

The Integration of Sustainable Development into Learning English

Christoph G. Edelhoff

- (1) Curricula, educational standards and sustainable development
- (2) Language and global development
- (3) Dimensions of language learning for sustainable development
- (4) Communicative skills and intercultural learning:
Language for Understanding in the One World
- (5) Themes, topics, texts and tasks – Sustainable Development Goals
- (6) Textbook bias
- (7) Language textbooks and materials for learners, teachers and parents
- (8) Literature used

The Integration of Sustainable Development into Learning English

(1) Curricula, educational standards and sustainable development

A curriculum represents the total learning experience of a student. All planned learning curricula are therefore an important foundation for all learning. The curricula of any country, educational authority or organisation must determine the educational objectives and aims of new foreign language learning just like any other subject. Learning programmes are planned for learners to acquire linguistic, communicative and cultural competencies; in particular of understanding and communicating in terms of attitudes, knowledge and skills, i.e. motivational (emotional) dispositions, fundamental linguistic and (inter)cultural knowledge as well as methodological skills. The “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” (CEF) of the Council of Europe (2001) supplies the essential prerequisites for the acquisition in all these domains. Its detailed descriptions of competencies have been included in the respective national educational standards of member countries and indeed in the wider world.

In the following, the subject English (as a foreign or second language) is taken as an example, but all statements, competencies and contents are also applicable to other foreign language learning.

*Communicative Competence*¹ is the term used for the motivation and ability to establish contacts through language. Such contacts are built and maintained through encounters at home, abroad and in the wider world. They are systematically promoted and maintained in

- school and community partnerships reflecting daily life,
- a wide variety of cultural and study exchanges,
- various voluntary services,
- people’s world-wide travel activities,
- the internationalisation of business relationships,
- global analogous and digital contacts.

All over the world basic standards for curricula and certification in languages require the equal status and interdependence of these four key areas of competencies:

- Functional communication competencies
- Command of linguistic means

¹ The term goes back to the most influential book by Hans-Eberhard Piepho of Gießen University, Germany, in 1974, where “Communicative Competence” is regarded as the overall goal of modern foreign language learning. Here the terms competency and competencies are used.

- Intercultural competencies
- Methodological and learning competencies.

At the advanced level of language acquisition they are supplemented by more complex competencies, such as

- Communication strategies, particularly intercultural competencies,
- Text and media competencies,
- Language learning competencies and linguistic awareness.

In Global Development Education / Education for Sustainable Development, communicative learning is constituted by these competencies, thematic contents as well as tasks (activities) and learning methods. Right from the start of foreign language learning the choice of topic and text opens up perspectives of the 'One World' where familiar life worlds meet with unfamiliar ones and where this challenge is mastered by foreign language communication. As in all subjects these embrace processes of *recognizing* (acquisition of knowledge), *assessing* (*critical thinking and value judgements*) and *acting* (*participation, collaboration and agency*). Within the learning process, concrete action sequences imply that certain tasks are performed on the content and text level (e.g. research, analysis, presentation) as well as by contacting and communicating and negotiating in different action patterns (direct, media-related, text-related, face-to-face).

(2) Language and global development

Language, culture and communication are global phenomena; dealing with languages and cultures of the world is at the centre of a modern general education aiming at sustainable development. As basket 3 of the Helsinki Final Act (1975) has already stated, the languages of the world have to be protected in order to protect the cultures of the world. Language is culture expressed in words. Hence, the development of competencies in the field of linguistic and cultural communication among the regions and cultures, namely among human beings of different linguistic and cultural affiliation is a central and genuine task of language education. Striving to teach languages with the objective of communicative faultlessness, the traditional education of foreign languages has always emphasised separating aspects, i.e. the unique features of a singular language. Today, there is no question that linguistic and culture-systematic analogies as well as historical relationships between languages and cultures must be exploited for learning a foreign language.

There is no doubt that English is the most important medium of global communication – not only from a European perspective – but it is not the only one. All students should learn English as successfully as possible. This is why English is the number one foreign language in

schools across the world – with very few exceptions. In view of its curriculum centrality, this school subject has the role of a *gateway to languages* – more than any other language, which might be taught at a later stage.

“English is a world language, and knowing it will enable people to have a voice in global conversations and issue-solving.

- A lot of conflict in the world is generated because of misunderstood speech; therefore, a study of communication skills is an extremely important part of language teaching.
- Literature helps develop a student’s imagination, and enables a student to envision a different world.
- Social issues can be connected to language skills and components that need to be taught as part of the curriculum.
- English teachers in many countries have the freedom to bring in content from different subject areas as long as they teach the mechanics of language and skills that should be taught. Analyzing fiction and non-fiction texts can help students examine issues related to sustainable development, peace and global citizenship.
- English can be a language of global support and solidarity. At the same time, we need to be aware of how the English language is closely connected to the history of colonialism. In many countries, there is a hierarchy of languages, wherein English is given more importance, and other languages are treated as inferior.
- Language teachers can use literature to develop critical thinking, and to build an appreciation of diverse perspectives.
- Literature helps readers step into another person's shoes. It provides the opportunity to learn empathy.
- English opens doors socially and economically. It increases employment opportunities.
- Speaking of the connection between language and social justice, there is a growing discourse around the recognition of the plurality of English as opposed to just one species of standard English. Students need to be given the space to dialogue about how language is connected to power structures.
- In the language classroom, through poems, songs, group discussions, debates, interviews, comprehension, film screenings, etc. it is possible to initiate conversations around peace, sustainable development and global citizenship.
- Literary texts, regardless of the time period and culture they are set in, often address universal themes such as love, loss, displacement, migration, aspiration, violence and

conflict, environmental destruction, racism, good governance etc. and they can resonate with people in the here and now, enabling them to make connections between the text and contemporary issues of global concern.”²

(3) Dimensions of foreign language learning for sustainable development

The mentioned contexts constitute the starting point for possible contributions of foreign language education for a competency-based learning in Global Development Education/ ESD

Foreign language learning can be assigned to the following areas of competencies:

- *Recognising*: What students should know about language(s) and how they are acquiring knowledge.
- *Assessing*: What impact do languages have on people
- *Acting*: What people can do with languages.

Recognising: What students should know about languages

From a didactic point of view this is about recognising the functions of language and linguistic diversity for being human in the context of sustainable development:

- Language as a medium for dealing with global development
- Linguistic diversity as a prerequisite for cultural diversity and cultural wealth
- Linguistic diversity as guarantee for diversity of thinking

Assessing: What impact do languages have on people

An important aspect of ESD is the students’ ability to assess the impact of linguistic and cultural influences in a rational way. This includes issues of sustainable and global development focused in the context of concrete learning situations, e.g.

- How do languages manipulate people, e.g. through advertising, expository or fictional texts?
- How is political and cultural dominance exerted through language?
- Which forms of linguistic discrimination exist, how do they affect the people concerned?

This implies that the two competency areas of *recognising* and *assessing* are connected by linguistic means that are culturally determined. By developing their linguistic competencies students learn to make their own judgements according to the principle of sustainable development.

Acting: What people can do with language

² Bangalore UNESCO Workshop June 2016 (Chintan Girish Modi)

Here the focus is on motivating for the challenges of global change and on strengthening sustainable attitudes and behaviour for lifelong language and culture competencies.

**(4) Communicative skills and intercultural learning:
Language for Understanding in the One World**

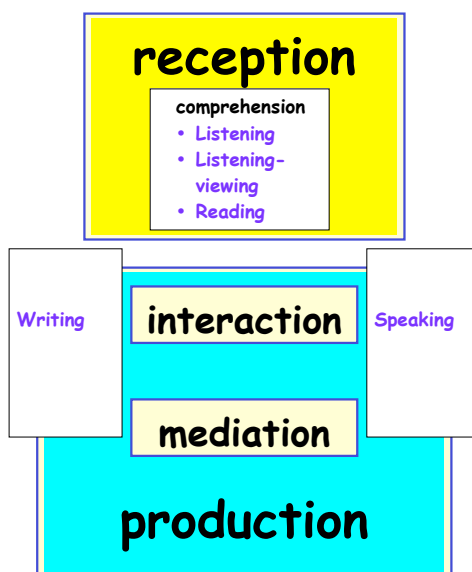
General models of language and communication competencies are normally based on language skills like the following:

Basic Components of Communicative Skills			
	oral	written	interactive and functional
receptive	listening	reading	comprehension (understanding)
productive	speaking	writing	making o.s. understood
Understanding language structure and use: Language learning competencies			

Werlen (2003, 12)

The Council of Europe³, by introducing *mediation*, added another interactive dimension of communicative skills as shown in the following diagram:

³ Council of Europe 2001. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment . (Strasbourg 1996), Cambridge University Press.

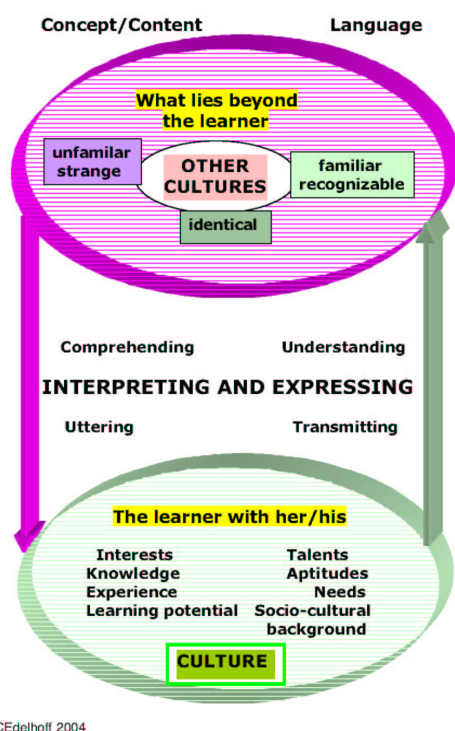


The Common European Framework:
Communicative Skills

© C.Edelhoff 2004

Moreover, *Communicative Competence*⁴ embraces more than just the language skills; apart from the simple receptive listening, listening-viewing and reading skills which are the basis of any foreign language communication situation, learners are confronted with interactive uttering and transmitting foreign language problems in order to tackle speaking and / or writing tasks: Communicating face-to-face, mastering distanced conversations on the telephone or video call as well as writing emails or using the keyboard for chatting on social media. Normally, skills are interdependent and have to be developed together. Mediation comes in when the partner(s) in communication do not understand the original language and a second language has to come in to support the understanding / communicating process, in speaking and / or in writing: explaining, summarising, transferring content and meaning from one medium (language) to another. Interpreting and translating in everyday situations do not necessarily require the full range of language use but the ability to render meaning into understandable utterances, both ways.

⁴ See above footnote 1.



Moreover, all of this is not a one-to-one process but one of intercultural conditioning. Learners are always starting off from their own interests, knowledge, experience, learning potential, talents, aptitudes and needs. They have their socio-cultural backgrounds, indeed, are tinged in culture(s), values and beliefs. Beyond their own world there are other people, other cultures, values and traditions. What lies beyond the learner may be familiar and recognisable - or unfamiliar and strange. Things may even be identical in a global culture. The problem is that things unfamiliar and strange are posing fewer problems or questions because they are beyond their reach. Yet, the things that seem similar and familiar may be false friends.

The arrows in the diagram are there to indicate that there is movement from 'own' to 'other'. There is interpreting and expressing, i.e. negotiation of meaning. It is in fact a model of communication which, in foreign language teaching and learning, must deal with two problems. Things may seem foreign, alien or simply different in two ways: The concept may be different and also the way it is expressed. In getting familiar with items beyond their normal reach learners must come to grips with various forms of the foreign language and the concepts (the meaning and the content) at the same time. Comprehending and understanding, interpreting and expressing, negotiating meaning requires us to negotiate between cultures all the time; that is why we are talking of intercultural learning. Academic literature has used similar terms like cross-cultural, international, transnational, multi-ethnic, multi-racial. What they all have in common is that learners have to go across borders if in most cases symbolically. Hence the motto of "Language for Understanding in the One World".

(5) Themes, topics, texts and tasks – Sustainable Development Goals

The following list of thematic areas and sample topics is taken from the German ESD framework in order to illustrate possible approaches of language learning and teaching to SDG standards (the UN 2030 Agenda goals) through themes some of which have been dealt

with for some time, yet – amongst other ESD curriculum proposals – may serve as a basis for authors of textbook and materials.

Thematic area	Sample topics
1. Diversity of values and living conditions: Diversity and inclusion	Arranged marriages Festivals
2. Globalisation of religious and ethical guiding principles	Creation vs. evolution Church meets state Democracy – an ideology for the whole world?
3. History of globalisation: From colonialism to the "global village"	<i>Australia</i> - Aborigines - (Aboriginal) Languages - Immigration <i>English in India</i> - The heritage of British colonization <i>New Englishes</i> - Remaking a colonial language in post-colonial contexts
4. Commodities from around the world: Production, trade and consumption	Coffee – the world's most traded commodity The 'Play Fair' campaign and the international sportswear industry
5. Food and agriculture	<i>Hunger in a world of plenty</i> - Global food production
6. Illness and health	Public health in emergencies (Oxfam) Fighting famine in the Horn of Africa
7. Education	The Internet and Gutenberg Illiteracy – barrier to cultural growth
8. Globalised leisure-time activities	This thing called 'Youth Culture' Football as the world's game An internet lifestyle
9. Protection and use of natural resources and generation of energy	<i>How green is your future?</i> - The carbon footprint - Low impact living
10. Opportunities and risks of technological progress	Cloning and genetic engineering Designer food
11. Global environmental changes	<i>Global warming</i> - Climate change taking its toll
12. Mobility, urban development and traffic	Megacities – new urban challenges

13. Globalisation of the eco-nomy and labour	<i>Global economy</i> - Global player India - Degrowth
14. Demographic structures and development	<i>Ethnic minorities in multicultural societies</i> - Changes in the Indian caste system
15. Poverty and social security	<i>Sweatshop – the modern hall of shame -</i> Sweatshops and child labour
16. Peace and conflict	<i>War and peace</i> - Children at war - Refugees
17. Migration and integration	The immigrants' long journeys – case studies Contemporary refugee crises
18. Political rule, democracy and human rights (Good Governance)	<i>Defending Human Rights</i> - The death penalty - Children's Human Rights
19. Development cooperation and its institutions	Aid and development finance (European charities) Foreign aid – introducing self-help schemes 2030 Agenda
20 Global governance	NGOs – challenges to legitimacy World Trade Organization
21. Communication in the global context	<i>How social networks have changed the world</i> - Friend or foe - web 2.0? - English as a neighbouring and an international language

The choice of themes (thematic areas) and concrete topics will vary from continent to continent, country to country, region to region, neighbourhood to neighbourhood according to general education goals, age groups, cultural traditions and priorities. What they have in common is the approach to meet ESD criteria.⁵ Following a whole school approach they may also serve as connectors between subjects and cross-curricular activities and projects. The concrete topics feeding the choice of texts will have to be revised and added on according to societal change. Students can be active as researchers and will learn the language by doing. The three modules attached to this paper illustrate possible themes and topics for various groups of learners (primary, lower and upper secondary). They present a variety of texts and tasks showing a range of basic language and communication activities as well as more complex operations where parts of language are not seen as independent learning items but as

⁵ Cf chapter 1.5

constitutive items for a set of competencies to acquire knowledge, build motivation and favourable attitudes, and use communicative skills for meaningful and peaceful activities.

(6) Textbook bias

Many foreign language textbooks, all over the world, still reflect different views and traditions. Language is seen and treated as system and structure only mirroring idealised living and times gone by. Just look at the image of women, the image of children, the image of foreigners and people of coloured skin, the image of people like puppets on a string. What is there on beliefs, war and peace, people and minorities, families on the move, gender, money (not just pocket money), traffic, the green and the built environment, citizenship and justice, happy and unhappy circumstances? The established mode of textbook and materials making seems to focus on language, grammar and vocabulary, structural exercises and formal tasks. Moreover, textbooks, especially the ones we make ourselves, are full of our own expectations, prejudices and clichés of the people and countries. Many ELT materials seem to be obsessed with the United Kingdom and the British Isles as if there weren't millions of people speaking English outside this remoter part of Europe.

Communicative intercultural education offers a solution to these problems if we are prepared to look at the issue in a more educational than purely linguistic way. To quote Louis Porcher from France working for Council of Europe projects for many years: "This is why in our view the only positive and constructive option really open is interculturalism" (not one inter-culture), "which is based on the idea that every cultural reality is a double one. A culture is always individual, different from others ... hence reflects the specific identity of its members;...at the same time though it also involves sharing. We need the ability to communicate and relate to another person as another person. The inter-cultural approach implies taking both these aspects into account simultaneously because they are essentially together. The way forward is to take the other person for what he/she is. That is both identical to one's self and different from oneself, in other words similar to oneself..." (Porcher 2001).

(7) Language textbooks and materials for learners, teachers and parents

Therefore, applying all of this to modern textbook and materials making authors should observe a number of user-oriented criteria. First of all materials are not the printed books only but using all the kinds of digital channels available in a combined way: print, audio and audio-visual, off-line and online. They are not singly learner- (or teacher-)oriented but will have to be geared to the needs of all concerned in the educational process:

What learning and teaching materials should offer

...for learners and teachers:

- Authentic information
- Animation (arousing interest, building motivation) (a stimulus for curiosity)
- Models for linguistic learning and language use
- Themes, topics, texts as well as a choice of exercises, activities and tasks
- Reference ("for looking up", or a touchstone)

...a quarry of prepared bricks in order to be able to build one's own house according to one's needs and wishes;

...a supporting handrail which helps learners to walk alone.

...for teachers they should offer:

- Ideas
- Practical proposals for learner-centred mixed ability inclusive classrooms
- Support for daily teaching routines, not the „holy book“ which replaces the teacher and governs and directs learners and teachers alike.

...for parents they should offer:

Orientation with regard to

- immediate and long-term aims and objectives
- practical classroom activities
- and expected results (“a visible horizon of outcomes”).

Rather than adding ready-made tests to the “units” of learning /teaching they should be integrating assessment for learning, i.e. “the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there”⁶.

Learning in today's inter-connected world must explore tomorrow's opportunities.

(8) Literature used

Assessment Reform Group 1999. Assessment for Learning. 10 Principles 2002,

<http://www.kinberg.net/?p=769>;

<https://www.aaia.org.uk/content/uploads/2010/06/Assessment-for-Learning-10-principles.pdf>

AUPLF, The British Council, Goethe-Institut (Hg) 1988. Interkulturelle Kommunikation und Fremdsprachenlernen. Culture and Language Learning. Communication interculturelle at apprentissage des langues. TRIANGLE 7. Difusion Didier Erudition (6 Rue de la Sorbonne, F-75005 Paris).

Council of Europe 2001. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages:

⁶ Assessment for Learning Reform Group, 2002

Learning, teaching, assessment. (Strasbourg 1996), Cambridge University Press.

Dam, L. 1995, 2015. Learner Autonomy. From Theory to Practice. Dublin. Authentik.

Edelhoff, Ch. 1995. Intercultural Learning in Foreign Languages. European Tasks for the Nineties. Key Note Address Innsbruck, 4th International NELLE Conference. Networking English Language Learning in Europe. Hamburg: NELLE.

European Union 1996. Teaching and Learning. Towards the learning society. Brüssel.

Gardner, J. (ed) 2012. Assessment and Learning: Second edition. London: Sage.

Legutke, M., Thomas, H. 1991. Process and Experience in the Language Classroom. Harlow: Longman.

Piepho, H.E. 1974. Kommunikative Kompetenz als übergeordnetes Lernziel im Englischunterricht. Dornburg-Frickhofen: Frankonius-Verlag.
(*“Communicative Competence as the core goal in English language teaching”*).

Porcher, L., Abdallah-Preteille, M. 1996, 2001. Éducation et communication interculturelle. PUF - L'Éducateur, 2^e édition 2001.

Schreiber, J.R., Siege, H. (eds.) 2016. Curriculum Framework. Education for Sustainable Development (2nd and updated edition). (Engagement Global gGmbH, German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs in Germany. Bonn). Berlin: Cornelsen (forthcoming)

Valdes, J.M. (ed.) 1986. Culture Bound. Bridging the cultural gap in language teaching. Cambridge University Press.

Werlen, E. 2003. “Was sollte im Fremdsprachenunterricht gemessen und mit Noten beurteilt werden? Vortrag Bundesweites Netzwerk Englisch in der Grundschule, Erfurt.
(*“Learner Assessment. English in Primary Schools in Germany”*)
(<http://www.ph-karlsruhe.de/wp/schlemminger/files/Werlen-Leistungsmessung2.pdf>)

Werlen, E., Weskamp, R. (eds.) 2007. Kommunikative Kompetenz und Mehrsprachigkeit. Diskussionsgrundlagen und unterrichtspraktische Aspekte. Hohengehrden: SchneiderVerlag.
(*“Communicative Competence and Plurilingualism”*)

Willis, D., Willis, J. 2007. Doing Task-based Teaching. Oxford University Press.

For the German reader:

Börner, O., Edelhoff, Ch., Rebel, Kh., Schmidt, T., Schröder, K. (The English Academy) 2011. “Funktion und Profil von Englischlehrwerken in der Epoche von Standards und Kompetenzen”, FLuL 2011,2.

Edelhoff, Ch. 2010. „Kommunikative Kompetenz revisited – Anmerkungen in einer überflüssigen Debatte“, In: Forum Sprache Online (Hueber), S. 149 – 160.