



# Episode 6: Global schooling

## Transcript

### The Climate Connection

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# Episode six: Global schooling

You can find the show notes and link to the podcast at <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/podcast>.

**Duration: 51:25**

**Quote:** Language Education is more than just about teaching language in this case English, it is part of a broader education.

**Quote:** Even as an adult, I had no idea of the extent of my ignorance regarding climate science.

**Quote:** I still have to take banana peels out of paper recycling bins

**Quote:** You know, actually we can only, each of us, only do little things, but if we all do little things together it's a big thing.

**Sting:** The British Council presents the Climate Connection. Climate Action in language education. This is Episode Six: Global Schooling.

**Chris Sowton:** Hello, and welcome to the Climate Connection, a British Council podcast focusing on climate action in language education. I'm your host, Chris Sowton. This is Episode Six: Global Schooling, in which we look specifically at educational institutions, and what they can do to promote climate literacy.

Our first guest this week is Asha Alexander.

Asha Alexander is the principal at GEMS The Kindergarten Starter in Dubai, and has more than thirty years' experience of K12 educational provision. She is also a UN certified Climate Change Leader, the only one in the United Arab Emirates, and her school is a regional and global beacon of good environmental practices. Asha, welcome to the podcast.

**Asha Alexander:** Thank you, Chris, it's a pleasure to be here.

**Chris Sowton:** So, Asha, when I first got in touch with you to invite you on this podcast, one of the first things I noticed on your email sign off, it said that you were not only the principal at GEMS Kindergarten Starters, but also the Executive Leader for Climate Change. Could you perhaps begin by explaining your job description and what it consists of in this role?

**Asha Alexander:** Around two years ago, I saw an article in the newspapers which said that the UN CC:Learn and EduCCate Global in the UK were offering certification to enable teachers to become climate change leaders and climate change teachers and it intrigued me. I saw a possibility of making my school the very first in the world to have a climate change teacher in every classroom. And so I must tell you Chris, I have 162 classrooms with 5,500 children, and not only did my teaching staff do the course but I had every single staff member in the school: from the accounts office, to the front of house, to the manager



of school operations doing the course. What followed was that the EduCCate Global team came with the Hammersmith and Fulham Borough council's leadership to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, a very unlikely place for climate change action, and The Guardian followed them and they covered the story for about a week. So I had the leadership visiting classes, we held a climate conference, leaders from the United Arab Emirates were present, people from the Knowledge and Human Development Authority, our CEO Dino Varkey and several others who believe that climate literacy was very important. That was followed by an invitation by Angus Mackay to attend COP25 of Madrid in Spain. And while there, I realised very few educators are leading this change, and I wanted educators to be there at COP26 leading the change and ensuring that climate literacy is embedded in schools. So I came and shared that with our founder and chairman Mr Sunny Varkey but he said: why only you for your school? Why not for GEMS education and we have around 50 schools in this region, and more than 100 across the world? And he said: I'm going to give you this title, which you see on my email signature

**Chris Sowton:** And that's how you got there, what a fantastic journey. You said it was quite unusual that you were doing this but you seem to see this wasn't unusual, in a way. Why were you so passionate about this? Why did you see this particular issue as being as such crucial importance to your learners and to teachers?

**Asha Alexander:** That's why you have leaders, Chris, you have to have a vision, and I can see things coming. I transitioned from a textbook reading curriculum to a digital curriculum nine years ago, much before the pandemic. And so when the pandemic came, my teachers were well equipped and the transition was seamless. The signals for climate action are there, there is so much that's going on around. There was a glacial burst in the Himalayas very recently in Uttarakhand, a couple of years ago there were floods which inundated large parts of the state called Kerala from where I hail, and I have never seen such things. And very recently I've seen Texas having a power outage because of the drop in temperatures because of the storms. These signs are everywhere, and we think we are beyond this, we think it will be something that we'll come out of, it's very temporary, but it keeps happening all over the world. And I began to look at it once I had done this course, I realised we're very ill-informed, we're not literate in the sense that I want us to be, even as an adult, and I'm actually 60 in a few days. I had no idea of the extent of my ignorance regarding climate science, and I didn't want that too much.

**Chris Sowton:** Did you find your, so you said in your, in your introduction there, that the UAE was a very unusual place to be focusing on this issue. Could you say a little bit more about that? Did you get some sort of pushback from some of the parents at your school and thinking why are you focusing on this particular issue?

**Asha Alexander:** No, I think it's a perception I'm talking about, because worldwide people think this is a oil-rich emirate. There is no reason why they should be talking or they are talking about sustainability when actually, they're largely responsible for the carbon footprint, but I don't think it's a time to apportion blame to anyone. I think it's everyone's responsibility. So it's not about the developed countries, or the developing countries, it's about everyone's responsibility as a citizen of the planet, to take informed and responsible action for mitigating climate change, and that's what I mean by climate literacy, I want children to know and assess scientifically-credible information, they should be able to have a vocabulary about climate science which they can communicate in a meaningful manner. And when they are able to understand and create awareness, they should be able to take action to mitigate climate change, and these things will not happen unless you are taught it



in lessons in schools and model that by people in society, make our students' voices be heard, and there's nothing better to inspire others than hearing students talk about how they affected changes in their schools and in their communities.

**Chris Sowton:** Absolutely, and I know at your school and your schools that you're involved with your students are very active outside of the classroom as well in terms of taking action, with regards to climate change. Could you perhaps share a little bit about those initiatives?

**Asha Alexander:** First we committed to planting 15,000 trees every single year. And that gave children the target, and I don't know why we conjured up 15,000 but I thought, 5,000 children if each of them was to plant three trees, we would have 15,000 by the end of year. But within two months, we had finished planting the 15,000 trees, in fact they were engaged with us, and they were engaged with 40 organisations from Dubai, who were not involved with teaching. They all came together and I know everybody wants to do something, but nobody has a platform or a place where they can go about planting trees. And so I began this, but during this pandemic, I found that it's difficult to take children out to plant trees so we took that plant and legacy as we called it, it's called PAL, for short. And it's global now, we're asking children all over the world, plant a tree every Monday. Monday is for mother nature, so there are children planting in Africa, in India, in Bangladesh, in different parts of the world and Australia, and they send us a picture every Monday, of them planting a tree, and we're keeping that alive. And these are simple things that every school can do.

**Chris Sowton:** And what feedback do you get from your students when they're doing this, what do they say to you on, on Mother Nature Monday?

**Asha Alexander:** They are completely passionate about it, you can talk to any child in my school right from kindergarten to grade five, which is our highest grade at the moment, everyone has greened their own campus, they've greened their community around, and they are really passionate ambassadors for change. You will see that they've acquired a vocabulary of words like biodegradable in kindergarten and they talk with understanding, they have learned words like composting because they're actually composting and they're using that to grow vegetables in the school. So, children's impact is not just changed behaviours, their thinking skills have improved, they become critical thinkers and problem solvers, whether it's using technology and robotics to come up with a solution, or whether it is finding a solution for natural problem that's happening around, they are transferring those skills to their academic learning in class. And in order to raise awareness, they become fluent speakers of the language. Children, we are not native speakers of English, and yet, all children in school use this language with great facility now, because they've got to convince other people, they've got to teach others.

**Chris Sowton:** So they are using that language for a specific purpose and as we know that's when you learn best, but you also, have you also seen then your children become ambassadors for what they say to their parents or to their brothers and sisters and other members of their families?

**Asha Alexander:** Yes, they're not only our ambassadors to the parents, they've actually gone into offices around the school, they've done a survey of what's the most wasted food item in hotels around our school, and they've done a survey and they've submitted a report and they've advised those hotel owners that this is what you could do, and they carried this message to people, far outside of the student community. And then when we started twinning with schools across the world. At the moment we are twinning with around 13



schools in six different countries we have Malawi, we have Australia, we have Oman, Bangladesh, India, UAE, several countries where children are teaching other children, and there is nothing better than a student voice convincing somebody else what it means to save the planet, why they should take action and children are very receptive. And we are tracking the carbon footprint in all these schools. It's my hope that in a year's time, we will have a hundred schools, with whom we can train, and that would be in at least 25 different countries so that's the gauntlet I have thrown, and I hope they'll pick it up.

**Chris Sowton:** Yeah, and I love the idea as well that you're saying of the group of seven-year-olds marching into a hotel and talking to the manager there about that and I mean, it's very difficult then to push back against that if you're hearing it from the children's mouths about, and this is backed up by scientific data and evidence and all those sorts of things, it's a very, very powerful message

**Asha Alexander:** You know, there may be naysayers around the world, because you don't want those things to happen. You don't want to face up to the reality of how detrimental, it can be, and climate change doesn't know any borders, just as the pandemic has shown us, you know, we're all connected in a way that if it's going to impact one part of the world, even through floods, or lack of water or clean air to breathe, all of us will be impacted

**Chris Sowton:** Do you see then, that you mentioned about the Covid pandemic, do you see that there's an opportunity now to build on that, like you say your school was already prepared because of moving to a digital curriculum in terms of teaching remotely. Do you think there is an opportunity now to use what has been learned from the Covid pandemic and use that positively to address the climate crisis?

**Asha Alexander:** Yes, I see an opportunity, the first thing is the signals are everywhere, the signals of climate change are everywhere, and everyone's waiting for governments to take action. It's not just a top-down approach, it has to be a bottom-up one. While the government and policies are waiting to change. I have only one life, I have only one go as a principal in this school. I need to do my best while I'm here, to make the changes that I wish to see. And in the long run when we begin to see impact, some governments will take action.

**Chris Sowton:** Absolutely. And just finally, Asha, if you could just talk a little bit about the language learning aspect of climate change is there anything else that you could say about that how your children's language skills, or language awareness, have developed as a result of this additional climate literacy, which you've introduced

**Asha Alexander:** When you give children some project to be engaged in when they really are passionate about it. They'll seek out the vocabulary, they will learn words, they will be using it every day because in our school they compost the waste, they take the material they use it as fertilisers, we talk about organic fruits and vegetables. They talk about carbon footprint and global warming and the need for fresh air and oxygen, and this is coming because this is not just done during the science lesson, it happens during English, it happens during math, it's integrated in the curriculum, and by giving children a chance to use their voices to convince others, a jury or roadshow, or in writing a story about climate change. Now, the children who wrote stories we put them together from different parts of the world and we call it The Climate Diaries and it's published on Amazon. I think that excited the children. Children are becoming illustrators and storytellers and they are able to give us different perspectives of climate change in their countries. So we're going to keep



that series alive, and we're going to keep inviting stories from children what better way to develop language, than allow children's voices to be heard, to write it, and I'm actually looking at audiobooks now where children are going to be reading out their stories, because this is what language should be used for, to express your thoughts and ideas, to give an opinion, to convince people, to persuade them. And this is the way language is growing. My children when I came into the school were not native speakers, we were speaking in broken phrases, now you won't find that even in kindergarten, they are speaking with fluency and confidence, because we've given them something they're passionate about and they're using language to express that passion

**Chris Sowton:** And importantly people are listening to them.

**Asha Alexander:** Yes.

**Chris Sowton:** Lovely, Asha, thank you very much for your time.

Thanks to Asha for her time. You can find out more about her work in climate literacy in this episode's show notes, which you can download at [www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection](http://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection).

**Vox pop:** I am a secondary school English teacher from Guinea Bissau. With my students, I planted trees in the region of Guinea Bissau. We're also talking about recycling bottles and plastic. And we do it yourself in house, with scissors, paper, plastic bags, bottles, cardboard, and paints.

**Chris Sowton:** At the crossroads of central and southeast Europe, Croatia is a country of around four million people. As we learn in today's From the Field, its attitude towards recycling and the environment has been somewhat mixed. But in modern Croatia, there are many schools – and programmes such as the Green Standard Schools initiative – which are helping to change that.

### **From the Field:**

**Josip:** Hello. I am Josip Sobin, CEO of Jantar International House in Split, Croatia. My school is a member of the Green Standard Schools initiative, an accreditation scheme for language schools that can demonstrate the highest level of commitment towards environmental protection.

With more than 1,500 students receiving their language education at our school every year, we believe it is our responsibility to play our part in the process of modifying their behaviour. I believe it is our duty to implement environmental topics into our programs at all levels.

We started the process of transforming our business into a more environmentally sustainable one many years ago. We introduced recycling and waste separation efforts at our premises. We did what we could with our infrastructure, in terms of reducing water consumption, in terms of reducing energy consumption, eliminating single-use plastics at our school and so on. More recently, we started working on systematic integration of environmental topics into our syllabi. But still, even in my own school, where we have higher than average population in terms of education, I still have to take banana peels out of paper recycling bins.



**Iva:** My name is Iva Mestrovic, I've been working here at Jantar IH Split school for about seven years now. I was learning languages at Jantar before that, and after graduating and completing my internship I got a job as an English and Croatian teacher here. Personally, I care a lot about the environment and sustainable practices. And I find, including environmental issues into our day to day work, and our lessons highly important. I truly believe that everyone can make a difference, and that learning about sustainability can help us change our mindset into a more mindful one and add more meaning to our lives. I am an advocate of Content and Language Integrated Learning, which refers to teaching other subjects through a foreign language. We often include this method into our lessons and one better topic to cover many subjects than environmentalism. Depending on the level, teachers can include many project based activities into their lessons, which will improve students' vocabulary, enhance their ability to discuss ecological issues, develop their creativity and critical thinking, and of course, help them in becoming more eco-friendly.

**Josip:** I first saw the importance of environmental sustainability back in 1999 when I crossed the Atlantic Ocean and went to college in the United States. Although the war had finished in Croatia in 1995, the country was consumed by hatred and nationalism. Politics was corrupt. We were as far away from democracy as any country can possibly be. When I arrived on my campus, I found that it had its own wind turbine, solar panels all over the place and a composting station. I didn't even know what compost was until I came to Northland. I remember when I came back to Croatia in 2008 and immediately started separating my waste – all of my friends laughed at me. Almost a decade had passed and nothing had changed in the mindset of people here. No-one tried to change it, not the government, not the educational system.

**Ante:** My name is Ante Demo and as Director of Studies, it is my job to manage curriculum and syllabus for each of our language teaching programmes. Unlike Josip, I made a move in the opposite direction going from Canada or North America to Croatia. I was brought up in Montreal, Canada, even though I have Croatian roots Canada has shaped my mindset quite differently comparing to a native Croatian. Being brought up in Canada, elementary environmental issues are something you learn at school, do at home, and is required by law. In Croatia, even the most basic environmental habits are practically non-existent. In part, this can be attributed to poor organisation at a regional or national level, as most towns and neighbourhoods do not even have the basic conditions for waste separation, let alone other things. The other factor is most certainly the lack of education.

**Iva:** Everyone is talking about 21st century skills these days, and implementing them into their syllabus or their curriculum, but most institutions are still failing to understand what these 21st century skills really are, and how to make them a part of their educational programmes. At Jantar International House Split, we believe that building a global citizen is the most important aspect of the 21st century education, and environmental sustainability is the most certainly one of the most important topics of this aspect.

**Karlo:** My name is Karlo, and I've been a student at the Jantar for many years. Today we should all be minding our environment, as it is the only one we have. Many people are still insensibly unaware and don't know how to contribute to saving our planet. This is where education comes in, because when people are properly guided, they understand their surroundings, and most importantly themselves. Jantar is an excellent path to guide people towards language learning, which is a key component in having a conscious way of thinking



about all global issues surrounding us these days.

**Josip:** It makes me happy that my school recognises the need to educate our students about environmental sustainability and provides me with an opportunity to make a change myself, and I think we are on the right track as every new generation Croatia is changing for the better when it comes to important issues such as this one.

**Chris Sowton:** There's no such thing as just English, but rather many different forms of the language spoken across the world. In this episode's Green Glossary, we explore Indian English, Filipino English, and New Zealand English and examine the words which they use to talk about the climate emergency.

**Sting** The Green Glossary. The Green Glossary. Brought to you by Oxford University Press

## The Green Glossary

Hello, my name is Danica Salazar and I am World English Editor for Oxford Languages.

I research and write dictionary entries for words used in localised varieties of English spoken throughout the world. These varieties are spoken by people of diverse cultural backgrounds in a wide range of sociolinguistic contexts. Varieties of English such as Australian English, Canadian English, Caribbean English, Indian English, and Singapore English, among many others, have their own distinctive vocabulary that we cover in our dictionaries of current English, as well as the historical *Oxford English Dictionary*.

I myself am a native speaker of Philippine English—the variety of English spoken in the Philippines, an island nation in Southeast Asia where English is an official language. The Philippines is one of the nations of the world most susceptible to the worst effects of global warming. In 2015, it chaired the Climate Vulnerable Forum, or CVF, during the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, also known as COP21.

The CVF is a partnership formed by countries that are disproportionately affected by climate change, and in his keynote remarks before the Forum, former Philippine president Benigno Aquino, Jr. stated that no single country could solve the climate crisis on its own, and that an effective response called for a global *bayanihan*. This word — *bayanihan* — was added to the *OED* in 2016, just a year after COP21. It is a borrowing from a Philippine language, Tagalog, which refers to a traditional Filipino system of mutual assistance in which the members of a community work together to accomplish a difficult task. It is also used to signify a spirit of civic unity and cooperation among Filipinos. It is with this spirit of *bayanihan* that Filipinos help each other face the natural catastrophes caused by the climate emergency, and in his CVF speech, Aquino was invoking this core Filipino value in calling for greater international cooperation in responding to this global threat.

A few years later, another world leader, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, also spoke about the climate crisis at another UN event. In 2018, in her opening speech for Climate Week at the United Nations in New York, Ardern proposed the Māori concept of *kaitiakitanga* as the key to combating climate change. *Kaitiakitanga* is a loanword a word adopted from one language (the donor language) and incorporated into another language without translation. In the Māori language, *kaitiakitanga* means guardianship, which Ardern





described as ‘a responsibility of care’ placed upon humans ‘for the environment in which we live’.

Under international law, there is no enforceable legal requirement for states to protect the natural environment. However, the concept of human trusteeship of the Earth is central to the Māori worldview. It is increasingly being used by the international community to emphasise the duty of states to collaborate in preserving our ecological systems, in an effort to convince governments to take this duty seriously and accept it as a legal obligation. *Kaitiakitanga* is not yet in the OED, but its increasing use in discussions of environmental and resource management means that it may soon find its way into the dictionary.

The lexicon of global varieties of English is characterized by the presence of loanwords such as *bayanihan* and *kaitiakitanga*. In multilingual contexts where English is spoken alongside other native languages, the borrowing of words from these languages into English is a natural consequence of such sustained language contact. These loanwords are typically used to name objects or convey concepts that are specific to a particular language community. This includes indigenous plants and animals, local food, clothing, and other cultural artefacts, and of course, words like *bayanihan* and *kaitiakitanga* which express native traditions, values and norms.

As we have seen in previous episodes, most of the terminology of climate change originates in the language of Western science. However, it is now becoming clear how important it is to include other perspectives in the global climate change messaging. A recent study carried out in India by Climate Outreach, a Europe-based specialist in climate change communications, and Climate Action Network International, a global network of over a thousand non-governmental organizations, highlights this. The report shows that Indian communities do not respond well to climate change terminology from the West – terms such as *dirty energy* and *climate justice*.

These terms are poorly understood, even when translated into native languages, and mean little to the daily lives of the members of these communities. Climate change is not felt or understood in India as it is in the West, and these differences in viewpoint must be taken into account when choosing words to use when trying to engage people in the climate discussion. For example, the study found that when trying to make Indians more enthusiastic about renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydro—called *hydel* in Indian English—describing them as environmentally friendly alternatives to coal is not enough.

Instead, it is much more effective to frame them as characteristic of *jugaad*, a particularly Indian way of flexible problem-solving that uses limited resources in an innovative way. Added to the *OED* in 2017, *jugaad* is a borrowing from Hindi that was originally used in English beginning in the mid-1990s to mean a makeshift car built from cheap materials. The term subsequently developed a figurative sense, referring to a distinctly Indian adaptability and self-sufficiency. Unlike language copied from the West, this concept resonates with Indians and is likely to encourage their cooperation.

When proposing solutions to environmental problems, we should also be sensitive to the socioeconomic situation of each country. In developed countries, for instance, the eradication of single-use plastics is seen as something that ordinary people can do by simply making a lifestyle change in favour of sustainable product packaging. However, in



countries such as India and the Philippines, a serious plastic waste crisis is being made worse by these countries' *sachet economies* or *sachet culture*. Millions of people can only afford to buy products such as shampoo, laundry detergent, and cooking oil when sold to them in small, cheap, non-biodegradable packaging called a *sachet*, a word we've found to be more frequently used in these countries.

However, local communities are now finding their own solutions, as in the Philippines, where people are increasingly turning to *refill stations* in zero-waste *sari-sari stores*, or small neighbourhood stores selling a variety of goods. This is nothing new. Before the introduction of disposable sachets, this was how people generally bought everyday domestic products. As a child, I remember often going to the sari-sari store near our house with my little glass bottle, ready to be filled by the storekeeper with the cooking oil my mother asked me to get. It looks like we are now going back to these sustainable habits of the past.

Civic unity and cooperation, a strong sense of responsibility for the environment, innovative and flexible problem-solving, sustainable practices – these are all crucial for meeting the challenges of the climate emergency. As demonstrated by the language that they use – and the words which have found a home in English – these ideas are already part of the culture of various communities across the English-speaking world.

**Chris Sowton:** In our second interview this week, we talk to two ELT professionals with wide and varying experiences of working in English language institutions.

Rose Aylett is a freelance teacher trainer as well as the coordinator of IATEFL's Global Issues Special Interest Group, an organisation focussing on global issues such as human rights, equality, sustainable development and the climate crisis. Beccy Wigglesworth is the director member services and client experience at International House World Organisation, a global network of over 160 affiliated language schools in 52 countries. Welcome to the podcast today.

**Rose and Beccy:** Thank you. Lovely to be here.

**Chris Sowton:** So if we could begin, Beccy, could you outline to us International House's environmental sustainability scheme? How it came about and what it's trying to achieve?

**Beccy Wigglesworth:** We were really aware over the last year or so that there are lots of issues around the world affecting different communities, whether it's deforestation, loss of natural habitats, pollution in the air, pollution in the sea, plastic in the oceans, or the global warming that we hear about all the time, rising sea levels. And these are kind of big topics that are affecting the whole world and they kind of seem a bit daunting sometimes like, you know, God, how can I affect that, what can I, one person do to change, or we, you know, the rising sea levels? But we're really positive and, you know, confident that if everybody in the world does something, even if it's a little thing, then together that contributes to a big impact all over the world. And we know that we're dealing with, in educating students, and a lot of the students we educate are young people and these are the people who are going to be affected in the years to come, much more by climate change than, you know, the old fogies of us. So when we thought about how can we encourage our schools to do something, how can we frame this for them, getting over that problem of: it's quite daunting, I don't know what I can do led us to develop a kind of structured framework of actions that are achievable for any school to do in any context, no matter where they are in the world,



no matter what sort of students they deal with, we tried to frame it in a really positive way. So these are six positive things that schools can do. So it doesn't seem like it's all just, like, telling them off like, you mustn't do this, you mustn't travel as much, you mustn't, you know, use so much electricity mustn't do that. Sometimes environmentalism seems a bit negative and, you know, we've got to stop doing what we're doing and crawl in a hole and actually that's not realistic, I don't think

**Chris Sowton:** Can you give us some examples, Beccy, of some of these positive actions that are in the framework?

**Beccy Wigglesworth:** The positive things we can do about educating students so adding things into the curriculum, adding things into summer school: they're putting lessons on about why the environment is necessary, what can be done, encouraging sustainable behaviour. So encouraging students to recycle, putting bins in different places, there's something about being more involved in your local community because all of theory on environmental sustainability as is if you look after your local community, and whether that's a cat and dog home, or whether it's an environmental thing then, then you have more of a stake and you're more likely to act in a sustainable way, more generally. You can set sustainable policies for your suppliers. And I really like that one because all you have to do as a school is say to your supplier, whether it's a publisher you buy books from or whether it's the taxi company that ferries your students from the airport if you study abroad. All you have to do is say, before I sign a contract with you, I want to see your environmental policy. And that's all you have to do. It's kind of a simple thing, it doesn't take much effort, doesn't take much time on the school's behalf, but it gets into the accepted practice that every company should have that, and that's a really good thing. So those are sorts of positive actions. We all know that part of being a human these days has a detrimental effect on the environment so there are actions to take around reducing that negative impact we have on the environment, So reducing travel so whether that's local travelling your community, for example, you know, some schools have started carpooling for their parents to drive their kids to school so they're reducing travel, or whether it's reducing international travel if it's study abroad in schools where you can't, where that's part of your business model, you can offset the negative aspects of that, that's carbon offsetting. There's reducing energy consumption, just those simple straightforward things like, you know, turning off the lights, having low energy lights, having switched off the coffee machines and the printers overnight, so they're not on standby. All of those standard things we need to do. Reducing consumables, reducing single use plastics, recycling where you can, reducing water consumption so they're in toilets and hand basins, if schools have gardens, using rainwater to water the gardens, things like that. And where schools move buildings, maybe they're opening a new school somewhere, maybe they're opening new accommodation premises, and part of the decision process of buying or renting that premises should be the environmental footprint of the premises so, you know, how well insulated is it? All that sort of thing.

**Chris Sowton:** And when schools meet these criteria, they can get a Protecting Our Planet badge.

**Beccy Wigglesworth:** Yeah that's right, yeah.

**Chris Sowton:** Could you say a little bit about what that is? What that means and perhaps give an example of a, of a school in your network and what they did to achieve that?



**Beccy Wigglesworth:** So where schools do demonstrate to us that they can meet, you know, most of those, a range of those, we award them this badge. And the reason for having that badge is is an encouragement, you know, come on, just try and do it and that's just a little more of a push to get them to do it, and the benefit to the whole network of that is that then we share the information. We communicate, we say, oh this school over here is doing this, it's got this summer school which is all about being a global citizen, you know that's good idea, other people could do that as well. It's about keeping the conversation open, prompting people with good ideas, oh I could do that, so I could add that into my curriculum, I could do that, oh I could suggest that to my publisher and, you know, insist they have that policy, things like that.

**Chris Sowton:** Thank you, Beccy. Rose if I could turn to you now. First of all, could I just ask you to give a little bit of background information about who GISIG are, and then to say a little bit about what your members think about the climate crisis? Why is it of such importance to language education and whether some of the ideas that Beccy has mentioned are relevant in the context that you're working with your members in?

**Rose Aylett:** GISIG which is short for the IATEFL Global Issues Special Interest Group. It's one of several special interest groups that make up IATEFL, we've got a really diverse membership of English language teachers, some teacher trainers, academic managers, materials writers working all over the world, some in state educational systems, some in private language schools. I think the one thing that unites all of our members probably is the belief that language education is more than just about teaching language in this case, English, it's part of a broader education. Teaching English is probably just one of our roles as educators, so we should be preparing critical global citizens, and students who are really interested in taking an active and positive role in the world. Environmental and climate related issues have always been really important to our members, I don't think that that concern amongst our membership has changed today, if anything it's become even more urgent. So the climate crisis continues to be a really central theme amongst our members.

**Chris Sowton:** And have you seen perhaps something that's moved on, or changed since, as I say 25 years ago and when GISIG was started, that environmental justice is now very much embedded within wider ideas of, of social justice as well. Is that something that, that you're seeing in GISIG?

**Rose Aylett:** Yeah, for all our members, the work that they do in the classroom is kind of like a form of activism if you like, they're interested in pursuing social or environmental justice and that is part of what they do and they want to, as teachers and as citizens of the world, create a better future for their students and for everyone, including the planet. We need to believe that teachers can make a difference, however small that difference might be. Actually at the GISIG 25th birthday party last year Alan Maley, quoted Margaret Mead: Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. Which is such a great quote I think, so we need to educate students and teachers in a way that they believe that every single one of us can make that difference. And in particular I think we need to start empowering teachers to make that difference, and I had a really interesting conversation with Jules Schoenmann, who's a previous GISIG coordinator, and she talks about this critical balance between awareness raising, so raising awareness of this very immediate threat that we all face, but without causing panic and alarm and a sense of despair or helplessness at sort of either ends of the spectrum.



**Chris Sowton:** And do you see something similar in your network, Beccy with that? With, with teachers having that, that same sort of view? When you presented this idea to the schools within your network what was the response? Were they positive or some of them mixed or how did they respond?

**Beccy Wigglesworth:** Actually I don't think it's really a teachers exclusive thing. Actually, it's really led by a lot of students, and they're just so up for this, you know, way ahead, actually, of all teachers already on it, and it's not just teachers, it's the other people in the schools all around the world, it's the administrators, it's the marketing department, it's the owners, it really is. We are in the business of education we're educators but it's the whole school that's educating them and the whole school it's moving them. So quite often it's in the schools we see where there's real encouragement to do recycling or swap out single use plastic cups for water bottles and whatnot is not the teachers, it's the administrative staff who are pushing that, making that happen because of their communities that are being affected.

**Chris Sowton:** Do you see things like the Protecting Our Planet badge, for example, as being something that will make the schools in your network more marketable as well because it's historically schools have complained, oh it's too expensive to become more green in the post pandemic world if we haven't got money to do that, but from what you're saying, is that it actually becomes a financial opportunity to adopt more green credentials as a school?

**Beccy Wigglesworth:** I think it's undeniably true that there's a green consumer out there, and they're definitely, you know, assessing the companies that they choose to spend their money with, if they trust their values, their value system, that's absolutely true. Absolutely, without a shadow of a doubt, but I'd also like to, kind of, come back to this. I don't think it is more expensive to go green. I really don't, and, honestly, that absolutely needs to be cut out of this question because there is no more expense at all for going green.

**Chris Sowton:** It just becomes just an easy thing to say, without having to really engage with the issue.

**Beccy Wigglesworth:** Yeah, there's so many actions you can take, which really have no cost at all, do those first don't let that be an excuse. Yeah, some things maybe you don't want to do, you don't want to pay extra to insulate your room because you're working in an old historic building, fair enough. You can't do that but you can do lots of other stuff

**Chris Sowton:** Fantastic, and Rose, to come back to you, perhaps you could give some examples from some of the teachers and principals and other educational actors that you work with in GISIG about initiatives which they're doing in their own contexts?

**Rose Aylett:** Yeah, so there's some really great examples I'd love to tell you about that are, kind of, happening at a grassroots level. A teacher in Guinea Bissau writes about some of the really serious environmental problems that he's facing in his country as a result of climate change. So, the sea level rise and coastal erosion, which is actually worse around the West African coast, than it is in other parts of the world, he talks about unsustainable traditional fishing practices, destruction of the habitats of bees when people are out gathering wild honey and issues like rubbish disposal, and he says in the article he feels really strongly that the English teachers should take responsibility for helping to solve at least some of these problems that are directly affecting the lives of local people. And so in



setting up ELTA-GB he wanted to encourage teachers and students as well to appreciate their environment more. And one of the things that ELTA-GB has done is organised a tree planting day with students, with teachers, with members of the community where they taught everyone how to plant and care for trees, and there are some really lovely images in the publication of everyone getting their hands dirty, getting involved on this day. In the same publication from Togo talks about how the Togolese English teachers' organisation plays a really big role in raising awareness of climate related issues there. And they've actually worked with the Ministry of Education to update and include environmental issues within the national curriculum. And so with this new curriculum students are taught about English for the environment. They've also been running conferences on environmental issues, and that's involved with, like, focusing on training teachers so that when they go back to their perhaps more rural context around the country, they're able to set up environmental sections which can support the English clubs in continuing to raise that awareness amongst their students and organising things like poster competitions for International Earth Day and other kinds of very much grassroots initiatives that get students involved and engaged in the issues that are impacting them.

**Chris Sowton:** This goes very much back to the point Beccy was making before about, you know, doing something, which may seem very small and insignificant to start with but, you know, the Togolese English Language Teachers Association now is influencing government policy and embedding climate education within the curriculum.

**Rose Aylett:** We have to counter the idea of, sort of, learned helplessness, this idea that we can't make a difference because everyone can make a difference. You know, we can do this on a personal level, we can do it on an institutional level, we can do it in all sorts of different areas of our lives so as an English teacher trainer I try and build this into my work in my training as well, to CELTA courses, I try and raise awareness within the different schools that I work at, and I think it's, it's welcomed. I suppose one of the tricky things about a CELTA tutoring is that you, you often have to fly, reconsidering how, how to get around that

**Chris Sowton:** You've worked in high polluting places like Bahrain and so on as well

**Rose Aylett:** Yeah, interestingly, in Bahrain I met two English teachers who were working for the British Council, who were very environmentally engaged, and they had, they knew that in order to get to their place of work, initially they had to fly there, they had to fly out of the country, there was no other way of getting there and back, but they were committed to offsetting the carbon that had been spent and they were going to contribute to charities to make sure that trees were planted, and they were very aware of that, they were also very committed to raising awareness of environmental issues in a part of the world where that hasn't traditionally been a priority

**Chris Sowton:** Being the change that you wish to see in the world.

**Rose Aylett:** Yeah, exactly.

**Chris Sowton:** Rose, Beccy, thank you very much for your time.

**Rose and Beccy:** Thank you.

**Chris Sowton:** Thanks to Rose and Beccy for their time. And remember, you can find out



more about GISIG and International House in the show notes.

**Vox pop:** My name is Louise and I'm a senior teacher at the British Council here in Porto, Portugal. I think that one of the best ways that we as teachers can teach our students a little bit about the climate crisis is to make the learning as tangible as possible. Really, bring it through to them visually, the impact that we have, for example, and one of the things that has worked really well for me was an energy audit that I did with some primary learners. The students had to go home, and they had to take a look around the house and count all the number of light bulbs in the house, how many of them were LED? Take a look at the windows in their house with a single pane, double pane, triple pane? Go and have a look as well, at the fridge, if they fold up a piece of paper and put it inside the fridge door can they pull it out easily? Is it keeping the cold in there? And that worked really well for the students to see what their own houses, and how they were contributing to the energy problems, and other things. Going through all their recycling or not, it depends on the family doing it, bringing in plastics and paper that they had at home making classroom displays, all these things that make it really, really visible to see, you know, where energy is lost, or like, how much waste we're producing, things like this have worked really, really well.

**Chris Sowton:** That's all for this episode of The Climate Connection. For show notes, bonus material and previous episodes, please visit the show website, [www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection](http://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection). Join us next time for Episode Seven: Natural Language, in which we look at how language shapes our environment, and how the environment shapes our language. Until then, goodbye.

