

An Environmental Administrator by David Royal

Introduction

The late William Foster wanted to see administrators who “are critical because they are educators and they are therefore not satisfied with the status quo; rather, they hope to change individuals for the better and to improve social conditions for all.” (1986, p. 18) Throughout the literature of educational administration, there has been a growing interest in addressing global, social and environmental issues. Social justice was the focus of two recent special issues of the *Journal of School Leadership* (March 2006, March 2002) and an issue of *Equity & Excellence in Education* (September 2002). When *Educational Administration Quarterly* dedicated their February 2004 issue to this topic, the editors explained that they saw “social justice efforts as more important than traditional research concerns.” (Marshall, p. 3)

Furthermore, there is an increasing awareness that is impossible to separate social justice issues from environmental ones. (Bigelow and Peterson, 2002; Bowers, 1997) Furman and Gruenewald (2004) explain that “the links between social and environmental justice are based on the widely acknowledged and well-documented understanding that the political economies of modern or postmodern states have created myriad environmental problems for human and nonhuman communities all over the globe.” (p. 48)

Social and global issues have also become more and more mainstream in ESL and EFL. Over ten years ago, H. D. Brown (1995) put forth the idea that those of us “who teach languages have a special responsibility to subvert attitudes, beliefs and assumptions... ..that language teaching is neutral, sterile, inorganic and has nothing to do with political issues, ...that global conflict and other forms of international aggression are no longer serious threats in the 'post-cold-war' era, ...and that there is no particular urgency to act assertively to stave off an imminent global environmental crisis.” (p. 13)

Discussion of these issues has since become even more prevalent within our professional organizations, exemplified by TESOL's social responsibility caucus and JALT's global issues in language education special interest group. An increasing number of teachers in both EFL (Jude, 2005; Hronopoulos, 2004; Peaty, 2004; Sargent, 2004) and ESL (Licht, Maher, & Webber, 2004) settings are bringing activism on these and other issues into their classroom. But what does this mean for an administrator?

In addition to considering professional ethics, being an ethical administrator includes considering my program's place in the larger community. For me, this means helping students improve their lives by providing knowledge and opportunities for positive action. In this paper, I am focusing primarily on environmental responsibilities but, for other teachers and in other contexts, different types of activism might be more relevant to the students' lives. For example, if one's program were geared towards disenfranchised immigrants, one could focus on empowering them to improve their cultural and social situations. (Licht, Maher, & Webber, 2004)

Admittedly, this type of program administration is not for everyone. Some believe that ESL programs should simply teach English and avoid explicit engagement with larger issues. In this paper, however, I am interested in putting forth ideas for program administrators who are willing to question the status quo. I will suggest some ways in which one could make one's program more eco-friendly. In addition, I will address how to carry it out, both in terms of program policies and teacher training. Finally, I will conclude by discussing some of the difficulties that could discourage an ESL program administrator from attempting to move his or her program towards environmental responsibility.

Ideas for Greening a Program

The International Environment Education Programme, created by the U. N. in 1975, outlined six objectives for environmental education: awareness, knowledge, attitude, skills, evaluation ability, and participation. (UNESCO-UNEP, 1975) A recent analysis of English textbooks (Jacobs & Goatly, 2000)

found that, while environmental issues were sometimes present, they rarely progressed beyond awareness and knowledge. In fact, the authors found that a mere 1% of environmental activities in ESL and EFL textbooks called for actual participation by the students in a real world problem.

To improve upon this, an environmental program administrator could encourage teachers to develop classes which foster environmental activism. This could be done by providing specialized environmental courses, but there are environmental components to almost any sort of content. Classes dealing with business, travel, tourism, history, science and culture all have the potential for the integration of environmental information and ideas for action.

In addition, I have had a great deal of success with student-generated topics. In a recent Global Issues class, I asked students to choose an issue and take a personal action on it as part of their final project. For example, a student could choose water conservation, and reduce the amount of water he or she used when washing dishes and taking a shower. The ideas for both the issues and the actions came from the students, and many of the resulting projects showed both thoughtful reflection and substantial language use. An environmentally-minded program administrator can attempt to provide teachers with both the resources and the flexibility needed to integrate environmental concerns into their classes.

Jacobs, Lie and Amy (in press) list many ideas of simple environmentally beneficial actions that can be carried out both in and out of the classroom. For example, the authors encourage the boycott of products that are harmful to the environment, and the intentional purchase of environmentally-friendly alternatives. An administrator could certainly take this into consideration when making purchasing decisions. Recycled paper could be used in the copy machine; reusable cups, plates and utensils could be used at school functions; and the bathrooms and kitchen could be equipped with non-polluting soaps and cleaning supplies. Everything that is purchased has an environmental impact, and a program administrator could consider this impact alongside traditional considerations such as cost and convenience.

In addition to having a positive effect through purchasing decisions, the Jacobs et al. have other ideas for institution-wide policies that would exemplify and encourage participation in pro-environment activities. An administrator could encourage reduced paper use and conduct an environmental audit of the school as part of program evaluation. A policy could be put into place involving students in maintaining the appearance and health of the school's environment by making them responsible for picking up litter and taking care of plants. Teachers could be encouraged to turn the lights off when their classrooms are empty and to limit their use of air conditioning and heating. These types of behaviors can help convey to students of the program that the administration and faculty are sincere in their belief in the importance of environmental stewardship. Exemplifying commitment to the issues is, among other things, an important factor in determining the success of an environmental education program. (Van Petegem et al., 2005; May, 2000)

Teacher Training

For a program administrator looking to integrate environmental concerns into an ESL curriculum, one of the biggest problems might be that some teachers may not feel comfortable teaching about environmental issues. They may be uncomfortable directly addressing political issues in the classroom. Another group of teachers might be hesitant because they do not see themselves as experts on environmental issues, and many teachers do not like covering topics that they are not knowledgeable about. For these teachers, some training might increase their confidence and willingness to participate.

A recent study by Van Petegem, Blicke, Imbrecht and Van Hout (2005) looked at the effectiveness of teacher training in environmental education, and they found seven criteria which contributed to the success of the training. These criteria were participant engagement, instructor credibility, intention, functionality, self-efficacy, school climate and evaluation. I would like to briefly explain each factor, while also addressing how they relate to the program administrator.

participant engagement – In environmental education, it is not simply enough to outline goals and make plans. It is also important to involve and motivate all participating individuals – teachers, staff and students. An enthusiastic and committed administrator who is well-regarded by the other stakeholders can certainly help to involve and motivate others.

instructor credibility – It is important for the teacher trainer to be credible. In this case, credibility comes from an understanding of environmental issues, knowledge about the teachers being trained and the program of which they are a part, and from perceiving possible obstacles to implementation. In addition, a good trainer would also be familiar with English language education. As the one responsible for selecting the trainer(s), the program administrator must take all of these factors into consideration.

intention – Teachers will get more involved in environmental education if they see that the institution truly intends to make strides in this area. Thus, it is important to engage in environmentally sound practices as a program in addition to creating educational objectives. In the previous section of this paper I gave some relatively simple ideas that an administrator could adopt to reduce the ecological footprint of his or her program. By showing a commitment to environmental responsibility, the program administrator can increase the willingness of the other stakeholders to get involved.

functionality – Environmental education “must be structurally embedded in initial teacher training programmes and curricula rather than being an occasional item.” (Van Petegem et al., 2005, p. 163) Committing to environmental concerns means including them consistently in all aspects of the program. Ideally, this would mean addressing the environment not only in terms of a potential topic

for content-based language instruction, but also in terms of considering the ecological footprint of the program as a whole.

self-efficacy – It is important that teachers feel comfortable and confident about their ability to integrate environmental concerns into their practice. Each teacher will respond differently. Some will prefer being given materials that they can plug into existing courses, while others will be more comfortable developing their own. The administrator needs to be sensitive to the varying needs of each teacher and provide support accordingly.

school climate – Educating the entire school population about environmental responsibility is no small undertaking, and a collaborative school culture would be very beneficial. Having this in place before introducing environmental ideas would ease the transition. In addition, “the ability to work in a network of cross-institutional partnerships between colleges, school communities, and social and business agencies can offer important support for the participants.” (Van Petegem et al., 2005, p. 164) Thus, an administrator who has a strong network of community contacts would have an advantage.

evaluation – As with any aspect of program or curriculum development, it is important to periodically evaluate the progress that has or has not been made. Evaluation gives an opportunity for reflection, modification and continuing action. The program administrator must decide when to evaluate, and what type of evaluation is most appropriate.

Clearly, the seven criteria for implementing environmental awareness in a program as outlined above are all influenced by the program administrator. The precise way in which this influence is displayed will vary from program to program, but the active involvement of the administrator is a key

component of making a program more environmentally responsible. Petegem et al.'s study found that the most difficult part of training teachers in environmental education was motivating teachers to work together as a team. "To organise staff development and cooperation facilities, strong leadership is needed." (p. 169) Thus, a program administrator who has already created a cooperative environment might find the integration of environmental responsibility to be more feasible.

In another study, May (2000) interviewed 18 experienced environmental educators to find out what the keys to success were. He assembled their answers into a 42 part framework, divided into three sections: teaching conditions, teacher competencies and teaching practices. In addition to agreeing with Petegem et al. on the importance of fostering a collaborative and cooperative environment, May found that many other determiners of the success of environmental education are part of the program administrator's area of responsibility. According to May, administrative support, adequate teacher planning time and a flexible curriculum all contribute to the success of environmental education. In this way, EE is no different than other types of pedagogy.

May also believes that having a strong network of resources outside of the classroom is very important. An administrator that is able to both give students the opportunity to study outside of the classroom and bring in experts and guest speakers would be an asset to any program looking to include environmental education. As far as teacher training is concerned, May recognizes the importance of helping teachers develop both ecological and sociopolitical knowledge bases. May also acknowledges the importance of an administrator's commitment to actual environmental responsibility, while at the same time he stresses the importance of humor and taking time off to recharge oneself. The role of an administrator in making a program more eco-friendly is a big one, but it need not be overwhelming.

Difficulties

Administrators might be resistant to incorporate environmental activism into their program for

several reasons. First of all, many people believe that being environmentally responsible is expensive. For example, we know that organic food and hybrid cars cost more than their more heavily-consumed and less sustainable counterparts. While it is true that on a per unit basis many eco-friendly products are more expensive, an adoption of the environmental principles is very cost-effective. Reduced consumption must be at the core of any environmental policy, and that means spending less money. Reusing paper that has been printed on just one side and reducing electricity consumption will certainly save money. In addition, many places offer economic incentives for recycling different materials. Buying only the books, materials and technological equipment required by the program and using them responsibly will also reduce expenses, as will buying things secondhand whenever possible. Furthermore, if the program is housed within a larger institution like university, it might be possible to get funding for environmental initiatives. Many universities have environmental stewardship as one of the components of their mission statement.

Another potential deterrent for the environmental administrator is the pressure to practice what you preach. Simply put, if you encourage environmental activism and awareness in your staff and students, you need to incorporate it into your own behavior. For some people, this might seem quite intimidating. It is important, however, for interested administrators to realize that no one is perfect. Everyone living a “modern” lifestyle is consuming an unsustainable share of the Earth's resources. It is virtually unavoidable. Having said that, gradually raising one's awareness while reducing the harm one does is an admirable goal.

A third difficulty for administrators considering incorporating environmental responsibility into their program is a lack of expertise. Just as teachers may be reluctant to teach content about which they do not have a great deal of knowledge, an administrator might feel ill-prepared for moving his or her program towards environmental stewardship. Again, I would stress the importance of simply making an effort, and gradually increasing both one's knowledge and one's responsibility. To avoid

environmental issues completely because one fears an inability to handle them perfectly is effectively a decision to continue making things worse.

Finally, the greatest resistance preventing administrators from making their program more environmentally responsible may simply be inertia. Change is not easy and, unfortunately, making one's lifestyle or ESL program more eco-friendly takes both time and effort. One must reflect on the effects of one's actions, and decide which changes should be made. This can lead to painful realizations and difficult choices. Ultimately, though, I believe that moving down the path towards environmental responsibility is quite rewarding.

The facts are quite simple. Humans alive today will face increasing repercussions for our environmental negligence over the coming years. Each of us, regardless of our position in society, must decide the role in this that we are going to play. Ignoring the problems does not remove our involvement in them, nor our responsibility for them. Having said that, my purpose in writing this paper is not to convince people to get involved. Instead, I am simply offering some ideas to program administrators who are interested in greening their intensive English program.

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