

## GREENING AN INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAMME

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During the summer of 2006, the Hawaii English Language Program (HELP) began to implement changes in order to become more environmentally responsible. HELP is an intensive English program (IEP) located on the campus of the University of Hawaii. The IEP had approximately 120 students, primarily from Asia. At this IEP, admission was open to all, with approximately 70 percent of the students going on to study at American colleges or universities. An instructor at the IEP, I was asked to undertake the project after writing a class paper about being an environmentally responsible program administrator. Kira Davis, an environmental educator with English teaching experience, joined me on this project.

Initially, we thought we could make substantial improvements in the program's overall environmental responsibility by purchasing greener office supplies. However, after spending time contacting various suppliers, we were unable to make much headway in finding green office supplies in Hawaii. The most substantial change we made was to increase the percentage of post-consumer content in our copy paper. Because the IEP is maintained by a university, purchasing more eco-friendly cleaning supplies, paint or other maintenance materials was not possible.

After a few weeks, we decided to shift our focus to developing educational activities and materials. During the summer, we created a short orientation for teachers, and a two-hour orientation for students. In the student orientation, we introduced students to various environmental issues and made them aware of local resources for greener living. We also created a series of environmentally-themed student activities as a follow-up to the orientation. We changed the program's food purchasing practices, favouring more vegetarian and local options. We also eliminated the need for disposable plates, cups and utensils. Finally, we made several changes in terms of the IEP's resource use and waste disposal. Each of these changes will be discussed in detail below, followed by an evaluation of the success of the project and a discussion of some of the difficulties that we faced. All of the materials that we created as part of the project, along with two podcasts discussing the project are available at: <http://www.ESLetc.com/greening-an-english-program-overview>.

### **Student Orientation**

For the student orientation, students were separated into four groups, each of which was led by an instructor. Our two main goals for the two-hour orientation were to introduce students to a few environmental issues and to give them information to enable them to make environmentally responsible choices. We focused on food purchasing and waste disposal, and we also touched upon electricity consumption, transportation and buying second hand goods. We discussed consumer choice and how our everyday actions affect these issues.

We began the orientation by explaining both how and why we wanted to make the school more environmentally friendly. Next, we gave students a handout with discussion questions and some environmental vocabulary words. These questions dealt with eating, shopping and disposing of waste in environmentally responsible ways, and gave students an opportunity to share their opinions and knowledge. For example, students were asked: "Why is it better to buy local food?" and "How can I recycle my stuff?". Students discussed these questions in groups and then shared their ideas with the class.

Instructors then took students through two more handouts. The first answered the discussion questions and gave some of the reasons behind certain environmentally responsible behaviours. The second handout gave information on local businesses offering eco-friendly goods and services. For example, students were told about a local community supported agriculture program, a few farmers' markets and a couple of nearby natural food stores. The handouts also provided information on waste disposal and recycling. Students were introduced to Freecycle Honolulu and local thrift stores. Finally, information was given about transportation, including nearby bike shops and the public bus system.

The final handout included review activities such as roleplays and discussion questions. The roleplay scenarios asked students to imagine themselves explaining why they were engaged in an eco-friendly behaviour. For example, one asked them to imagine how they would explain the benefits of buying second hand clothes to a sceptical friend while another had them brainstorm possible questions to ask while shopping for the types of food (local, organic, bulk, not genetically modified) that we covered

during the orientation. The handout also had students reflect on the issues and ideas covered in the orientation by sharing their personal experiences with recycling, buying second hand clothes and so on.

The orientation ended with a short field trip. Each instructor took his/her group of students to one of the following nearby locations: a natural foods store, the natural foods section of a supermarket, a thrift store or a farmer's market. Students spent 15 – 30 minutes at their location, and the instructor answered questions as they came up. Students were also encouraged to ask questions of the staff, and to look at labels and signs for vocabulary words that had been covered during the orientation.

### **Friday Activities**

On Fridays, students at the IEP have no classes and instead participate in various other activities. We created several two-day environmentally-themed activities that were offered during weeks four and five of the eight-week term. These included writing and performing an eco-drama; watching and discussing an environmentally-themed movie; reading about, writing about and discussing environmental issues; and a hike.

After the first eight-week term, the Friday activity schedule was restructured and our activities were changed accordingly. On the day of the student orientation, we offered a one-day version of several of the above activities for continuing students. In addition, we added an activity where students read and wrote environmental poetry, and the eco-drama was redesigned as a four-day activity. A brief explanation of each activity follows. Please visit [ESLetc.com](http://ESLetc.com) for more information and for copies of the handouts.

**Eco-Drama** – Students created a play based on the book *Maui, Maui* by Steven Cosgrove. The story deals with overconsumption, resource use and waste. First, students read and discussed the story. They next summarized the story in their own words, decided on roles and began creating a script. A model was provided to assist them with this. After the script was written, students rehearsed their lines. In addition to learning relevant vocabulary words, students spent time working on pronunciation and intonation, taping and listening to their rehearsals. Students then made costumes and props in preparation for their performance at the end of term luncheon.

**Movie with a Message** - Students watched and discussed the film *Princess Mononoke*, a Japanese animation that vividly portrays the struggle between humans and nature. The movie was stopped at several key points to allow for student discussion. In addition, throughout the film students kept track of the good and bad deeds of the various characters on a worksheet. Finally, after the movie was complete, students brainstormed ideas for positive environmental actions and posted their list on the school bulletin board.

**Environmental Readings and Discussion** - Students read articles on a variety of environmental and global issues and discussed them in small groups. The articles were divided by level, but students were encouraged to read whatever interested them. In addition to discussion activities, some of the articles had writing exercises or worksheets associated with them. Some students also chose to freewrite responses to what they read.

**Hike** - Students were taken on a 3 hour hike and learned about local plants and animals. Highlights included sampling strawberry guavas and spotting a Jackson's chameleon.

**Green Poetry** - Students began by reading six poems with environmental or global issues themes. These poems also had structural or content elements that made them relatively clear models for student poetry. For example, *God to a Hungry Child* (Hughes, 2003) is written in the form of a letter from God, while *Two Young Women* (Barry, 2003) tells the story of two women in a series of paired lines, one from each woman's point of view. Student chose one of the poems and discussed it in small groups using questions provided on a handout. Students then wrote their own poems either individually or in groups, using the poem they had selected as a model. Finally, volunteers read their poems aloud to the class. Students were also invited to publish their poems in the school newspaper.

In addition to those listed above, we also created an activity asking students to discuss and create environmentally-themed posters. First, students were shown a variety of eco-themed artwork, choose a piece, and work with a group on interpreting it. They shared their opinions on the picture and discussed the environmental issue it referred to. Students were also encouraged to look at the picture from an artistic point of view, talking about composition, technique, medium and so on. After sharing

their interpretations with the class, students then spent the remaining time creating environmentally-themed artwork of their own. They presented their artwork at the end of the class and, finally, found a place in the school to display it.

### **Food Purchasing and Consumption**

Several of the most successful changes made as part of this project were in the areas of food purchasing and consumption. Knowing that a vegetarian diet is lower impact in terms of both resource use and pollution, we shifted from a meat-heavy menu for our mid-term beach barbecue to one featuring primarily vegetarian dishes. In addition, we found a caterer that used more environmentally responsible ingredients. The vegetables were primarily local, and the meats were all natural. We also started using the same caterer for our teacher meetings.

At the same time, we stopped using disposable plates and utensils. The program director purchased reusable plates and utensils for the student lounge and began using these exclusively at school functions. Prior to this, disposable plates and utensils had been used for all lunch activities. Second hand coffee mugs we purchased from a local thrift store and collected from staff members to replace the styrofoam coffee cups that had previously been provided.

In addition, we asked students and staff members to bring their own plates and utensils to the beach barbecue. Specifically, we encouraged them to bring sealable containers. This eased the dishwashing burden, and also provided a way to distribute the leftovers. Many students and almost all of the staff members brought their own containers. Students that did not bring containers used reusable dishes and utensils provided by the school.

### **Other Changes**

**The Give-Away Shelf** – As a short-term IEP, the school has considerable student turnover. In the interest of both reducing waste and curbing consumption, we set aside space in the student lounge where students could leave items that they no longer wanted so that other students could take and reuse them. We began by collecting non-perishable food, usable household items and school supplies from students and teachers. These items were placed in a large cabinet in the student lounge, and students were invited to take items from there as needed. We hoped that new students would be able to find useful items there, while students who were returning to their home country would donate things instead of throwing them away.

**Staff Resource Use** – A short orientation was conducted at a staff meeting, letting staff members know about the new program-wide push towards environmental responsibility. Staff members were asked to turn off lights and air conditioners between classes. They were also encouraged to make double-sided copies and print on used paper when possible. In fact, many staff members were already doing these things. At the end of the orientation, ideas were given for bringing environmental issues into some of our content-based classes, including those dealing with business and tourism.

**Recycling** – Paper recycling boxes were placed in every office, and emptied regularly. In addition, new containers for plastic bottles and aluminum cans were put in two locations. As part of the new student campus tour, students were informed of the range and location of recycling services offered both at the IEP and on the campus of the university. We also took advantage of a campus-wide initiative to recycle old computers, dropping off two carloads of old computers, printers and monitors.

**Tote Bag** - As part of their welcoming package, students were provided with a cloth tote bag that they were encouraged to use instead of plastic bags while shopping.

### **Suggestions and Obstacles**

First of all, if you are interested in making your English program more environmentally responsible, start with reasonable goals. Aim for progress, not perfection. If you are trying to completely eliminate all of the environmental problems associated with your program, you are likely to give up in frustration.

Initially, we wanted to completely revamp our program's purchasing of office supplies, but we found this to be impossible. Unfortunately, green office supplies are hard to find, and many became prohibitively expensive when we factored in the cost of shipping them to Hawaii. As a result, we shifted our focus to areas that we had a background in, namely materials development and course design.

Overall, the student orientation was successful. Both students and teachers expressed their

appreciation of the information that was presented during orientation. At the same time, we believe that we attempted to do too much in a limited amount of time. The second time we ran the orientation we pared down the materials so as not to overwhelm the students with information. Based on student feedback, it seems food purchasing is the area in which students are most likely to change their behaviour. Perhaps it would be better to focus on that, leaving the other topics on the handout, but out of the orientation itself. Another improvement that could be made to the orientation is making the materials accessible for lower level learners. Due to time constraints, we were unable to make level-specific materials.

For the activities, the biggest problem was a lack of student enthusiasm. Students were willing to engage in passive activities like watching a movie, but seemed resistant to more involved activities. In part, this could have been due to a lack of understanding about what would be expected of them. Most students who did choose more involved activities seemed to feel positively about them afterwards. I believe our main weakness in carrying out the student activities was insufficiently explaining and promoting them.

The giveaway shelf is another area where more promotion and explanation could be beneficial. The initial drive was successful in collecting goods, especially household items. Afterwards, however, few students took anything from the shelf. School supplies were the only popular items. While some students simply may not want to use second hand goods, more could be done to make sure students are aware both of the existence and purpose of the giveaway shelf.

If we had to suggest one place to start, it would be with a green component to the student orientation. Most English programs already have some sort of new student orientation, and adding information about environmentally responsible options is a good first step. Next, having a few green activities throughout the term is a good way to remind students about the issues covered in the orientation. If you are interested in implementing these types of changes and would like to exchange ideas, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Environmental sustainability is becoming an increasing concern in all aspects of society. English programs are no exception. As educators, we need to consider the example that we set for our students and the resources that we make available to them. Looking at our English programs, we can find plentiful opportunities to take positive steps to a more environmentally responsible future.

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