

## BREAKING THE ROUTINE: A POSSIBLE NEW TECHNIQUE IN ESP TEACHING

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**Abstract.** *ESP practitioners need to have different skills and competencies so as to be able to show good performances in the classroom. Research skills in finding new ESP materials and methodology awareness are just some of the important requirements that are essential in the teaching practice of ESP practitioners who therefore should constantly work on expanding their knowledge in order to develop themselves professionally. Although teaching ESP is not always easy, the learning process should never be made difficult for students. On the contrary, it should be an enjoyable experience which will motivate students, arouse their critical thinking and make them reveal their creative side. That is why it is necessary to refresh the learning environment now and then in order to create more ideal working conditions both for teachers and their students. ESP practitioners need to be ready to embrace novelties in teaching methods and techniques and search for original study materials which will be inspiring for the students. This paper aims to present one such case when novelty has been introduced in the classroom of Environmental protection students at the tertiary level of education. A small scale in-class project, as it turned out, had a big impact on learning the language and proved to be beneficial for the learners, thus qualifying for one teaching experience that should be shared with other practitioners.*

**Key words:** *innovation, technique, ESP, in-class project presentations*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Most ESP practitioners are aware that ESP teaching implies not only constant search for up-to-date authentic professionally-oriented materials to be presented and practiced in class, but also great readiness to bring innovations in the classroom in respect to teaching methods and activities which will prove to be more efficient for achieving success in the learning process and the learning outcomes. In his book on *Constructivist Blended Learning Approach to ESP* Tarnopolsky (Tarnopolsky 2012) gives a suggestion for a set of activities which are particularly handy for application in the ESP environment, but this list should by no means be considered final. Namely, ESP teachers must be innovative to re-design, modify, adapt and expand these pre-set activities to make them more suitable for their classroom and the specific needs of their students.

The main mission behind the constructivist approach in ESP teaching is first and foremost to enable students to develop their professional communication skills in the target language. To achieve this goal, it is advisable that students are exposed to a wide variety of role-model authentic resources which, if used in a creative way, may be of great assistance in reaching not only accuracy and fluency in speaking but progress in other skills as well. Variety and creativity thus prove to be essential principles in the process of ESP teaching, as linguists (Hutchinson and Waters 1990) are trying to point

out. It appears that only when the students are provided with plentitude of exercises and activities which will occupy their minds and motivate them to rely on their cognitive and language capacities, the path towards well-defined, accurate and reliable student language skills and competencies will be paved.

Many of the indispensable activities that Tarnopolsky recommends, such as simulations, role-plays, project tasks, case studies, discussions and presentations actually reveal different techniques in the background which can be used to approach authentic materials. The truth is that ESP practitioners must be very careful not only when selecting teaching materials but also when employing different techniques to present them to students. At the same time, the material must be stimulating enough for the learners' thinking process but also motivating enough to make students wish to practice their skills in class thus developing and perfecting them. If the selected authentic material is not given the real purpose in the classroom by ESP teachers, then it cannot be useful for students either.

To introduce novelty in the ESP classroom for the students at the department of Environmental Protection at the College of Applied Technical Sciences, a special in-class project was devised, which is, based on its results, believed to be one example of good practice to be shared with other ESP practitioners. To give a thorough account of the in-class project task, first the concept of the class organization will be outlaid and then the outcomes of the class will be elaborated on.

## 2. NOVELTY MEANS MORE ENTHUSIASMS IN THE ESP CLASSROOM

As an English language teaching assistant at the College, I decided to make a kind of experiment in the classroom and organize a non-typical class in ESP offering students a whole new concept of learning the language. This experiment was carried out solely with the idea to check how the students will use the knowledge and skills they already possess in a new learning environment, thus gaining one valuable practical experience which will become an integrative part of their overall language performance and competencies.

According to the timetable of classes, students have two practical classes of English each week. Usually, there is a 15-minute break between the classes, but this time there was no break since continuity of work had to be ensured. The students were divided in 4 groups of seven and each group had its own text to work on. For this occasion four texts were selected from *An Introduction to Global studies* (Campbell, Mackinnon and Stevens 2010) which has a whole chapter devoted to current issues in Natural Environment. One-page-long texts on *Desertification*, *Air Pollution*, *Disappearing Habitat and Species* and *Electronic Waste* were chosen to allow for the variety of content in class and thus avoid boredom.

The students had experience in reading professional texts of a similar kind before; the only difference was that in previous classes usually only one professional text was dealt with at the level of the entire class. Now each group had a task to prepare a presentation about the topic they received. Good task division was crucial for the success of each team. Two students from the group were responsible for presenting the material orally, two of them had to write five questions about the text, one person was in charge of finding new lexical items in the text, one had to translate the most interesting part of the text from English into Serbian, and one acted as a group secretary whose task was to monitor the work of others and offer assistance when needed. The students first had 5 minutes to agree upon their roles in the group. I did not wish to assign the roles to students because I wanted them to decide which skills they would like to be working on most of the time and which

role, whether a more active or passive one was the most suitable for them. Once each member of the group knew what his/her task was, the preparations could start.

Students were allotted 15 to 20 minutes to prepare their team presentation which was to be given to the rest of the class. This meant that all students had to be actively involved in the presentations of their peers since they were expected to answer the questions about the topics they heard, discuss new lexical items and finally give their own comments on the performance and competencies of individual students. Simple instructions were given. Presenters were required to split the text in half and get ready to retell their part of the text without the help of the paper. These students were told not to memorize the text but to use their own language constructions in order to make their oral presentation as close to the original as possible. The students who were preparing the questions were told to read the text carefully, find the most important information in it and write questions based on these crucial pieces of information. In case their peers could not provide the answers, they had to be ready to answer the questions themselves. The student searching for the new vocabulary items was asked to find new professional terms in the text which were to be presented on the board and explained to their peers. He/she was also given a professional dictionary which to refer to. The translator was also allowed to use the dictionary and had to read the translation to the rest of the class. The last but not the least, the team secretary was responsible for the smooth running of the presentation and the accompanying activities, which required good organization of all the group members. The result of such task division was that all the students were requested to read their text and listen to their peers and almost all of them could practice their speaking and/or writing skills through one type of activity or another.

During this stage of the class, all the students showed great motivation to participate in team work and each student put all efforts to do his/her part of the task properly in order to represent his/her team in the best possible way. In general, students liked having the feeling of individual autonomy over the task that was delegated to them and showed great level of creativity when presenting the results of their work.

After the time for preparation elapsed, the groups started presenting their topics. Each group had 15 minutes to present the material, ask the questions, introduce new professional words and give an illustration of the translated part of the text. All the group members were asked to step out in front of the class, wherefrom it was much more convenient to address their peers, ask questions or write lexical items on the board. It was really amazing to see how the observing students enjoyed what was being presented. They listened to the presentations with great interest and attention and were very good at answering the questions. This quiz-segment of the class was especially interesting to the student-examiners since they were given freedom to ask questions to peers of their own choice. Generally speaking, students felt very comfortable in communication with each other and they seemed to treat each other with great respect.

In the end of the class, the outcome was that all the students heard what native speaker professionals think about four different topics on Environmental protection and they significantly expanded their word banks, being provided with new professional terms and their definitions which they were asked to copy from the board into their notebooks. They also had the opportunity to practice skills, including translation skills, assist each other in the process of learning and be not just passive observers but active participants in different class activities building a cooperative team-spirit atmosphere. Moreover, students embarked on a team project which is very close to real-life experiences which are to be encountered in the world of professionals. What the students felt very good about was actually assuming the roles

of professionals in Environmental protection who could inform the public about important environmental issues and convey their knowledge for the benefit of their listeners.

The remaining time of the class was used for peer-to-peer feedback as well as teacher-to-student feedback when it was decided which team was the most successful and which individuals were the best performers. Also, I used the opportunity to finish the class with error-correction. For their homework assignment, the students were asked to write a couple of sentences about their text using the new vocabulary, if-sentences and passive voice constructions. Since the entire class was devoted to the content and vocabulary items, it was found useful to analyze the texts from the grammatical point of view as well to further practice the study material.

The overall impression of the students after the class was very positive. They expressed their true satisfaction with the class which they had enjoyed immensely. A high level of interest, creativity, involvement and devotion to the tasks was not hard to notice. That led me to believe that the class achieved its mission to motivate students, draw their attention to important professional topics, provide them with a new, fresh and exciting learning environment, make them reach tangible learning outcomes and above all “encourage a sense of progress and achievement” (Tarnopolsky 2012, 15) in them.

### 3. CONCLUSION

This kind of class is certainly not the type of class which should be organized on a regular basis. However, the concept behind it - to make tuition more interesting, active and creative from time to time can find its practical use in the teaching process. These kinds of outlets are needed both to teachers and students in order to avoid cliché in the classroom and bring in new and fresh energy. However, this class would not have its real value or purposefulness if it was not followed by more intensive exercises and practical activities based on the texts that were dealt with. This kind of practice is necessary if the study material is going to be learned and internalized properly.

After the class, students got one assignment, but the possibilities to recycle the language items used in class are endless. Students can be asked, for instance, to write short summaries of their peers' texts, they can do open-close tests, or fill-in the gap exercises where they will be asked to apply the newly acquired vocabulary, they can translate sentences from their mother tongue into English using the new words, match new words with their definitions, paraphrase sentences from the text or construct sentences with the given language items. Learning requires a lot of repetition, but in order to avoid boredom in classes and loss of interest in ESP, students should be engaged in such mind-stirring activities and be given a chance to take part in classes, such as the one being exemplified in this paper. For this purpose, innovation is always welcome.

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