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Incorporating sustainability into American postsecondary modern foreign language classrooms at the pre-advanced level: exploring current practice and identifying future directions

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Abstract:	ABSTRACT This article reviews recent literature concerned with the issues of interdisciplinary integration of sustainability-related content in American higher education curricula and expands the discussion into the integration of sustainability-related content into modern foreign language classrooms, particularly at the introductory and intermediate levels of study. The article first unpacks the concept of sustainability as an interdisciplinary curricular construct in a postsecondary context and situates it alongside recent research in education for sustainability (EFS) and content-based second language (L2) instruction. It then outlines the specific challenges and affordances of sustainability content and language integration for introductory and intermediate level language learners. Finally, the authors propose several considerations for language-and-content integration in order to both foster sustainability competencies and support student linguistic development in an instructed L2 setting at all levels. This article will be of interest to L2 educational professionals, higher education policy makers, and researchers concerned with enhancement of language and content integrated practices at tertiary levels of education. RÉSUMÉ Cet article passe en revue la littérature récente traitant des questions d'intégration interdisciplinaire des contenus liés au développement durable dans les programmes d'enseignement supérieur américains et élargit la discussion à l'intégration de ces contenus dans les cours de langues étrangères modernes, en particulier aux niveaux débutant et intermédiaire. L'article analyse d'abord le concept de développement durable en tant que construction curriculaire interdisciplinaire dans le contexte postsecondaire et le situe à côté des recherches récentes sur l'éducation au développement durable (EDD) et sur l'enseignement des langues secondes (L2) orienté vers le contenu. Il expose ensuite les défis et les possibilités spécifiques de l'apprentissage intégré de langues et de contenu axé sur le développement durable pour les apprenants de niveaux débutant et intermédiaire. Enfin, les auteurs proposent plusieurs pistes de réflexion sur l'intégration de la langue et du contenu afin de favoriser les compétences en développement durable et de soutenir le

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	développement linguistique des étudiants dans un contexte d'enseignement de L2 à tous les niveaux. Cet article intéressera les professionnels de l'enseignement de L2, les décideurs politiques de l'enseignement supérieur et les chercheurs soucieux de promouvoir les pratiques d'intégration de la langue et du contenu dans l'enseignement supérieur. RESUMEN En este artículo se revisa la bibliografía reciente de temas relativos a la integración interdisciplinaria de contenidos relacionados con la sostenibilidad en los planes de estudios de la educación superior estadounidense y se amplía el debate para incluir la integración de la agenda de la sostenibilidad en las aulas de lenguas extranjeras modernas, especialmente en los niveles de estudio introductorios e intermedios. En primer lugar, el artículo desglosa el concepto de la sostenibilidad como constructo curricular interdisciplinario dentro del ámbito postsecundario y lo sitúa junto a investigaciones recientes sobre la educación para la sostenibilidad (EPS) y la enseñanza de segundas lenguas (L2) por contenidos. A continuación, perfila los retos y las affordances específicos del aprendizaje integrado de contenidos de sostenibilidad y lenguas extranjeras para aprendientes de nivel introductorio e intermedio. Por último, proponemos varias consideraciones que hay que tener en cuenta al emprender el aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas, tanto para fomentar las competencias en materia de sostenibilidad como para apoyar el desarrollo lingüístico de los estudiantes en un entorno de enseñanza de L2 en todos los niveles. Este artículo será de interés para los profesionales de la enseñanza de L2, los responsables de crear políticas para el sector de la educación superior y los investigadores interesados en la mejora de las prácticas del aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas en los niveles terciarios de la educación.

Authors' Response to Reviewer/Editor Critique (for Revised Papers Only) ~ SECOND REVISION

Title: Incorporating sustainability into American postsecondary modern foreign language classrooms: exploring current practice and identifying future directions

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REVIEWER 1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVISION	
Reviewer's comment	Authors' response
1. The revisions address the concerns. My thanks to the author(s)	Many thanks, both for this feedback and your careful and thorough feedback on the first draft of this article!
REVIEWER 2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVISION	
Reviewer's comment	Authors' response
1. I appreciate the authors' willingness to revise-- for me as a reader I think they authors have written a draft that provides both an orientation to the issue (sustainability in pre-advanced language classes) and concrete ways that an instructor could bring that into their classes.	Many thanks, both for this feedback and your careful and thorough feedback on the first draft of this article!
ADDITIONAL REVISIONS	
Though the reviewers' comments did not include any further recommendations for revision, in the final version uploaded to the portal, we have indicated in red font all changes (outside of portions of the text that have been removed) to the paper (including clarifications, additions, and formatting changes).	

Incorporating sustainability into American postsecondary modern foreign language classrooms at the pre-advanced level: exploring current practice and identifying future directions

Article part of the Special Issue: Global Goals for Sustainability in European Language Teaching (guest editors: Minna Maijala & Salla-Riikka Kuusalu)

1 Introduction

Sustainability has become an important priority in American higher education settings, where it is increasingly conceived of as a necessary institutional guiding principle. From the greening of campus operations to the creation of majors that center sustainability as an academic discipline, in many colleges and universities, sustainability influences everything from campus infrastructure to curricular priorities (Melin 2019; Leal Filho 2010). It is not surprising, then, that there is a growing number of calls to center sustainability as a key educational component for all students and in all disciplines (de la Fuente 2021a; UNESCO 2020). While the presence of sustainability-related content is well-established in disciplines such as engineering, economics, or environmental sciences, in many other fields, such as modern foreign language (L2) education, efforts to incorporate this type of content are much more recent. In recent years, a small but growing body of scholarship has begun to highlight the significant contributions that L2 education can make to the broader pedagogical project of interdisciplinary education for sustainability (EfS), also sometimes referred to as education for sustainable development (ESD)¹. This research suggests promising paths forward for more expansive EfS in the postsecondary foreign language classroom. At the same time, since much of this scholarship currently focuses on advanced-level language courses, we argue that more scholarly attention is needed to the integration of sustainability content for the student population that currently represents the majority of language learners in American postsecondary contexts, namely beginning- and intermediate-level learners.

The present article begins by proposing working definitions of sustainability and education for sustainability, and then synthesizes recent research on interdisciplinary EfS at the

¹ In this article, we do not engage with the debate surrounding the terms “sustainability” and “sustainable development”, or possible distinctions or dissonances between the two. The term ‘education for sustainability (EfS)’ was chosen for this article, but the terms “education for sustainable development” (ESD) and “sustainability education” are also quite common in the published research. While important ideological differences do exist between EfS and ESD, a more elaborate discussion of the nuances of these terms is outside the scope of the present article.

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postsecondary level alongside scholarship that explores sustainability-related content-based language instruction to conceptualize what language teaching for sustainability may entail. It then discusses several key considerations for integrating sustainability-related content meaningfully and appropriately for what we are calling “pre-advanced” L2 learners² – students who begin or continue their L2 study in college but who have not yet reached advanced-level language proficiency. Given the particular linguistic needs of these pre-advanced language learners and the curricular realities of the programs in which these courses are embedded, the article argues that impressionistic evaluation of existing curricular materials represents a crucial first step in the process of EfS-informed content and language integration at the pre-advanced level. The article suggests one possible framework for conducting such an impressionistic evaluation, and then illustrates its application using sample published curricular materials from one author’s institutional context. Finally, the article suggests priorities and potential future directions for language programs in ongoing efforts to integrate sustainability-related content for all language learners.

2 Sustainability and interdisciplinary EfS

2.1 Defining terms and synthesizing frameworks

Before turning our attention to EfS for pre-advanced L2 learners, we must elaborate what we mean by education for sustainability more generally, and indeed, even the term “sustainability” itself. Several of the most common definitions of sustainability have become so well-known as to seem ubiquitous (Purvis et al. 2019). Among the most frequently-cited are the Venn diagram representation of sustainability at the intersection of environmental, economic, and societal concerns (Purvis et al. 2019), or the 1987 Brundtland report’s definition of sustainability as development in synergy with natural systems that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland 1987:16). The report’s emphasis on social and economic development that respects planetary limits has

² Because the present article focuses on foreign language education in an American postsecondary context, we engage specifically with scholarship that links L2 education and EfS in languages other than English. Much promising work is also being done at the intersections of ESL / EFL and EfS. See for example Goulah and Katunich (2020).

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been the basis upon which numerous international development agendas have been drafted, culminating most recently in the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals. Called a “blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs n.d.), this network of 17 development priorities highlights objectives that include both basic subsistence needs like food (SDG 2), water (SDG 6), and decent work (SDG 8), and also include non-material hallmarks of human flourishing such as gender equality (SDG 5) and access to quality education (SDG 4).

Given the vital role that quality education plays in furthering the sustainable development goals articulated by the United Nations (UN), it is logical that policymakers and educators have endeavored to articulate the ways in which education itself may be leveraged for working toward more sustainable futures. In academic settings, sustainability educators have defined sustainability as “the collective willingness and ability of a society to reach or maintain its viability, vitality, and integrity over long periods of time, while allowing other societies to reach or maintain their own viability, vitality, and integrity” (Wiek et al. 2015: 241). By centering the needs and prosperity of societies both now and in the future, these definitions underscore the idea of futurity and intergenerational responsibility. By the same token, their insistence on the recognition of economic, technological, natural, and social limits affirms the essential interconnectivity both between natural and built systems, and across various human societies. However, while these definitions are familiar, they remain vague. Moore et al. (2017: 2) argue that this vagueness means that sustainability lacks a unified, standard definition, which can in turn complicate the efforts of curriculum designers and faculty to conceive of what education for sustainability means in practice in their disciplinary contexts. If we wish to avoid what Nolet (2016: 41) has called “an ‘I know it when I see it’ standard” of education for sustainability that risks becoming “the educational equivalent of greenwashing”, it is essential to articulate what postsecondary education for sustainability might look like, and what it may hope to achieve.

For Basiago (1995), working definitions of sustainability are tightly linked to the academic disciplines or professional fields in which they are embedded and the methods employed to arrive at them. Thus, the priorities and principles inscribed in, for example, an economic definition of sustainability can diverge significantly from biological, sociological, or ethical definitions. One useful point of departure for establishing a base definition of education for sustainability is therefore proposing a set of foundational elements that can be considered

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salient for a wide variety of disciplines. Basiago (1995) argues that at the heart of these various disciplinary definitions of sustainability are four common, essential components. He writes:

[...] ‘sustainability’ is embodied in four principles: futurity (a concern for the welfare of future generations), equity (the fair sharing of economic benefits and burdens within and between generations), global environmentalism (a recognition of the global dimension of ecological problems associated with use or depletion of natural capital by one or some at the cost of others) and biodiversity (the maintenance of the integrity of ecological processes and systems). (Basiago 1995: 118)

The common relevance of these four criteria make them a useful foundation from which to articulate a widely-applicable definition of education for sustainability as a multifaceted concern that resonates in a wide variety of disciplinary educational contexts.

In recent years, sustainability education scholars have begun to elaborate detailed frameworks of sustainability-related competencies that may help to map these four common foundations onto more concrete learning goals. Perhaps the most well-known of these frameworks, Wiek et al.’s (2011) key competencies in sustainability, proposes an integrated model of interlocking knowledge, skills and dispositions. The authors’ framework for postsecondary sustainability education is structured around five fundamental and interdependent competencies, summarized in the Table 1 below.

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While Wiek and colleagues argue that an integrated approach that prioritizes each of these competencies is necessary for sustainability education to be considered successful (Wiek et al. 2011), they maintain that interpersonal competence must play a foundational role. They thus consider interpersonal competence a “cross-cutting” competence that enables the successful realization of all other key competencies via collaborative approaches capable of bridging geographical distance, cultural differences, and diverse histories and priorities (Wiek et al. 2011: 211). In their refinement of this framework specifically for postsecondary educational contexts, Brundiers et al. (2019) propose two more key competencies – intrapersonal and integrated

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problem-solving competency – and suggest that these seven key sustainability competencies are most productively considered as one component of an integrated system that links sustainability competencies both to basic postsecondary academic competencies, such as critical thinking, and to discipline-specific content knowledge (Brundiers et al. 2019: 23). Furthermore, Brundiers et al. (2019: 24) posit that in addition to interpersonal competence, values-thinking competence, too, should also be considered a “lead-competence” that informs all other competencies. Figure 1 below presents this integrated framework.

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By situating sustainability competencies within a network of basic academic and discipline specific knowledge and skills, Brundiers et al.’s (2019) validation of Wiek et al.’s (2011) sustainability competencies framework drives home the *interdisciplinary* nature of postsecondary education for sustainability. Indeed, Nolet (2016) argues that interdisciplinarity is a key attribute of EfS. “Education for sustainability,” he writes, “seeks to equip learners to deal with the kinds of challenges that arise from the interconnectedness of environment, culture, society, and economy and that seem to typify life in the 21st century” (Nolet 2016: 7). Because sustainability challenges touch all aspects of modern life, education for sustainability must draw on content from a variety of disciplines (Nolet 2016: 8). However, while Nolet (2016: 7) concurs with the sustainability education scholars cited earlier that a “whole-curriculum approach” to education for sustainability must necessarily include elements such as critical thinking, systems thinking, and integrated and real-world problem solving, development of students’ values must also accompany that of their knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Education for sustainability must cultivate what he terms students’ “sustainability worldview”, a way of being in the world that includes knowledge, skills, and dispositions, but that also fosters a “global ethic”, that “sees humans as citizens of the world [and] is based on a respect for human rights and self-determination that transcend specific local, national, or regional agendas” (Nolet 2016: 77–78). Crucially, this means that while content from disciplines spanning the natural and social sciences and humanities all have a role to play in education for sustainability, sustainability-aligned

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values themselves must also be considered content worthy of academic study and reflection (Nolet 2016: 8).

The above synthesis of frameworks of education for sustainability affirms that institution-wide sustainability-related priorities at the postsecondary level can interface meaningfully with both general academic skills and with fields of study for students in any major. However, in American postsecondary contexts, this interdisciplinarity has been slow to manifest. In a survey of the integration of climate and sustainability related content at the postsecondary level, Leal Filho (2010) confirms that while a majority of students indicate that climate and sustainability related content is important for their general knowledge or career aspirations, this content was limited primarily to departments in the natural and social sciences. He concludes that primarily housing climate-related content in departments of natural and social sciences is an unwarranted limitation, since “its deep ecological, economic, and social roots means that climate change needs to find its way across all relevant parts of university programmes” (Leal Filho 2010: 18). Ten years later, the findings reported in UNESCO’s (2020) report *Education for sustainable development: a roadmap* corroborate these findings. The report concludes that while scientific knowledge is unquestionably essential for education for sustainable development, the tendency to limit sustainability education to the natural and environmental sciences is not sufficient for the type of reimagined, transdisciplinary educational approaches that are up to the task of comprehending and responding to current and future sustainability challenges (UNESCO 2020: 9). Instead, the report calls for a “whole-institution approach” to education for sustainable development that rethinks “what, where and how we learn to develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that enable us all to make informed decisions and take individual and collective action on local, national, and global urgencies” (UNESCO 2020: 8). In this way, whole-institution approaches not only invite considerations of how the disciplinary content of all academic fields informs holistic interdisciplinary postsecondary education for sustainability, but also reconsiderations of existing institutional structures, educational values, and even curricular models.

2.2 Integrating L2 teaching into whole-institution EfS

In the United States, the past few years have seen increased recognition of the role colleges and universities can and should play in sustainability education. Recent initiatives have included

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everything from the signing of international commitments for more sustainability-related teaching and research ([Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future](#) 1990) to the creation of sustainability general education requirements (Dickinson College n.d.) to the embedding of climate and sustainability related learning goals throughout the curriculum (Yale University 2024, Duke University 2023). Many of these measures and initiatives aspire to the types of whole-institution curricular integration of sustainability that invite collaboration across disciplines and departments, and in which modern foreign language departments are positioned to make unique and meaningful contributions. Indeed, calls for more interdisciplinarity in modern foreign language departments have been a defining feature of imagining the future of the field for nearly twenty years. In 2007, an ad hoc committee of the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) published “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World,” a report which serves as a call for foreign language departments to imagine curricular and structural shifts that more centrally integrate the study of foreign languages and cultures into the broader pedagogical project of their institutions (Geisler et al. 2007: 237). The report concludes that to both remain relevant in the rapidly-shifting landscape of American higher education, and to more visibly contribute to institutional curricular priorities, modern foreign language departments must craft articulated curricular arcs that foster language competence and transcultural understanding at every level, that underscore the necessity of multilingualism for students in all departments and majors, and that prioritize fruitful interdisciplinary collaborations with a wide variety of fields and disciplines ([Geisler et al. 2007: 242](#)).

Though the 2007 [MLA](#) report does not identify sustainability explicitly as a thematic priority for increased interdisciplinarity, EfS is the explicit focus of one very early response to the 2007 MLA report. Goulah (2008) affirms that intentional integration of sustainability in modern foreign language courses for all learners is imperative to realize both the potential of interdisciplinary education for sustainability on the one hand, and transformative language learning on the other. For Goulah, modern foreign language courses are a necessary venue in which both knowledge-based and values-based education can coexist. This in turn invites a reconsideration of the purpose of modern foreign language education, decoupling it from what he calls “militarism, monetarism, and materialism” to instead align with values and behaviors that aspire to more sustainable futures ([Goulah 2008: 11](#)). In the intervening years, modern foreign

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language education for sustainability has begun to achieve scholarly attention in ways that underline its promise for both the knowledge- and values-based components of EfS.

In what is, to our knowledge, one of the first edited volumes to explicitly interrogate the intersections between environmental education and postsecondary foreign language teaching, Melin and contributors approach the task of integrating the environment as a topic of primary concern in the postsecondary foreign language classroom from an environmental humanities **perspective** (Melin 2019). The environmental humanities, Melin argues, emphasize the necessity of understanding “the cultural dimensions of how we live in the world” (Melin 2019: 2), and environmental humanities courses in languages other than English provide a unique opportunity for American university students to meaningfully interrogate how these lifeways are linguistically and culturally informed and specific. While Melin’s volume is not a theoretical or pragmatic engagement with broader discussions of interdisciplinary EfS and its associated competencies and goals, it nevertheless acts as an important exhortation to postsecondary language educators to intentionally consider the ways in which environmentally-focused content may meet the linguistic and aesthetic goals of foreign language literature and culture courses while also creating transdisciplinary bridges with fields in the environmental and sustainability sciences.

Published just two years later, de la Fuente’s (2021) *Education for Sustainable Development in Foreign Learning* argues that, due to the complex, global nature of sustainability-related problems, “language education could and should acquire an essential role in sustainability literacy within the higher education landscape” as it can “add crucial perspectives (intellectual, moral, global, cultural and cross-cultural, linguistic and cross linguistic) to the sustainable development debate” (de la Fuente 2021a: 2). De la Fuente advocates for an approach to EfS in postsecondary L2 classrooms that aims for what she calls “multicompetence” (de la Fuente 2021a: 4), in which language proficiency and sustainability content are intertwined. In so doing, de la Fuente’s argument echoes UNESCO’s call for ESD institution-wide, and recalls the kind of three-dimensional constellation of sustainability, general academic, and disciplinary competencies at the core of Brundiers et al.’s (2019) elaborated model of sustainability education in higher education.

This approach to foreign language teaching takes an integrated approach to developing students’ linguistic proficiency, content knowledge, and sustainability competencies in tandem.

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In foreign language learning settings, the two competencies that Wiek et al. (2011) and Brundiers et al. (2019) identify as cross-cutting – interpersonal and values-thinking competencies – play a foundational role. For example, a student aspiring to become a multicompetent user of the target language would leverage their L2 linguistic proficiency as a vital component of interpersonal competency as they refine their abilities to collaborate in teams composed of culturally and linguistically diverse groups of stakeholders (Wiek et al. 2015: 251). Similarly, the abilities that students develop in the L2 to identify, understand, and reconcile cultural and cross-cultural factors at play could be leveraged in an enactment of values-thinking competency to understand and even create visions for the future that respect culturally-influenced values (Wiek et al. 2015: 248) while engaging with sustainability-related challenges in the target language. In this way, L2 courses that leverage sustainability content and competencies can also provide venues that center a core values-based attribute of education for sustainability, the recognition that “there are multiple ways of knowing, living, and valuing and that there is no single ‘correct’ approach that will work for everyone” (Nolet 2016: 10).

2.2.1 (Critical) content-based instruction for L2 EfS integration

De la Fuente affirms that content-based instruction (CBI) is the most appropriate pedagogical approach for integrating education for sustainability in postsecondary L2 instruction (de la Fuente 2021a: 4). Echoing European scholars’ assertions that content and language integrated learning (CLIL) pedagogies allow students to develop linguistic and content-specific knowledge in tandem (Eurydice 2006), de la Fuente argues that CBI creates space for foreign language classes to become “multidisciplinary courses [where] the target language is both the medium and the object of study” (de la Fuente 2021a: 4). CBI is a pedagogical approach that aims to develop students’ linguistic proficiency alongside non-linguistic disciplinary knowledge via the integration of thematic content into the language classroom (Donato 2016). Champions of CBI argue that it reinforces form-meaning connections, motivates students towards more advanced L2 proficiency, brings interdisciplinary relevance to the language classroom, and brings to the fore consideration of individual responsibility within local and global communities. (Cammarata et al. 2016).

CBI is also a pedagogy that can, in many contexts, tend toward criticality. Indeed, in considering the integration of sustainability content, which is complex and subject to a diverse

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and often unpredictably fraught confluence of priorities and ideologies, an approach to CBI that is overtly critical (Kubota 2016; Sato et al. 2017) is most up to the task of L2 and EfS integration if, as we have seen, EfS aspires to contribute to students' knowledge of sustainability-related content, to enhance their sustainability competencies, and to enable their participation in societies that embody sustainability values. Critical content-based instruction (CCBI) "emphasizes students' development of the critical perspectives required to accomplish the mission of educating future citizens. It also stresses making the enterprise of world language education an integral and indispensable part of society" (Sato et al. 2017: 58). Sato et al.'s conception of linkages is a particularly apt model through which to understand the parallels between CCBI instruction generally and L2 EfS specifically. Linkages in CCBI connect L2 education with education in general, with other academic disciplines, and with society more broadly (Sato et al. 2017: 53). CCBI encourages students to "become language users who can set goals and strive to accomplish them, and [...] willingly participate in discussions to create new values" (Sato et al. 2017: 60). Kubota (2016) reminds us that the criticality of CCBI recalls the critical pedagogy of Freire, Giroux, and others that "envision[s] social change by questioning assumptions and posing problems" (Sato et al. 2017: 193). If, as Goulah (2008) suggests, traditional models of language teaching risk upholding values and practices that tend toward unsustainability, sustainability-focused CCBI maintains that "interlocking structures of power, class, race, spirituality, environment and so forth must be *explicitly* discussed as content and critically analyzed" (Goulah 2008: 10). Here we return to Nolet, whose own idea of criticality in EfS "is concerned with undoing the effects of oppression and hegemonic relationships" that perpetuate unsustainability (Nolet 2016: 90). Thus, while sustainability as a thematic topic for CBI promotes linkages between L2 education and many other disciplinary contexts, and while the study of this thematic context in the context of other cultures and through another language can productively contribute to the development of students' values-thinking competency, an explicitly *critical* CBI approach further enhances the real promise of language teaching for sustainability. In a CCBI approach, development of content knowledge and sustainability competencies must necessarily be accompanied by critical reflection on the values and norms that are reflected in the content, in the teaching materials used to present the content, and the ways in which they either uphold or challenge unsustainability.

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In this way, we argue that the intersections between EfS and (C)CBI are clear. Both aspire to a conception of interdisciplinary education that centers analysis and critical reflection, promotes values and dispositions wrapped up in responsibility and community, and places a high priority on the ability to communicate effectively across cultural and linguistic boundaries. We turn our attention now to what L2 teaching for sustainability might look like for *all* learners, and specifically those learners who have not yet, and indeed may never, reach advanced levels of L2 proficiency.

3 L2 teaching and EfS for all students

3.1 EfS for pre-advanced students

In the preceding sections, we have endeavored to synthesize baseline understandings of “sustainability” and “education for sustainability”, particularly in a postsecondary context, and to connect EfS principles to critical content based language instructional approaches in order to highlight the explicit linkages between interdisciplinary sustainability education on the one hand, and L2 teaching and learning on the other. In this way, as de la Fuente argues, education for sustainability in the postsecondary foreign language classroom has the potential to realize what she calls “the primary mission of higher education: to give students knowledge, competencies, and tools to live sustainably, and to find solutions to the sustainability challenges we face so that future generations can, too” (de la Fuente 2021b: 80). However, the trends in the current research on language and sustainability integration beg the question – for which foreign language students is this integration intended and accessible? To date, **much** of the published research on EfS in postsecondary L2 education has focused on language learners who are attaining, or have already attained, advanced-level linguistic proficiency. In de la Fuente (2021), for example, only three of the twelve pilot projects presented in the volume are geared towards beginning or intermediate proficiency students; Melin’s (2019) volume includes just a single such project, with one additional chapter alluding to institutional structures that would support pre-advanced learners. While the relative paucity of projects that address the lower end of the student language proficiency range is logical – many of the curricular projects described in the abovementioned research are constructed around sophisticated case studies, extensive community involvement, or are housed in environmental humanities-style literature and cultural studies courses that require

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advanced skills in the foreign language – it poses the question of who language and sustainability-related content in integration should be for, or to what extent it can make meaningful contributions to a broad pedagogical project of education for sustainability in all disciplines, including modern foreign languages, and for all students.

The authors of the 2007 MLA report describe a common bifurcation within American modern foreign language departments, whereby advanced-level courses in literature or cultural studies are given pride of place, and courses designed for introductory- and intermediate-proficiency learners are undervalued and considered separate from the intellectual project of the discipline. In this model, language courses at the lower-proficiency end of the course sequence provide basic linguistic skills training (Geisler et al. 2007: 237), while advanced-level courses define the intellectual trajectory and priorities of the department. In their reimagining of modern foreign language departments built on an array of courses that develop students translingual and transcultural skills, the report's authors critique this language-content divide, and instead argue for an articulated course progression that leverages transdisciplinarity at all levels. To be sure, enhancing the quantity and breadth of advanced-level L2 courses that meaningfully and expansively integrate sustainability-related content can no doubt contribute to retention efforts at the upper proficiency ranges of language study and diversify the types of advanced courses available to students. However, we argue that introductory- and intermediate-level courses, too, are an essential component of this type of curricular reform, and that much more attention must be devoted to sustainability content integration and curriculum adaptation or development for lower-proficiency learners if we are to avoid reproducing the type of language and content bifurcation that the MLA report rejects.

Numerous factors contribute to the relative underrepresentation of meaningful language and sustainability-content integration at “pre-advanced” levels – a term we use here to refer collectively to courses geared toward postsecondary foreign language learners with introductory or intermediate level proficiency in the target language³. For example, Maijala et al. (2024) note that lexical constraints tend to limit teachers' ability to engage pre-advanced learners in discussions of complex sustainability topics. Yet another limitation relates to the lack of

³ By “introductory” proficiency, we understand A1-A2 proficiency on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale, or novice-mid to novice-high proficiency on the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) scale. By “intermediate”, we understand **emerging** B1 / intermediate-low to intermediate-mid on these same scales.

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instructor familiarity with sustainability-related content, or with the skills needed to teach potentially controversial topics more generally (Maijala et al. 2024; Sato et al. 2017), particularly with learners who are still developing target language skills necessary for precision and nuance. Materials constraints, too, represent a significant barrier to meaningful integration of engaging sustainability-related content for pre-advanced learners. For example, in their description of a pilot project to create sustainability-related modules that correspond to many of the common themes of introductory-level postsecondary Spanish courses, Méndez Seijas and Parra (2021) note that many commercial materials for beginning learners are focused almost exclusively on the teaching of grammatical structures and on clichéd cultural topics that are otherwise largely devoid of meaningful content. If, as is the case for many postsecondary language programs with an articulated, proficiency-based progression of language courses, published curricula used across sections of courses for pre-advanced learners represent a mandatory and often sizeable portion of the curricular content (Allen 2008), making these materials work in a shift toward EfS-informed CCBI can be a complicated endeavor. The use of English alongside the target language in sustainability-focused lessons or units for pre-advanced learners is another complicating factor that appears frequently in the literature (Kern and Rodic 2021; Melin and Broner 2019), as meaningful engagement with sustainability content may necessitate difficult trade-offs related to L2 versus L1 use for learners who have not yet reached advanced levels of linguistic proficiency.

Nevertheless, if we are to take seriously the task of aligning foreign language curricula with institutional priorities for interdisciplinary education for sustainability, it is vital, particularly in American postsecondary contexts, that it be taken up not only for learners with advanced language proficiency, but also for pre-advanced learners. Indeed, pre-advanced learners make up the majority of foreign language students in American colleges and universities. In the United States, relatively few students who study a language other than English at the postsecondary level ever reach advanced-level proficiency (Malone et al. 2004), even in colleges and universities in which foreign language study is one component of general education graduation requirements. In their 2021 report on enrollments in languages other than English in American colleges and universities, the MLA notes that of the 15.4 million students enrolled in an American postsecondary institution, only a little more than a million students, or right around 7.8%, were studying a language other than English. Of those students, only a

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fraction were enrolled in advanced-level courses. For example, in the case of Spanish and French, the most commonly taught foreign languages taught in US postsecondary contexts, five times as many students were enrolled in introductory-level language courses than in advanced-level language courses (Lusin et al 2021). It is, of course, indisputable that advanced-level language courses offer numerous opportunities for elaborate integration of sustainability content in meaningful ways. However, given that many postsecondary L2 students **do not** achieve the level of proficiency necessary for advanced coursework, failure to intentionally and expansively integrate sustainability content and principles into courses for pre-advanced learners means that the vast majority of American postsecondary students risk missing out on the opportunity to engage with interdisciplinary sustainability education in their L2 courses. This, in turn, implies that, without expanded attention to pre-advanced language learners in the education for sustainability scholarship, modern foreign language departments risk falling short of the potential that de la Fuente (2021a) argues they can and should have for interdisciplinary EfS in postsecondary contexts. We therefore argue that pre-advanced courses, too, **must** be considered appropriate, and indeed necessary venues, in which to prioritize the types of language-and-content integration that can foster both student linguistic development and sustainability competencies.

Level-appropriate integration of sustainability-related content for pre-advanced postsecondary learners has the potential to both foster integrated language and sustainability learning, and to provide engaging and intellectually-challenging content in basic language courses. Attention to the development of language skills and sustainability competencies in tandem in introductory- and intermediate-level foreign language courses may also help to further break down the abovementioned bifurcation in modern foreign language departments (Geisler et al. 2007: 234). Coherent and articulated EfS integration across levels thus makes pre-advanced foreign language instruction at the postsecondary level not only a venue for improving linguistic proficiency, but also for establishing a pathway toward the mastery of key sustainability competencies that is necessary if institutions are to be successful in establishing these competencies as a primary outcome of postsecondary education for all students and in all fields.

In an expansion of their 2011 article, Wiek et al. (2015) suggest an operationalisation of their key sustainability competencies framework that provides guidance in establishing this type of pathway towards mastery for students in secondary, postsecondary, and postgraduate

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educational contexts. Though the authors provide core learning outcomes for each of their five competencies, in Table 2 below, we provide summaries only for interpersonal and values-thinking competencies, since, as we **have shown**, those competencies are particularly germane for L2 EfS integration for pre-advanced learners.

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Though these learning outcomes were originally developed for sustainability education contexts, as we will argue, they can also provide useful guidance for instructors of pre-advanced L2 learners and for curriculum designers wishing to adapt or develop sustainability-related teaching materials, since they provide concrete benchmarks of these key competencies that can be used to render more transparent the linkages amongst language-specific instructional goals and interdisciplinary education for sustainability more broadly.

3.1.1 Recommendations for sustainability curriculum (re)design for pre-advanced learners

In the preceding sections, we have argued that recent scholarship on L2 teaching for sustainability presents exciting models for ongoing work at the intersections of language teaching and learning and sustainability education, but that the present dearth of research focusing specifically on pre-advanced proficiency levels suggests that a sizeable number of postsecondary L2 learners are not currently benefitting from the many fruitful intersections between language and sustainability content. If we want to affirm that postsecondary L2 education can and should play an important role in broader interdisciplinary efforts to center education for sustainability in postsecondary institutions’ curricular priorities, we must pay more attention to the pre-advanced levels of language education. There are several meaningful, immediately salient points of intersection between key competencies in sustainability and introductory- and intermediate-level language education, but exploiting these in the design of well-integrated curricular materials is not a simple endeavor. Given that the field of EfS-informed L2 teaching is relatively recent and that there are a limited number of examples within the existing literature that provide models for pre-advanced students upon which to draw, we present a series of recommendations.

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(1) Instructor familiarity with sustainability content

Maijala et al. (2024) remind us that the integration of sustainability-related themes into L2 courses requires the development of a baseline level of content familiarity that is often outside language instructors' disciplinary expertise. While, as we will demonstrate, the difficulty of such an endeavor takes on a particular tenor in the case of pre-advanced L2 courses, the overarching sentiment is not unique to language instructors. Indeed, the scholarship on interdisciplinary EfS abounds with discussions of initiatives and procedures undertaken that, while not specific to L2 teaching and learning, demonstrate institutional structures that can be developed to facilitate the incorporation of sustainability-related course content by instructors who were not trained as sustainability educators. In postsecondary institutional settings, these initiatives have often taken the form of professional learning communities that provide interested faculty the opportunity to collaborate over an extended period of days, weeks, or months to acquire baseline sustainability knowledge, develop familiarity with EfS pedagogical approaches, and begin the task of course adaptation or course redesign in collaboration with other faculty and sustainability education scholars (see, for example, Barlett and Rappaport 2009; Kaza et al. 2015; Paul et al. 2020). Though these initiatives require a substantial investment of time and of resources on both an individual and on an institutional scale, they are crucial for elucidating the links between sustainability and other disciplines, establishing and expanding networks, honing best practices, and developing interdisciplinary communities of practice (Paul et al. 2020).

(2) Linguistic needs of pre-advanced learners

Given the influence the environmental humanities have had on language teaching for sustainability initiatives to date, it is not surprising that much of the current scholarship focuses on advanced-level curricular initiatives. Indeed, even in contexts where languages for specific purposes approaches inform sustainability content integration, advanced-level L2 proficiency is often considered a pre-requisite (see, for example, Reisinger et al. 2021). Maijala et al. (2024) note that linguistic constraints are a major complicating factor for pre-advanced students tasked with discussing complex topics related to sustainability (p. 4). At the same time, creating conditions whereby complex topics are integrated in engaging and level-appropriate ways means that postsecondary students' pre-advanced language courses more closely correspond, in intellectual rigor and in content, to their interests and their coursework in other disciplines

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(Méndez Seijas & Parra 2021: 88). We argue that, while not insurmountable, the linguistic needs of lower-proficiency learners represent a significant topic of consideration if L2 EfS is to meaningfully contribute to students' language and content learning in tandem.

In much of the published research, these linguistic considerations often mean that curriculum designers find entry points for sustainability content by incorporating this content into existing linguistic curricular content. In their description of a sustainability-themed redesign of a second-semester introductory Spanish course, Méndez Seijas and Parra (2021) affirm that, at least thematically, there is much that links the types of topics that introductory Spanish curricula present most frequently – for example, clothing, food, or travel – to content that is equally relevant to interdisciplinary sustainability education. Their approach to their complete curriculum redesign project leverages multiliteracies pedagogies (Paesani et al. 2015) to design a series of text-based units where authentic materials act as model artefacts upon which to build project-based tasks (Méndez Seijas and Parra 2021: 92). The authors' redesign preserves the types of lexical and grammatical elements that would figure in a standard second-semester course, layering on sustainability-related learning goals via their judicious choice of comprehensible authentic materials. In a pilot project implemented in a third-semester university German classroom, Kautz (2016) also inserts redesigned sustainability lessons into existing curriculum, preserving the standard linguistic content and mapping it onto related sustainability themes via the integration of short texts (Kautz 2016: 238).

(3) Materials

The aforementioned examples approach the task of sustainability integration for pre-advanced learners from distinctly different points of departure – complete redesign on the one hand (Méndez Seijas & Parra 2021), and adaptation of existing curriculum on the other (Kautz 2016). While complete curricular redesign from a CCBI-informed perspective is no doubt an ideal approach to more holistically and expansively integrating EfS for pre-advanced L2 learners, this recommendation belies the complexity of this task in articulated programs. In many American colleges and universities, published curricular materials, in the form of textbooks, online learning platforms, and other resources play a dominant role in determining the curricular trajectory and teaching priorities of language classes (Reagan 2016: 176; Allen 2008), particularly for lower-proficiency learners. Because complete redesign is a time- and resource-

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intensive proposition, we argue that a more realistic approach to initial efforts of integrating EfS for pre-advanced learners is instead an adaptive approach that takes **existing materials** as its point of departure. To be sure, few if any published curricula designed for pre-advanced learners adopt a pedagogical approach approximating CBI (Méndez Seijas & Parra 2021). Nevertheless, avenues do exist to work within the confines of published curricula, particularly in the early phases of EfS integration initiatives, without ceding to what Reagan (2016: 176) has called the “hegemony of the textbook”. Critical engagement with published materials, or what Reagan (2016: 177) calls “curricular nullification”, invites critical pedagogical approaches to engaging with, rejecting, or supplementing published materials. If done carefully and well, the practice has the potential to facilitate the transition toward more expansively-integrated EfS for pre-advanced learners that respects level-appropriate language learning goals, leaves space for the integration of the teaching of sustainability content and the development of sustainability competencies, and invites the kind of critical engagement with values and dispositions that Nolet’s (2016) conception of EfS requires. In what follows, we suggest one possible framework for impressionistic evaluation of existing curricular materials that takes into consideration the CCBI and EfS pedagogies we have discussed.

3.2.1 An entry point into integrating sustainability-related content into existing pre-advanced courses: toward a proposed framework for impressionistic materials evaluation

In the specific case of considering sustainability-related content in existing materials, an important first step, as Maijala et al. (2024) affirm, is examining the ways in which sustainability is currently presented in existing materials. However, because sustainability is such a multifaceted concept, the presence or absence in these materials of themes that could be considered sustainability-related – for example, recycling, ecotourism, or green spaces – is an insufficient measure with which to evaluate the usefulness of these materials for a transition toward meaningful L2-and-EfS integration. Because materials evaluation that sets out to determine the relative strengths and weaknesses of a given set of materials must necessarily rely heavily on local priorities and unique situational specificities, a detailed evaluation framework that can be applied to a variety of different contexts is outside the scope of this **article**. What follows, therefore, is a set of considerations that may prove useful based on the principles of impressionistic evaluation (McGrath 2016; Tomlinson 2013) as well as Littlejohn’s (2011)

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recommendations for materials evaluation of published curricular materials. In articulating this flexible framework for impressionistic evaluation, we draw on the definitions of sustainability and sustainability competencies, as well as on the recommendations for critical reflection on the values and ideologies embedded in educational materials that is at the foundation of both EfS (Nolet 2016) and (C)CBI (Sato et al. 2017; Reagan 2016). We propose the following five interconnected questions, which we have intentionally phrased broadly so as to leave room for practitioners to adapt them, or to insert their own particular educational or institutional priorities.

(1) What definitions of sustainability are apparent in the content presented in the materials?

As Moore et al. (2017) remind us, definitions of sustainability are tightly linked to the contexts and disciplines in which they are embedded. However, disciplinary specificity notwithstanding, we argue that at a minimum, the extent to which thematic content presented in existing materials exhibits one or more of Basiago’s (1995) four criteria of sustainability – futurity, equity, global environmentalism and biodiversity – must be considered in order to determine whether or not it could, as written, contribute to meaningful EfS. For example, published curricula for pre-advanced L2 learners in American postsecondary contexts nearly always include units on transportation, on travel and tourism, or on food, and at least some portion of these units typically makes allusion to related environmental or social concerns. However, if the treatment of these topics does not overtly approach them in a way that centers one or more of the four sustainability criteria, we argue that the materials, as written, fall short of the aims of education for sustainability. In this way, while seemingly very simple, we argue that this question is a necessary point of departure if we wish to avoid cursory treatments of environmental topics under the guise of sustainability that amount to no more than pedagogical greenwashing (Nolet 2016: 41).

From there, materials evaluators may wish to elaborate a more institutionally-specific working understanding of the materials’ definition of sustainability based on the ways in which these materials present human and natural systems, or on the importance that the materials accord to ideas of collective responsibility to present or future communities. As is the case with any evaluative judgement of what is implied in a given set of materials, this working definition will be subjective to great extent (Littlejohn 2011), though will at a minimum allow evaluators to identify fundamental strengths or weaknesses of the materials as written, as well as to elaborate

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potential strands of resonance or dissonance between the definitions of sustainability that rise to the surface within existing materials and broad programmatic or institutional priorities.

(2) From a content perspective, are the materials sufficiently engaging and challenging?

In CBI approaches to L2 instruction, it is not enough to simply present a topic and consider it content. In his discussion of curriculum development from a CBI approach, Martel (2016) cautions against what he calls “thinking-light” materials, in which a topic is superficially presented in order to elicit desired grammatical structures with little regard for the more consequential aspects of content. Indeed, since CBI aspires to integrate meaningful, intellectually stimulating thematic content into L2 contexts, surface-level allusions to environmental concerns deployed only to elicit desired structures or lexical features do not rise to the challenge, nor do they interface in any intentional way with the tenets of interdisciplinary EfS. Martel (2016) further distinguishes between “thinking-light” versus intellectually engaging materials in his discussion of “topics” and “themes”. For Martel, “topics” offer little in the way of intellectual engagement, as they present only loosely connected ideas with no real depth. He thus argues that “themes” – which present a coherent and often problem-based approach to tackling “big ideas” in the L2 classroom – offer real promise for content that is meaningful and challenging (Martel 2016: 114). While the specifics of content that is sufficiently engaging and challenging may vary from one instructional context or student group to another, in the case of postsecondary pre-advanced learners, we argue that sustainability content should, at a minimum, present topics coherently and in ways that move beyond modeling lexical or grammatical structures toward critically engaging with, or even problematizing, concerns that resonate with students’ lived experiences and academic interests (see also de la Fuente 2021b). Furthermore, this content should present the themes being addressed in ways that correspond to young adult postsecondary learners’ intellectual sophistication and offer opportunities to consider new or different viewpoints, or to grapple with sustainability-related challenges in a way that is complex and nuanced. In this regard, locally-consistent evaluative criteria can help materials evaluators determine whether existing materials’ treatment of sustainability-related content engages students in higher order thinking that brings substantive intellectual engagement into the L2 classrooms within even the most introductory-level of classes.

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(3) From a language perspective, are the materials sufficiently engaging and challenging?

In her analysis of the results of problem-based pedagogy on students’ sustainability and linguistic knowledge, de la Fuente (2021b) maintains that for sustainability-related content to make meaningful contributions to students’ linguistic development, it must make level-appropriate demands on students’ existing linguistic proficiency. De la Fuente argues that it is not enough for students to simply “talk a lot” about the content they encounter in thematic lessons, as “talking a lot” does not automatically foster students’ linguistic development (de la Fuente 2021b: 77). Rather, engaging tasks must be carefully structured to require student production of sufficiently challenging language. For the purposes of the present article and its focus on pre-advanced learners, language need not be linguistically “advanced”, from a language proficiency standpoint, in order to be challenging, but should make cognitive demands on students sufficient to further their lexical, grammatical, or discursive abilities in the L2. In the specific case of pre-advanced learners, especially those in their first one or two semesters of L2 study, it is therefore perfectly appropriate for materials that are “challenging” to elicit relatively “basic” grammatical features or lexical breadth, as long as such features represent the outer edge of what students are linguistically capable of. The extent to which the materials provide models of this level-appropriate challenging language, or include entry points for instructors to scaffold the development of this language in their classroom instruction, should also be considered.

We recognize that for students who are very early in their L2 learning journey, linguistic sophistication is often at odds with the type of intellectual sophistication that young adult learners are capable of, and indeed expect in their other academic courses taught in the L1. Materials evaluators will therefore likely also need to grapple with determining whether or not the materials achieve a balance between linguistic appropriateness and challenge on the one hand, and engaging content that demonstrates intellectual rigor on the other.

(4) Does language-and-content in integration in the materials contribute to the acquisition of undergraduate level mastery of key competencies in sustainability (Wiek et al. 2015)?

In much the same way that “talking a lot” in the L2 does not necessarily guarantee the type of linguistic production that can enhance students’ existing language proficiency, “talking a lot” about sustainability-related content does not necessarily foster meaningful development of undergraduate-level mastery of Wiek et al.’s (2015) key competencies in sustainability.

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Evaluation of the effectiveness of language-and-content integration must therefore consider not only the balance between linguistic and content sophistication, but also the extent to which the outcomes of these tasks map onto level-appropriate operationalizations of key competencies in sustainability. Given that two of the most foundational of these competencies – interpersonal and values-thinking (see Table 2) – are also some of the most salient for the work of pre-advanced L2 teaching and learning, evaluators should consider whether and how existing materials work to articulate intersections between linguistic proficiency and sustainability competencies, how they make the development of these competencies accessible and realizable for pre-advanced learners, and how subsequent courses at increasingly advanced levels may follow in a well-articulated, integrated course arc that incrementally contributes to students' increasing mastery of key competencies.

(5) Do the materials offer entry points to discussions of the values and dispositions necessary for EfS?

Nolet (2016) argues that one of the foundational tenets of interdisciplinarily education for sustainability is its emphasis on the values-based components of education that elicits change in students' thinking and behaviors (Nolet 2016: 7). In meaningful EfS, he continues, "the values and principles associated with sustainability are made explicit, examined, debated, tested, and applied in a variety of real-world contexts" (Nolet 2016: 8). This assertion is consistent with those put forth by CCBI scholars, who argue that the real promise of critical engagement with interdisciplinary content in the L2 course is that it blends the learning of language, the learning of content, and the development of students' critical disposition toward that content, and indeed toward the act of language learning and language use (Sato et al. 2017: 60). Thus a final, but no less crucial, component of an impressionistic evaluation of materials and their suitability for the task of EfS for pre-advanced learners must be a consideration of what values are imbedded in the topics presented, and indeed to what extent these materials ask students to (re)consider their own values, their dispositions, or their inclination to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable societies and futures.

3.3 Impressionistic materials evaluation in practice: a sample unit from an intensive pre-advanced course

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As is clear from the aforementioned questions, the impressionistic materials evaluation we are proposing must necessarily be broad, as many of the more granular considerations that will factor into this evaluation will be tightly linked to the programmatic and institutional realities and priorities of each individual context. Our goal is thus not to propose a detailed rubric to guide this evaluation, but instead to suggest this set of five essential, interlocking questions that can guide a consideration of existing materials and curricula for departments and programs at the very early stages of considering interdisciplinary EfS integration into pre-advanced courses. In this section, we offer an example of how the impressionistic evaluation framework may be used to guide materials evaluation efforts using a sample lesson from the published curriculum currently in use in the pre-advanced language sequence at one author’s institution.

At one author’s home institution, a private research university in the American southeast, ongoing efforts to intentionally integrate sustainability-related content into language courses at the advanced level began 5 years ago via a co-curricular course offered by the departments of Mandarin Chinese, French, Spanish and German in collaboration with the department of Environmental Sciences (Reisinger et al. 2021). In the years since this collaboration began, the author’s institution has announced a broad institutional commitment to interdisciplinary sustainability, which has prompted many faculty members to intentionally evaluate potential intersections between their disciplines and education for sustainability more generally. Encouraged by the success of advanced-level sustainability-related courses in a variety of languages, the author’s French language program is in the initial phases of redesigning a number of introductory- and intermediate-level French courses, with the goal of making sustainability-related content and the development of sustainability competencies accessible not only to French majors, but to pre-advanced French students as well. As we have argued, evaluation of materials currently in-use is a necessary component of any initial efforts to embed EfS in pre-advanced courses, and so in what follows, we propose an example of the usage of the impressionistic evaluation framework we have outlined, taking as a point of departure an evaluation of one lesson in an existing curriculum for one such pre-advanced course.

The course in question is an intensive introductory French course geared toward novice French students. Designed with the aim of bringing students to an A2 or emerging B1 level of proficiency in the span of approximately 4 months, students receive eight hours of classroom instruction per week, and complete an additional 8-12 hours of individual practice outside of

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class. Because the course must align with the existing departmental course sequence, it must also employ the same published curricular materials, though the intensity of the course lends some flexibility in pacing and coverage. Due to these programmatic constraints, while complete curriculum redesign is the eventual goal, in the immediate short-term, impressionistic evaluation of the appropriateness of the existing curriculum – with an eye toward adapting, supplementing, or critically engaging with problematic components of the curriculum as written – is a necessary first step. Appendix 1 provides the excerpted 2 pages from the published curriculum, while Table 3 summarizes the key takeaways of an impressionistic evaluation of one three-week instructional sequence occurring at the end of the academic term, using each of the five considerations proposed above as a guide.

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The lesson as written in the published materials present a pair of “documents” – the film trailer for the French documentary *Demain* alongside an excerpted public opinion poll. While none of the existing materials present an explicit definition of sustainability (impressionistic evaluation question #1), content that could be considered sustainability-themed is plentiful, and as presented, the materials include content that could map onto three of Basiago’s (1995) four key components of sustainability. Questions #2 and #3, which interrogate the levels engagement and challenge presented in the materials from both a content and a linguistic perspective, require an impressionistic appraisal of what the materials ask students to do with the content presented, and how these tasks align with the specific needs of the students enrolled in the course. Here, the lesson is multimodal, and invites students to express opinions, share information, and make basic hypotheses while engaging with source content that is interesting, if rather limited in length and in depth. While the linguistic tasks asked of students would seem to offer ample opportunities to observe targeted, level-appropriate structural or lexical items in context, the materials provide little lexical breadth or depth, and demonstrate no scaffolding of target structures upon which instructors could base instruction or review or on which students could model their own responses. Similarly, while the topics do align with a broader sustainability theme, they are presented with little nuance or depth, and even less opportunity for critical engagement with the

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content. These observations recall Martel’s (2016) criticisms of “thinking-light” materials in CBI. An examination of language and content in integration (question #4) reveals numerous opportunities in the published curriculum to develop A2- and emerging B1-level receptive skills by extracting essential information from the abovementioned short texts, while accompanying discussion questions prompt level-appropriate productive skills in articulating short descriptions and narrations, as well as basic comparisons and opinions. However, the materials offer no structure for making transparent connections between the tasks as presented and operationalized interpersonal and values-thinking competencies. In the same way, while values such as intergenerational responsibility or community engagement form the subtext upon which the lesson is structured, there is no intentional or critical reflection on these values (question #5), nor do they become the type of targeted topics of consideration that critical content-based instruction suggests they could – and indeed, should – be (Sato et al. 2017: 60).

Working through the five guiding questions of our impressionistic materials evaluation framework thus suggests that, while the materials are a solid basis upon which to construct a lesson that would more overtly, meaningfully, and critically approach the task of language education for sustainability for second-semester learners, the published curriculum invites several adaptations. Based on a number of other factors – which, depending upon context, may include syllabus and pacing, student interest, instructor expertise, and lexicogrammatical focus – curriculum designers could approach the task of adapting this particular lesson with an eye toward more transparent integration of language, content, competencies, and values learning. In the use-case of these materials in the author’s course, this adaptation includes expansion of the lesson into a several-day unit that introduces the entirety of the documentary film as well as associated case studies, the creation of a supplemental glossary to complement existing vocabulary lists, and the scaffolding of guided discussions to encourage elicitation of appropriately challenging lexicogrammatical elements to describe and to state and defend opinions.

4 Conclusions

Scholars have remarked that, in order for foreign language education to fully realize its contributions to interdisciplinary EfS, language instructors must engage in intentional and ongoing professional development in order to familiarize themselves with content and, in turn,

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integrate it in relevant and engaging ways for their students (de la Fuente 2021a; Maijala et al. 2024). This is especially true at the pre-advanced level, where professional development must foster familiarity not only with sustainability-related content, but also with the tools and frameworks that can make that content accessible to lower-proficiency students. As more colleges and universities move to prioritize sustainability in their institutional missions, this professional development must also include pre-advanced language educators' participation as stakeholders in the evaluation of existing materials and structures, and indeed in the crafting and implementation of enhanced or completed revised pedagogical practices. This implementation must also provide opportunities for more expansive experimentation with sustainability-content-and-language integration in introductory and intermediate-level foreign language courses, in order to both reach the significant segment of the postsecondary L2 student population that may not ever pursue L2 coursework beyond the pre-advanced level, and foster meaningful and coherent articulation across the L2 curriculum.

Interdisciplinary sustainability education scholars also point to the need for assessment strategies that allow faculty to gauge the impact of sustainability education on students' developing competencies (Brundiers et al. 2019; Wiek et al. 2011, 2015), or to more coherently map out the many fruitful intersections between existing pedagogical standards and the necessary pedagogical reimaginings that EfS requires (Nolet 2016). For faculty committed to language education for sustainability, more frequent integration of sustainability content in L2 settings brings with it both an increased need for assessing the effectiveness of this integration from both a linguistic and a sustainability perspective, and also new opportunities for considering the forms these assessments may take. As the field continues to grow and expand, language educators have a dynamic opportunity to elaborate the ways in which the skills, knowledge, and dispositions fostered in L2 teaching can make essential contributions to pedagogical goals that include not only teaching about sustainability-related topics, but also teaching for sustainability.

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Table 1. Wiek et al.'s (2011: 207-211) key competencies in sustainability.

Key competency	Associated abilities
interpersonal competency	collaborate and communicate with diverse stakeholders and in transcultural settings
values-thinking (normative) competency	identify, understand, reconcile and apply diverse norms, values, and priorities
systems-thinking competency	understand complex systems and the relationships between constitutive components
anticipatory competency	create and evaluate visions of the future related to sustainability problem-solving
strategic competency	propose and implement measures, interventions and strategies to solve sustainability problems

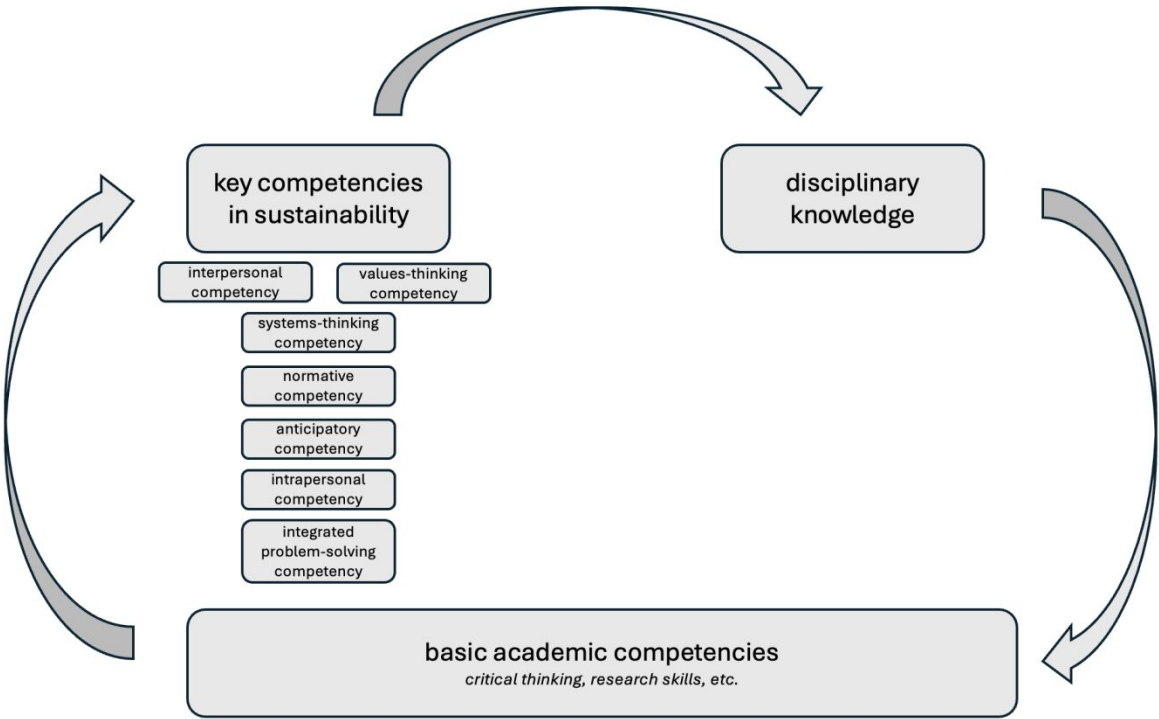


Figure 1. Integration of basic academic, sustainability, and disciplinary competencies (Brundiers et al. 2019)

Table 2. A summary of Wiek et al.'s (2015) learning outcomes for key competencies in sustainability essential in L2 EfS integration for pre-advanced learners

Interpersonal competency	
<u>Secondary-level mastery includes:</u> <i>Understanding</i> • basic components of successful interpersonal communication • how to effectively and respectfully collaborate in teams	<u>Postsecondary-level mastery includes:</u> <i>Understanding</i> • how to incorporate diverse stakeholder input in solving sustainability-related problems • the impacts of culture and cultural differences in sustainability <i>Applying</i> • interpersonal communication skills to collaborate with stakeholders on simple projects, negotiate, and resolve conflict • empathy in interactions, including perspective-taking
Normative / values-thinking competency	
<u>Secondary-level mastery includes:</u> <i>Understanding</i> • foundational concepts such as justice, fairness, and responsibility • how values influence stakeholders' values and actions • students' own values and norms	<u>Postsecondary-level mastery includes:</u> <i>Creating</i> • sustainability visions informed by diverse values and principles

Table 3. Summary impressionistic evaluation of existing curricular materials in the author’s institutional context.

DOSSIER 7: Nous nous souvenons. . . et nous agissons! CHAPTER 7: We remember. . . and we act <u>CONTEXT:</u> The materials as written fall near the end of a fifteen-week semester. The loose theme of the chapter as a whole is multilingualism, memory, and “taking action” for a variety of social and environmental causes (for example, the <i>Fondation Lilian Thuram</i> or ecotourism). By the time students reach this point in the semester, the published curriculum assumes that they have achieved roughly A2-level of proficiency. Grammatical foci of the materials as published include past tenses and transitional phrases situate the chronological flow of a story or to indicate dates. Thematically-presented vocabulary, which is a known shortcoming of the published curriculum, includes basic vocabulary necessary to express cause and consequence, expressions using the French verb “être”+ adjectives, and a limited assortment of vocabulary related to ecotourism. The lesson chosen for this sample impressionistic evaluation falls at the very end of the chapter, and presents a series of discussion-based activities around a short, 2-minute film trailer for the French environmental documentary <i>Demain</i>.
(1) What definitions of sustainability are apparent in the content presented in the materials? As published, the materials include the following conceptions of sustainability: • equity: The materials as-written include excerpted public opinion surveys that contextualize the French public’s expressed reasons for becoming involved in community-based initiatives. • futurity: The digital version of the materials embeds the cinematic film trailer for <i>Demain</i> directly into the lesson. This film trailer specifically links environmental crises experienced today to future generations, and hints at the content of the film, which will present numerous case studies of solutions using a hopeful and optimistic tone. • global environmentalism: Both in the embedded film trailer and in the related discussion activities proposed in the lesson, mentions of individual and collective actions <i>Remarks:</i> The materials as written are promising, as they touch upon three of the four key components of sustainability proposed by Basagio (1995). However, given the nature of the materials proposed – a very brief film trailer, an excerpted (and un-cited) public opinion poll – this components are presented in a rather cursory manner.
(2) From a content perspective, are the materials sufficiently engaging and challenging? In the local context of the course in which this lesson is taught, the materials that students are likely to find the most engaging are multimodal, related to real-life concerns, and lend themselves to low-stakes discussions and opinion sharing. As written, these materials are • multimodal: and include both text, graphics, and video • open-ended: though based on a relatively short film clip, the accompanying discussion questions invite students to share their hypotheses about the film itself, to discuss their prior knowledge of environmental or social change-makers in their own countries, and to do research on the types of social or environmental causes that motivate individuals in their countries. • limited: the entire lesson is built solely on a 2-minute film trailer, and an un-cited public opinion poll the authentic source of which is unidentified (and unidentifiable). Thus, while the

activity seeds interesting discussions, there is little upon which to base more meaningful exchanges of ideas or opinions.

Materials that students are most likely to find **challenging** are those that treat the topic with an adult level of seriousness, or that present them with viewpoints that are new or that challenge preconceived ideas. As written, these materials

- align with genres that are likely already familiar – all students will have engaged, in one form or another, with documentary-style environmental reporting – and with topics that are, at least theoretically, of significant interest to students.
- do not, however, invite a serious exploration of the topic, as they are limited to only partial information. While comparing social engagement tendencies in France versus their home countries is likely to be of general interest, the materials as-written encourage only a baseline comparison (___ is different, ___ is the same).

Remarks: While the content as-written has the potential to initiate some meaningful discussions and will likely encourage students to gather relevant information about their own local and community contexts, as presented these materials do not present the topic or encourage discussion of it in a sufficiently in-depth way to encourage engagement or to challenge students' existing ideas.

(3) From a language perspective, are the materials sufficiently engaging and challenging?

As written, this lesson asks students to:

- state opinions – their thoughts on the visual or audio components of the film trailer, whether or not they would be interested in watching the film
- hypothesize about the content of the film
- note basic similarities and differences between French social engagement and social engagement in their own countries

but provides no linguistic guidance with which to do so. Thus, students are not guided in the use of more sophisticated lexical items or grammatical structures for completing any of these tasks.

Remarks: The lesson as-written suggests avenues leveraging level-appropriate linguistic challenges – such as describing, comparing, giving opinions, or stating hypotheses – but provides no linguistic scaffolding or benchmarking with which to guide students. As presented, students could engage in the proposed discussions only very basic language, and the materials provide no guidance for less experienced instructors to base linguistic interventions on.

(4) Does language-and-content *in integration* work toward the acquisition of undergraduate level-appropriate mastery of key competencies in sustainability?

As written, the materials provided the following entry points into practice of the following competencies

- **interpersonal competency:** guided small-group discussion to share opinions and exchange information
- **values-thinking competency:** articulating links between individuals' values and their priorities in participating in social or environmental initiatives; cross-cultural comparisons of values and priorities as they relate to environmental initiatives

Remarks: As written, the materials propose discussion prompts that touch on both interpersonal competency and on values-thinking competency. In their current form, these materials seem to more systematically elicit *secondary*-level mastery of these competencies, however. There is no evidence of expectations to engage in activities that would foster postsecondary-level interpersonal competence (for

example, collaborating with others on simple projects), nor are there activities that synthesize sustainability initiatives into discussions of broader sustainability visions.

5) Do the materials offer entry points to discussions of the values and dispositions necessary for EfS?

The values that the materials as-written would seem to allude to are:

- responsibility towards future generations (via the *Demain* documentary trailer)
- action to create “un autre monde” (“another world”) via local action
- community engagement

Remarks: This lesson focuses on community engagement, transformative ideas, and collective action. It is encouraging to see that the lesson as presented moves away from the types of superficial environmental actions that are often a feature of introductory-level L2 textbooks (for example, recycling, taking the bus). Nevertheless, there is no opportunity, in the discussion prompts as written, for the values-laden aspect of sustainability to receive any special attention (Nolet 2016), nor are these values treated as a content topic in their own right worthy of discussion (Reagan 2016, Sato et al. 2017).

Dossier 7 Cultures

1 Demain

a. Par deux. Observez cette affiche du film *Demain*. Faites des hypothèses sur le genre du film, son sujet, son objectif et les lieux de tournage.

b. Regardez la bande-annonce du film. Vérifiez vos hypothèses.

c. Regardez à nouveau le début de la bande-annonce (jusqu'à 0'58") et répondez.

- Pourquoi voit-on des enfants au début ?
- Quel constat fait Cyril (un des deux réalisateurs) ?

d. En petits groupes. Que pensez-vous des images ? de la musique ? Cette bande-annonce vous donne-t-elle envie de voir le film ? Pourquoi ? Pour vous, quelles sont les qualités d'une bonne bande-annonce ?

e. En petits groupes. Échangez. Que pensez-vous de cette initiative ? Êtes-vous d'accord avec la phrase de Gandhi citée dans le film « Montrer l'exemple, ce n'est pas la meilleure façon de convaincre, c'est la seule » ? Pourquoi ?

f. Regardez la bande-annonce de 0'58" à la fin. Quels sont les différents domaines abordés ?
Exemple : l'agriculture.

g. En petits groupes. Connaissez-vous des hommes et des femmes qui inventent un autre monde dans votre pays ? Qu'est-ce qu'ils font ? Dans quels domaines ? Partagez vos informations avec la classe.

2 S'engager pour quoi faire ? Ce que les Français en pensent

L'envie d'être utile

Donner du sens à sa vie	57 %
Mettre ses idées en accord avec ses actes	45 %
Un événement personnel	36 %
La satisfaction de participer à un projet collectif	31 %
Un événement dramatique au niveau national ou international	28 %
Les convictions politiques	25 %
Une proposition de la part d'un organisme, une association	17 %
Les convictions religieuses	12 %
Une certaine culpabilité	7 %

Être parent

Donner de son temps	55 %
Se marier	40 %
Agir au quotidien	40 %
Défendre son pays	39 %
Participer aux actions d'une association	30 %
S'investir dans son travail	28 %
Consommer différemment	24 %

39 %

La protection de la nature

35 %

La protection de l'enfance

32 %

La lutte contre la pauvreté

29 %

La lutte contre les grandes maladies

26 %

L'aide aux personnes âgées, dépendantes et aux handicapés

24 %

Les droits de l'homme

24 %

L'égalité homme/femme

19 %

La prévention du développement durable

19 %

L'action locale de quartier

a. Lisez l'infographie. Associez les titres aux parties.

- Les causes qui mobilisent les Français
- La définition du mot « engagement » selon les Français.
- Les raisons de l'engagement des Français.

b. En petits groupes. Lisez les témoignages. Retrouvez pour chaque témoignage la cause qui mobilise et les raisons de l'engagement (infographies). Plusieurs réponses sont possibles.

c. En petits groupes. Faites des recherches sur les causes pour lesquelles s'engagent les habitants de votre pays. Comparez avec les Français. Quelles sont les similitudes ? Les différences ?

5 - J'ai toujours aimé me sentir utile. Au début, je signais des pétitions pour les droits de l'homme. Aujourd'hui, j'imprime de plus en plus, depuis mon écran d'ordinateur, dans plusieurs associations. Je traduis des textes bénévolement plusieurs heures par semaine et je soutiens des causes de défense des droits de l'homme et de protection des enfants. « David »

6 - Il y a cinq ans, j'ai eu l'occasion de partir en Thaïlande pour nettoyer des plages. Cette expérience m'a fait réfléchir sur la planète que je vais laisser à mes enfants. Depuis, je mène des campagnes de sensibilisation auprès de mon entourage pour enseigner les petits gestes efficaces pour la planète. « Lydie »

COMPLÉTEZ VOTRE CARNET CULTUREL

- Les grandes causes communes à la France et à mon pays : ...
- Les moyens d'action identiques en France et dans mon pays : ...
- Les associations représentées en France et dans mon pays : ...

cent trente-deux

Retournez aux pages 118-119. Répondez à nouveau aux questions. Mettez en commun avec le groupe.

cent trente-trois

Appendix 1. Two-page spread of Hirschprung & Tricot (2017). *Cosmopolite: Methode de français A2. Livre d'élève*. Paris: Hachette. 132–133.

European Journal for Applied Linguistics

Friday, September 19, 2025 at 10:41:36 Eastern Daylight Time

Subject: TR: Hachette FLE - Formulaire soumis depuis Contactez-nous
Date: Monday, May 19, 2025 at 10:32:00 AM Eastern Daylight Time
From: MANDIN PATRICIA
To: Sandra Valnes Quammen

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Bonjour, Je vous écris pour savoir s'il serait possible de reproduire 2 pages du manuel Cosmopolite A2 dans le contexte d'un article qui sera publié dans le European Journal of Applied Linguistics en été ou automne 2025. Il s'agirait des pages 132 et 133 du manuel niveau A2 (les deux pages "Cultures" qui présentent des activités liées à la bande annonce du film Demain). L'article présente des recherches sur l'intégration des objectifs du développement durable dans des cours du FLE (niveau universitaire dans une université américaine). Merci pour votre considération, Bien cordialement, Sandra Valnes Quammen slv2@duke.edu / s.valnesquammen@lancaster.ac.uk

Pour répondre à ce message, utilisez l'adresse suivante : slv2@duke.edu