Sustainability in Language Teaching (part 2): Pedagogical implications

Minna Maijala, School of Languages and Translation Studies

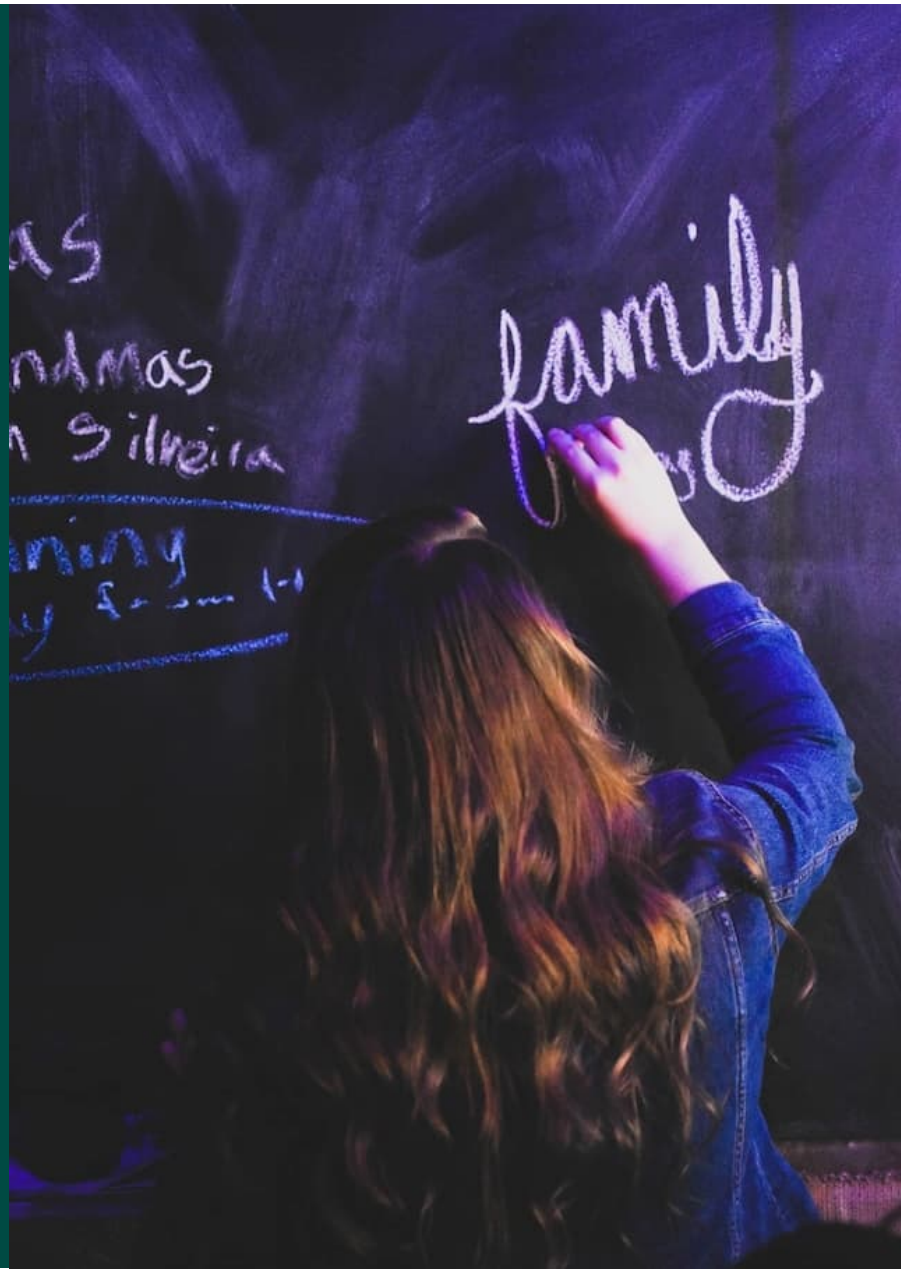
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EC2U, Discourses in Europe, 12.11.2026

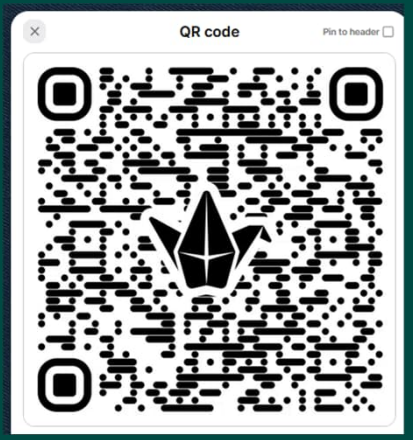
Today's Agenda

- Warm-up: Capturing sustainability on Campus
- Reflections the article (in breakout rooms & discussion): Promoting sustainability in European language teaching
- Teaching materials and pedagogical implications: Examples
- Activity in breakout rooms: Sustainable travelling
- Presentation of group works (30 minutes)



For the next lecture: Sustainability Snapshots: Capturing sustainability on Campus

- Before we meet in my next lecture, I have an engaging task for you all. It's called 'Sustainability Snapshots', and it's a simple way for us to explore how sustainable development is happening on our campuses. As you move around the university, I'd like you to take a photo of something that demonstrates sustainability in action. It could be anything from eco-friendly infrastructure, to green spaces, or even a project linked to social sustainability like inclusion or equality, or something related to your studies or campus life.
- Once you've taken your photo, I'll ask you to write a short description explaining how it relates to sustainability and why it's important. Please upload you photo on the Padlet wall by the 11th of November:
- *I'm very excited to see your perspectives on how sustainability touches different aspects of the university life!*
- Link: https://padlet.com/maijalaminna1/sustainability-snapshots-capturing-sustainability-on-campus-s02546fnu1qln3yqcoxf

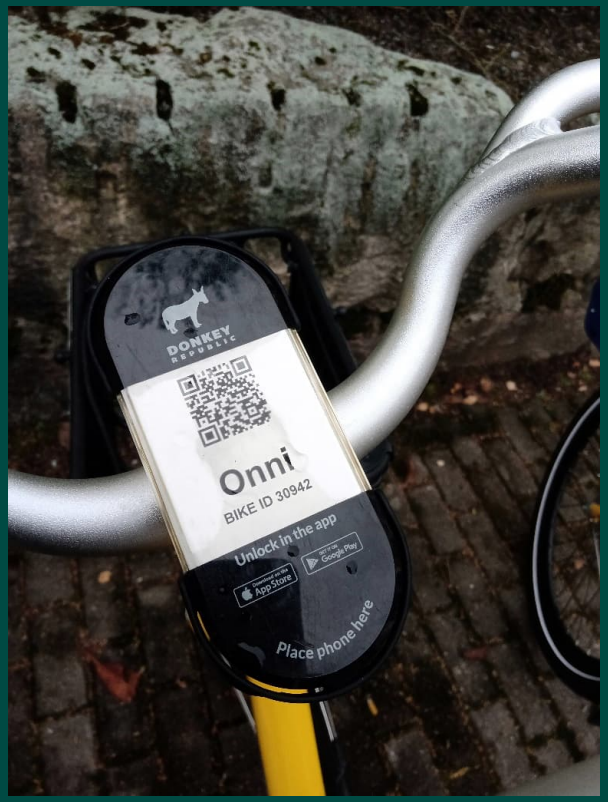


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Capturing sustainability on Campus





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The Global Goals for Sustainable Development (SDGs)

- The concept of sustainable development: ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (WCED 1987, 43).



MM1

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MM1 Minna Maijala; 15.10.2024

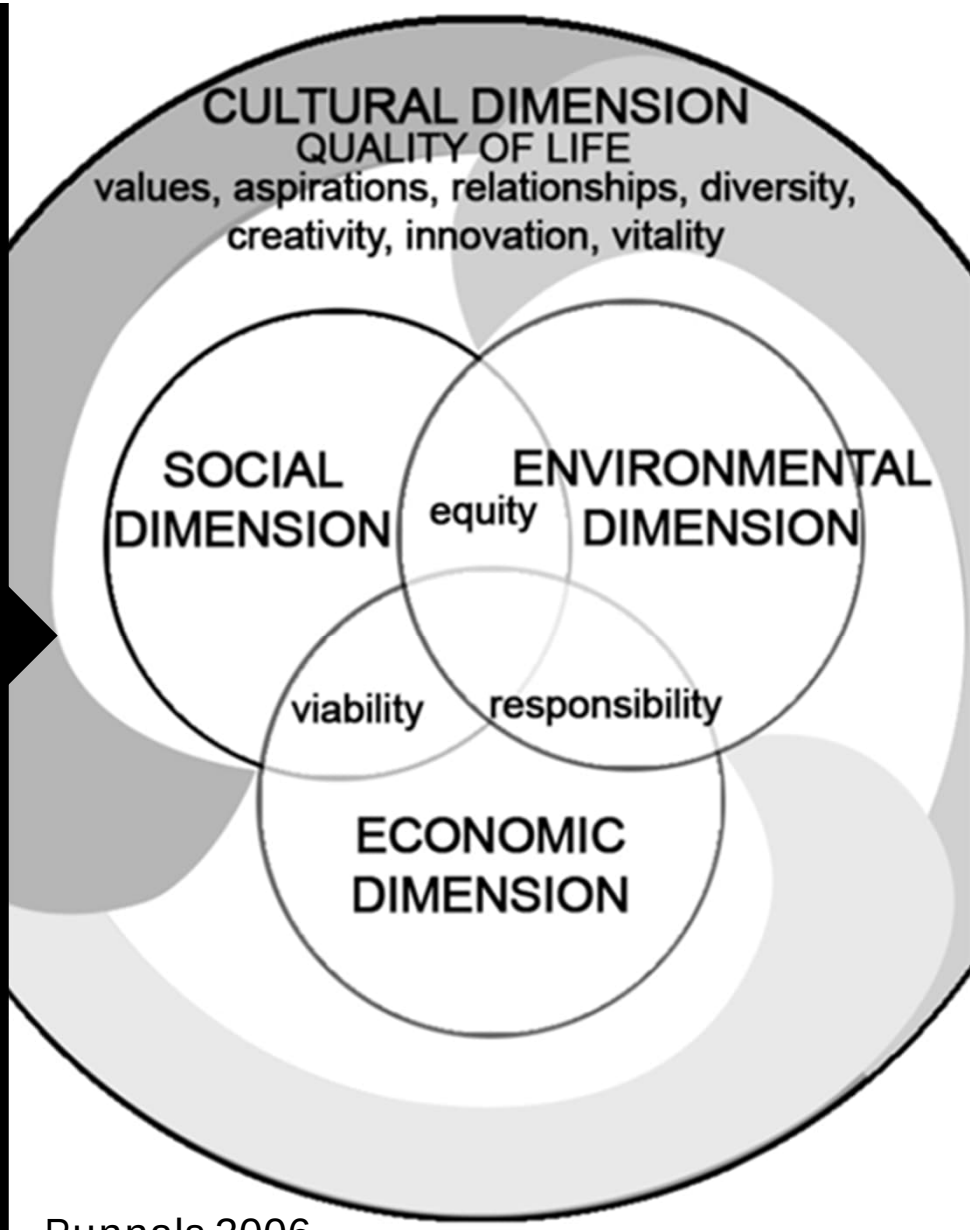
Sustainability dimensions

Four dimensions of sustainable development

It has been proposed that sustainable development consists of four dimensions. Please read the following short descriptions of these dimensions.

- Ecological sustainability means recognizing the Earth's carrying capacity and acting within those limits. This entails, among other things, actions to prevent and adapt to climate change and to nurture biodiversity.
- Social sustainability means securing health, wellbeing and their prerequisites from one generation to the next. This includes justice and fairness on a global scale. Social sustainability goals are human rights, equality, possibilities for participation and involvement and basic needs, such as food, housing, education and health care.
- Economic sustainability pursues a situation where the environmental effects of products are reflected in their price. Circular economy and economic instruments are concepts used in economic sustainability.
- Cultural sustainability refers to a community's ability to renew and maintain its existing strengths. This means, for example, openness to new ideas and agents. Central procedures include treasuring cultural diversity and strengthening the community's resilience.

Maijala, M., Heikkola, L. M., Kuusalu, S. R., Laine, P., Mutta, M., & Mäntylä, K. (2023). Pre-service language teachers' perceptions of sustainability and its implementation in language teaching. *Language Teaching Research*, 13621688231170682.



Runnals 2006

Sustainability topics include...

Table 1. Themes of sustainability for the five-point Likert scale evaluation in the questionnaire for pre-service teachers.

- ✓ safe neighbourhood
- ✓ saving energy/water
- ✓ adverse environmental effects due to use of natural resources
- ✓ peace and justice in society
- ✓ nearby nature and its wellbeing
- ✓ healthy diet
- ✓ democratic society
- ✓ actions to prevent climate change
- ✓ preventing and intervening in bullying
- ✓ adverse agricultural effects on the environment
- ✓ human rights and equality
- ✓ sustainable economic growth
- ✓ responsible travel
- ✓ tolerance
- ✓ recycling
- ✓ ensuring healthy life and wellbeing for everyone
- ✓ responsible and sustainable consumer habits
- ✓ securing renewable energy for everyone
- ✓ societal involvement
- ✓ adverse industrial effects on the environment
- ✓ equal education and possibilities for lifelong learning
- ✓ adverse environmental effects of traffic
- ✓ preserving biodiversity
- ✓ increasing vegetarian food in diet
- ✓ internationality
- ✓ gender equality
- ✓ sustainable industries and innovations
- ✓ consumer habits based on personal lifestyle
- ✓ cultural environment and heritage
- ✓ cultural diversity in Finland
- ✓ linguistic diversity in Finland
- ✓ personal financial situation
- ✓ personal social health and wellbeing
- ✓ personal mental health and wellbeing
- ✓ personal physical health and well-being
- ✓ sorting waste

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This edited book is centred around the novel didactic model of Transformative Language Teaching for Sustainability. The contributing authors discuss the uses and possibilities of the model, as well as other sustainability-related aspects of language education, such as Education for Sustainable Development, transformative language teaching methods, and ecolinguistics. The book consists of a combination of theoretical review articles and practical research articles drawing on findings from a variety of contexts and educational settings. While there are many practical examples of pedagogical approaches and methods for transformative education for sustainability, this book presents a thorough framework based on academic research, designed to be useful to language teachers, teacher trainers, policy makers, and curriculum designers, as well as academics working in fields such as applied linguistics, language learning, language teaching, language education policy, environmental education, and sustainability education.

Minna Maijala is professor of language teaching and learning at the School of Languages and Translation Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. She is the principal investigator of sustainability-related projects EKKO, SustainLANG, and SeedLING. Her areas of expertise include research on the teaching and learning of foreign languages, culture teaching, language teaching materials and their reception, language teacher education, and sustainability in language teaching and learning.

Salla-Riikka Kuusalu is a postdoctoral researcher at EKKO-project at the School of Languages and Translation Studies, a university teacher at the Department of Biology, and a teaching coordinator at a forest conservation and restoration focused Nature2100 Fund at the University of Turku. Her recent focus on interdisciplinary research on language teaching for sustainability and ecolinguistic research builds on her background in ecological research.

Riikka Ullakonoja is a researcher at EKKO-project and holds the title of Docent at the School of Languages and Translation Studies at the University of Turku. She also works in project AASIS on automatic assessment of oral interaction. Her expertise on language learning, teaching and assessment has been used in studies involving the use of experimental and phonetic methods in several different languages.

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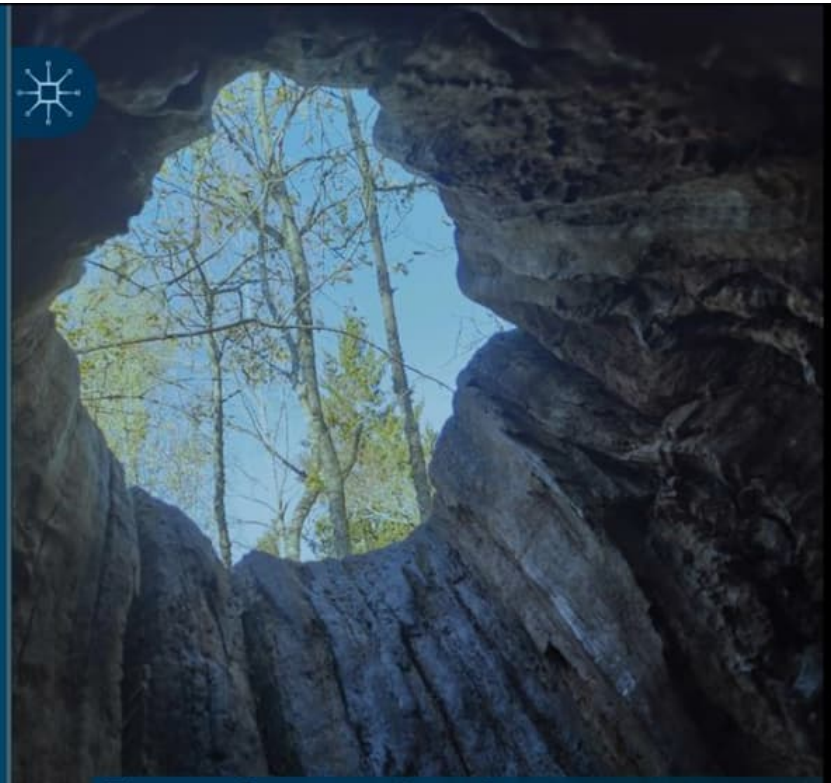
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Transformative Language Teaching for Sustainability

Edited by Minna Maijala · Salla-Riikka Kuusalu · Riikka Ullakonoja

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Transformative Language Teaching for Sustainability

From Theory to Practice

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Salla-Riikka Kuusalu · Riikka Ullakonoja

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Reflections

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Maijala, Minna & Kuusalu, Salla-Riikka (2025): Promoting sustainability in European language teaching. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics*. https://doi.org/10.1515/eujal-2024-0036



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Questions to reflect (breakout rooms)

- What is the potential of language teaching in promoting ESD?
- How is ESD implemented in language teaching across different countries?
- How is ESD integrated into language teaching in your own country?



Teaching materials and pedagogical implications: Examples

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The role of textbooks and other teaching materials in promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

- When teachers plan their lessons, they are often guided by the textbooks (e.g., Harwood 2010; McGrath 2006; Richards 2014).
- If we want to promote ESD in language teaching, more attention should be paid on how language textbooks deal with sustainability topics.
- Research available about sustainability in textbooks in other subjects, for instance in geography and biology (Biström & Lundström 2021), social science textbooks (Jimenez et al. 2017), and in primary education textbooks (Vásquez et al. 2021)

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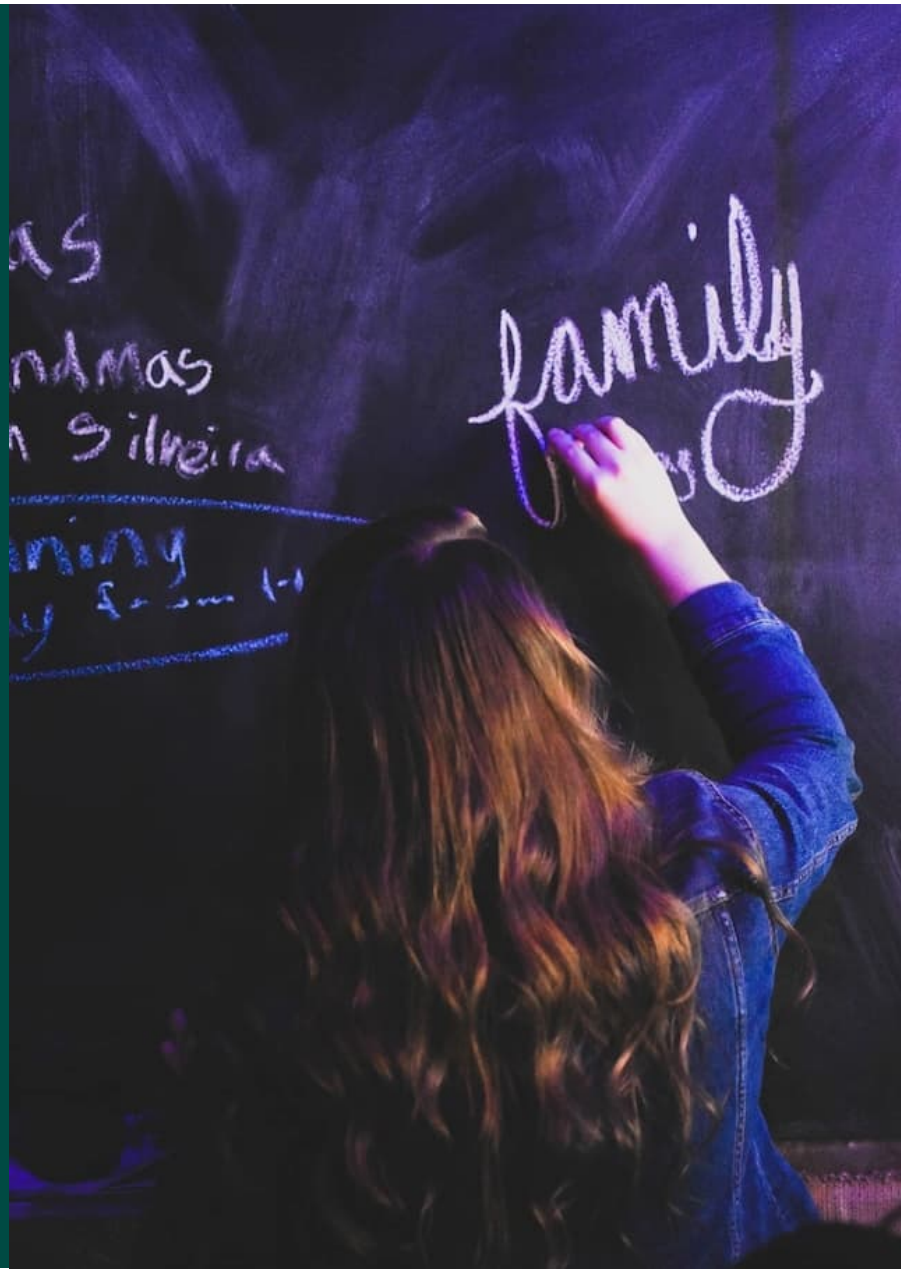


Instructional ESD* approaches in language education

- inquiry-based activities (investigations)
- experimental learning
- project-based language learning
- classroom discussions and reflections
- task-based language learning
- translanguaging

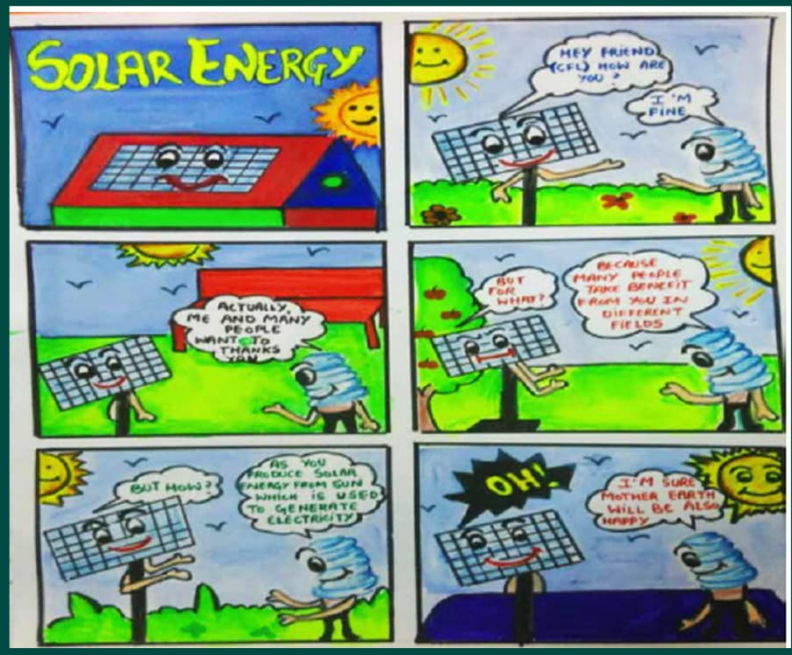
see e.g. de la Fuente 2021

*ESD = Education for sustainable development



Pedagogical implications: Example

- Increasing awareness of sustainability
  - Inquiry-based activities (investigations) -> Children exploring
  - Classroom discussions and reflections

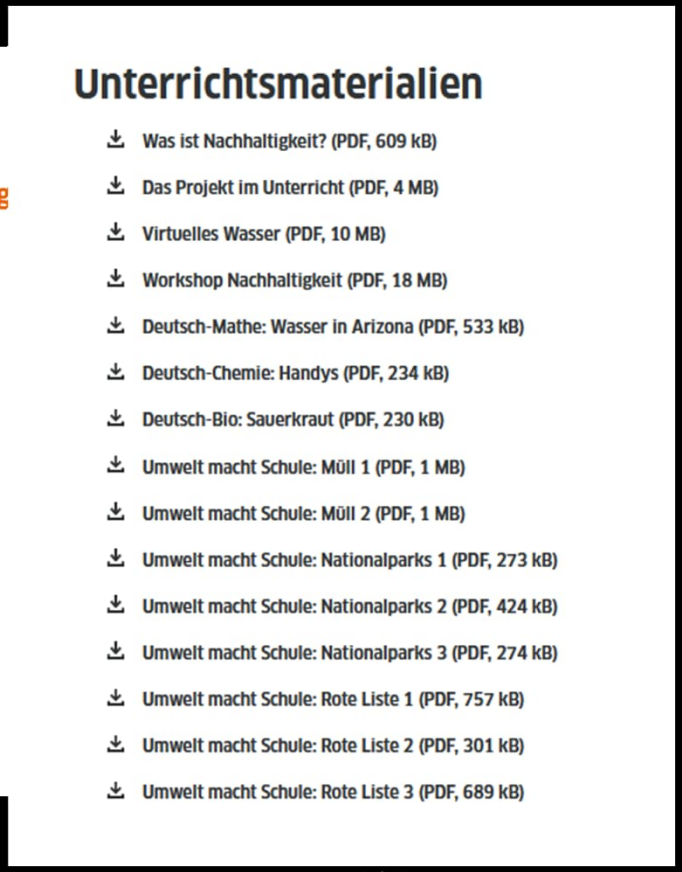


Example Pinter & Mathew: Children and teachers as co-researchers: A handbook of activities (British Council)

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Pedagogical implications: Example





https://www.goethe.de/prj/stg/de/nac/win.html

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Nachhaltigkeit – ein Konzept für die Zukunft

Was bedeutet Nachhaltigkeit – für dich?

a) Schau dir die folgenden Bilder an.
Welche verbindest du mit dem Thema Nachhaltigkeit?
Wähle ein Bild aus, beschreibe es und begründe kurz deine Wahl.

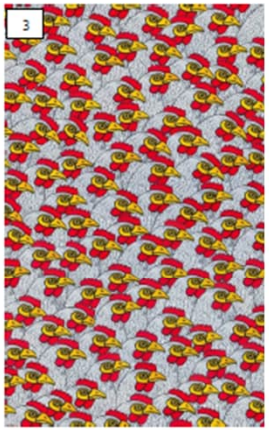
1



2



3



4



5



Bild Nr.:_____

Beschreibe dein Bild:

1. UMWELTAPPELLE DER JUGENDUMWELTKONFERENZ

1.1. Was passt zusammen?

Schreibt die richtigen Wörter unter die Fotos.

Trinkwasserschutz	**Wald und Bodenschutz**	**Gewässerschutz**
Müllvermeidung	**Mülltrennung**	**Bäume pflanzen und Pflanzenschutz**

Unterrichtsmaterialien:
https://www.goethe.de/prj/stg/de/nac/win.html

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Activities that can be adapted in different subjects

A Multilingual Treasure Hunt

Subject:

Citizenship, PHSE,
Languages, Geography,

Learning Outcomes:

- For students to have experienced a situation where they cannot find their way because they are unable to speak the language.
- To empathise with those who are refugees in a new country.

Preparation:

- Read through lesson plan and background information in *teacher's introduction*
- Consider the students in your class. Are there any children that can speak an additional language to one used for instruction in school? These could include languages that use a different alphabet. Gather these students together and ask for their help. Alternatively, seek help from mulitlinugal colleagues or parents.

Total Time:

35-45 mins

Age Range:

8-12 year olds



Introduction to the lesson for the rest of the class:
"Many of us are familiar with taking a holiday where tour operators, hotels, restaurants and shopkeepers make it easy for us to understand a language by providing simple translations that make our trip more enjoyable. But what would it be like for us if we found ourselves in a country whose language we didn't understand at all, we couldn't speak to anyone and we couldn't even read the writing because the alphabet is different?"

- Explain to the students that they will be asked to complete some simple tasks, similar to those that a newly arrived refugee might need to complete.
- In turn, give each student an instruction such as "go to the supermarket and buy some bread", "go to the doctor and explain that you are sick", "go and buy a train ticket to the next town" "go to the pharmacy and buy some cough syrup". Prepare enough questions so that there is at least one per student, or if your class is large you can put students into groups.
- Tell the students that they can ask for help from others and that if they have access to the internet they can also use that too (*see note box on left*). Let them set off on their "hunt" (20 minutes).

Once they have finished ask the students who have been on the Treasure Hunt : "Did you complete your task(s)? How did you do it? Did anyone help you? How did they help you?" How did it feel having to find your way without being able to communicate with in your language?" (5 min orally)

https://en.unesco.org/themes/education/sdgs/material/04#secondary

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Activities -> Products: Example

- Students were asked to find an example of a local and a global SDG., e.g. their home town vs. the world.
- Discussions in groups about the local and global goals and preparation of a poster. The posters were collected into an exhibition.
- During the exhibition, students identified their personal goals that were of greatest importance to them.



Maijala, M., Patzelt, M., Laine, P., Merijärvi, S. (2025). Materials for Transformative Language Teaching for Sustainability Model—Students' Perspectives. In: Maijala, M., Kuusalu, SR., Ullakonoja, R. (eds) *Transformative Language Teaching for Sustainability: From Theory to Practice.* Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-85493-4_8

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Exhibition & Posters







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Sustainable travel (Group work)

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EKKO

Oppijan kortti

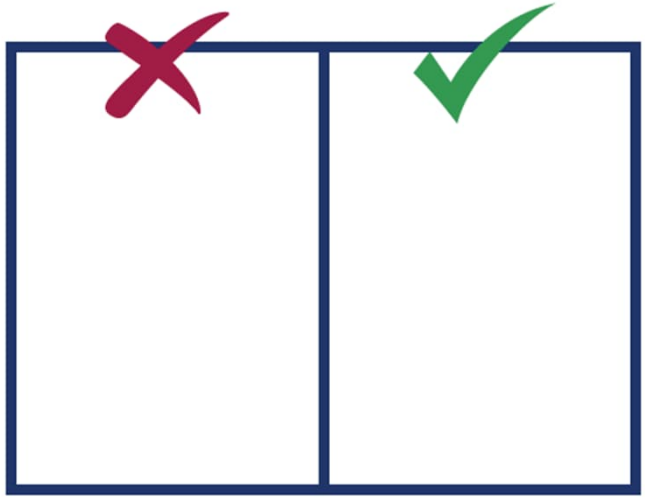
8 IHMISARVOISTA TYÖTÄ JA TALOUSKASVUA

11 KESTÄVÄT KAUPUNGIT JA YHTEISÖT

Sustainable travel

LÄMMITTELYTEHTÄVÄ

1. Find an English news article or video that discusses the disadvantages and advantages of tourism.
2. Read the article or watch the video.
3. Take notes on the disadvantages and advantages mentioned in the source.
4. Open the collaborative whiteboard created by the teacher, e.g., Padlet.
5. Add the disadvantages and advantages around the appropriate heading.
6. Together with the class, consider which of the disadvantages and advantages are related to the economy.



5. Add the disadvantages and advantages around the appropriate heading.
6. Together with the class, consider which of the disadvantages and advantages are related to the economy.



Disadvantages	Advantages
• Text • Text	• Text • Text

2. When everyone is ready, ponder in pairs, which one of the pros and cons are related to economics.
3. Think about the economical pros and cons of tourism, and be ready to share your thoughts.
   - Why are people in some countries protesting against tourism?
   - How does tourism affect the lives of regular citizens in mass tourism destinations e.g. Barcelona?
   - What actions can tourists take to make mass tourism more sustainable for the locals?

See: https://sites.utu.fi/kestavakieltenopetus/wp-content/uploads/sites/1387/2025/10/Oppijan-kortti-Kestavaa-matkailua-EN.pdf

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Reflections in small groups

2. When everyone is ready, ponder in pairs, which one of the pros and cons are related to economics.
3. Think about the economical pros and cons of tourism, and be ready to share your thoughts.
    - Why are people in some countries protesting against tourism?
    - How does tourism affect the lives of regular citizens in mass tourism destinations e.g. Barcelona?
    - What actions can tourists take to make mass tourism more sustainable for the locals?



Sustainability as a future direction in language teaching: Why and how?

- Language teachers share the responsibility for ESD
- Language a suitable tool for many goals in ESD
- How can languages be taught and learned in a sustainable way?
- How can sustainability become a natural part of language education?
  - Systems thinking, wider perspectives, curricular changes, teaching methods
  - Need of education for language teachers
- Content of teaching: choice of topics related to ESD
- Democracy goals: every student should have the possibility to use language, be able to communicate well and be part of decision-making in the society

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Takeaways

- Which activities in language teaching can contribute to achievement of SDGs?
- Content of teaching: choice of topics related to ESD
- Teaching methods promoting ESD

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Photo by Diego PH on Unsplash

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