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Communicating Climate Hope 2024

How can linguistic diversity in English language teaching support environmental justice?

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Introduction

- In this poster, I will share a project that combined English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes and Arts in a bilingual school in Brazil;
- Its main objective was to inform Middle School students more about young activists in the Global South and, through their speeches, to research and produce art pieces that would reflect their environmental awareness. *The Bow Seat Awareness Programs* resources helped us in this project;
- This allowed students to work with different English varieties in the classroom.

Methods

- "Many of the world's poorest people live in areas richest in both biodiversity and linguistic diversity" (Romaine, 2008, p. 01);
- Two sociolinguistic studies on native speakers (Labov, 1972, Kerswill, 2003) show how their pronunciation changes according to the prestige of certain English language models. If this bias is found on native speakers, those who speak English as an official language (or even as a foreign language) in the Global South may face similar stigma regarding their accent;
- With that in mind, this project was undertaken trying to answer the following question: How can we bring linguistic and environmental diversity into the classroom?
- Working with an interdisciplinary approach was one way to keep students motivated and engaged.

First Results

This interdisciplinary approach allowed students to reflect about the environment in different ways, from poems/essays to sculptures and painting (the QR codes below have some of the students' work):

Every time the wind blows, by Luca T.

The wind is beautiful and cold;
It makes the leaves fold.

My feeling it bellows,
And my loneliness it grows.

It rolls over the seas
and all oversees.

It comes from trees
directly into the seas.

The wind is nice,
Now read this poem twice.



Sculpture: *One World, One Chance*. By Paola Cruz

Painting: *Is there a fun side to Global Warming?* By Carolina C.



Essay: *The alarming reality of Deforestation*, by Maria Luísa B.

Language and Arts

Connecting linguistic diversity to the environment through art was one of the final stages of the project. As we can see below, students had to create an artwork based on the work of a climate activist from the Global South. Many countries from the Global South have English as an official language, mainly due to violent colonization processes (Mufwene, 2001). Students could research more about the work these people do to protect the environment and connect their findings to art. Below, we highlight Paola Cruz's beautiful research. She chose the Kenyan activist Elizabeth Wanjiru Wathuti:



Climate change [?]
United Nations - Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels and gas.

Climate activist Elizabeth Wathuti's full speech at COP26



More information about Paola's work, which includes an artist statement and a short description of the classroom project, can be found on the conference website and at the art exhibition at UBC.

Final remarks

- Gnerre (1985) once said that "A linguistic variety is "worth" what its speakers are "worth" in society, that is, it is a reflection of the power and authority they have in economic and social relations". This has impacts beyond the linguistic landscape, also affecting the environment. This project sought a way to bring these topics into the English classroom;
- Talking about linguistic diversity is talking about environmental diversity;
- Using an interdisciplinary approach is a good starting point to talk about environmental protection in our classrooms;
- As English is a "global language", it is possible to explore this theme through different perspectives in the EFL classroom.

References

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