problems.

Besides approaching songs and movies about sustainability we also worked with texts using different topics related to the same issue. When working with texts we apply reading strategies such as skimming and scanning.

There is a graph below illustrating the research to evaluate which topic appeared more often in the texts selected by the undergraduate students:

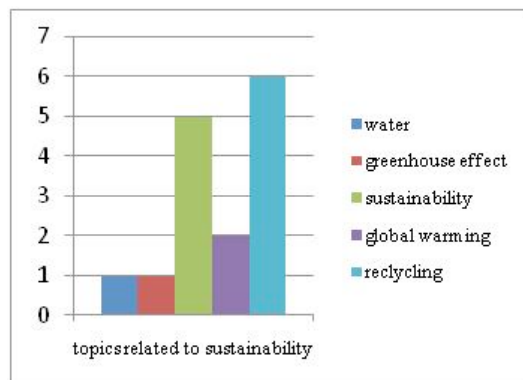


Figure 8. Graphic about the results of topics related to sustainability

Based on the graph above we can infer that water is the topic which appeared most often in the search for topics related to sustainability. Then, the other topics such as sustainability, global warming and recycling appeared less frequently. This does not mean that the other topics are less important; however, there is one which is affecting the neighborhood more than the others.

## **Conclusion**

Among our objectives we aim to develop competent readers and writers through the application of sustainability-oriented texts. Next, we present our preliminary results because the research is in progress. On the basis of the data collected we found that through music we can discuss the issue of sustainability. Based on the results of the data shown we can point out that sustainability is not a known subject and this justifies the discussion of this topic in the school. Furthermore, reflecting on the activities which are being carried out in the project, we realized the need to address the theme of the environment in public schools in order to help students not only to learn the English Language, but also to improve his/ her citizen formation according to Freire's (2001) assumptions about changing the reality where we live in to improve our lives.



## References

BOFF, Leonardo. **Saber cuidar**: ética do humano, compaixão pela terra. 7. ed. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2001. 199p. ISBN 8532621627 (broch.)

CHAVES, Cilene. Práticas Cotidianas em Educação Ambiental com Ênfase no Princípio Biocêntrico. 1. ed. Vila Velha ES: Opção, 2011. v. 01. 79 p.

DIAS, Genebaldo Freire. **Educação ambiental**: Princípios e praticas. 5ed. São Paulo: Global, 1998. 400p ISBN 8585351098 (broch.)

FREIRE, Paulo; FREIRE, Ana Maria Araújo. Pedagogia dos sonhos possíveis. São Paulo: Ed. UNESP, 2001. 330p (Série Paulo Freire)

REIGOTA, Marcos. **O que é educação ambiental**. Rio de Janeiro: Brasiliense, 1994. 62p. (Primeiros passos) ISBN 8511012923 (broch.)

**Contact email:** [prismaxe@gmail.com](mailto:prismaxe@gmail.com)