CDIPS Final Project
2021-2022 cohort

Revised syllabus for third-year Russian: Education for sustainable development

Part I: Executive Summary

Russian language courses at my university currently aim to provide students with a strong foundation in vocabulary and grammar. The learning objectives of these courses typically draw on the objectives of language textbooks as well as the ACTFL proficiency scale. However, language is more than just a system of words and grammatical cases, just as language learning is more than memorization and practice. The purpose of language education in college-level programs should be to expose students to other cultures and perspectives, build awareness of students' own cultures and identities, and develop critical skills that students can use beyond their language courses.

My project seeks to expand the learning objectives of a third-year Russian language course by connecting course content to United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Students will not only explore Russian vocabulary and grammar (which remain vital to language learning) but also delve into global issues and make connections with personal experiences. To help students navigate issues, genres, and registers, I will use the Multiliteracies Approach and Cope & Kalantzis's activity bank. By the end of this course, students will have an awareness of their own norms, values, and identities, a greater empathy towards other cultures and individuals, as well as a broader understanding of global issues and the part that they can play in solving them. Throughout the course, students will have multiple opportunities to exercise agency in selecting the topics and the assignments they want to work on. There will be multiple academic writing assignments as well as creative and multimodal compositions. In this way, the course provides students an opportunity to explore topics that are meaningful to them while developing digital, critical, multimodal, and sustainability literacies.

Reference List

Allen, H. W., & Paesani, K. (2010). Exploring the feasibility of a pedagogy of multiliteracies in introductory foreign language courses. *L2 Journal, 2*, 119-142.

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2009). "Multiliteracies": New literacies, new learning. *Pedagogies: An International Journal, 4*(3), 164-195.

de la Fuente, M. J. (2022). *Education for sustainable development in foreign language learning: Content-based instruction in college-level curricula*. Taylor & Francis.

Geisler, M., Kramsch, C., McGinnis, S., Patrikis, P., Pratt, M. L., Ryding, K., & Saussy, H. (2007). Foreign languages and higher education: New structures for a changed world: MLA ad hoc committee on foreign languages. *Profession,* 234-245.

Kern, R. (2000). *Literacy and language teaching*. Oxford University Press.

McEntarfer, H. K., & Iovannone, J. (2022). Faculty perceptions of chosen name policies and non-binary pronouns. *Teaching in Higher Education, 27*(5), 632-647.

Paesani, K. (2017). Redesigning an introductory language curriculum: A backward design approach. *L2 Journal, 9*(1), 1-20.

San Pedro, T. J. (2017). "This stuff interests me": Re-centering indigenous paradigms in colonizing schooling spaces. In D. Paris & Alim (Eds.), *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world* (pp. 99-116). Teachers College Press.

Part II: Analysis

The purpose of college-level foreign language education has been debated in the language educators' community for decades. Legitimate answers have been proposed, arguing that language education can broaden its objectives from the learning of grammar and vocabulary to foster new literacies such as the ability to locate and communicate information in digital spaces, produce and interpret multimodal texts, critically examine information (Kern, 2000); to allow learners to self-reflect by learning about other cultures (Geisler et al., 2007); and to examine and reflect on global sustainability issues (de la Fuente, 2022). In other words, scholars suggested a curricular reform that reimagines foreign language education as an opportunity to prepare students to be conscientious global citizens rather than tourists or linguistic analysts.

However, large-scale curricular reform is time-consuming and face-threatening to language programs (Allen & Paesani, 2010; Paesani, 2017). Perhaps a way to inspire the movement forward is through manageable innovation within individual language courses. My redesigned syllabus for a third-year Russian course is intended to do just that: to make space for important conversations about global issues in a pre-existing curriculum based on a popular textbook. Specifically, it uses the UN's Sustainable Development Goals as the thematic frame and the Multiliteracies Approach (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Paesani et al., 2016) as the pedagogical method. Not only will students be learning the Russian language, but they will also engage with personally and globally relevant content, discussing issues like equitable employment and fair working conditions, access to quality education, and gender equality.

The target audience is a mixed group of college students, on average, between 20 and 25 years of age. Some of them are heritage learners, most are majoring, and some may be minoring in Russian. These learners are typically at intermediate mid (ACTFL scale) when they begin the academic year and at intermediate high when they end. They may have formal or informal knowledge of global issues, but none of it comes from or is currently discussed in their Russian language courses.

The project is planned with my current institution in mind but will likely not be implemented there. Graduate students are rarely assigned to teach third-year language courses, but I am designing a syllabus for a third-year course precisely because I have only had one opportunity to

teach at this level in an intensive summer immersion program. The institution I am currently affiliated with is a large public research-intensive university. The enrollment in the third-year Russian language course is typically between 10-20 students. The course is taught face-to-face in a classroom equipped with a whiteboard, projector, and computer.

My instructional materials will be designed to fit the course textbook selected by the Language Program Coordinator, *Russian from Intermediate to Advanced*. This decision to stay tethered to a textbook is a practical one – for students', Language Program Directors', and other stakeholders' interests. I understand that most programs have clear curricula with defined objectives and with my syllabus, I aim to complement rather than replace them. Large-scale reform can be intimidating and unwelcome, but small steps can show the effectiveness and importance of innovation to language departments.

The proposed content ties textbook chapters to United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals in the following way:

Textbook Chapter	Sustainable Development Goal	Overview of proposed content
Chapter 1 - Education in the 21st century	Goal#4: Quality education	Purpose and value of education; access to quality education in the world; inclusive education.
Chapter 2 - Work and life	Goal#8: Decent work and economic growth	Unemployment in the world, consequences of unemployment for the economy, diversity in the job market, and fair working conditions.
Chapter 3 - Free time and lifestyle	Goal#3: Good health and well-being	Work-school-life balance and mental health, the impact of microaggressions and discrimination on mental health.
Chapter 4 - Family and family relations	Goal#5: gender equality	Gender equality in the family, cultural and individual family norms and expectations related to gender, gender discrimination and violence.

Chapter 5 - City, suburbs, and countryside	Goal#11: Sustainable cities and communities	Sustainable and inclusive city planning, settlement patterns and cultural heritage, systemic racism in the housing market, and the role of the physical environment in building identity.

My goals for students in this course are:

- To communicate effectively about global issues in the appropriate register
- To develop media and sustainability literacies
- To reflect on the heterogeneity of cultural norms and the value of diversity for global development
- To reflect on students' values, norms, and experiences related to the topics of the course and to build empathy towards the values, norms, and experiences of others
- To formulate manageable ways to participate in making the world more sustainable and inclusive

Part III: Design

Because this is a language course that covers five chapters on different topics (as well as vocabulary and grammar), the learning objectives for the entire course may be somewhat vague, like "to develop sustainability and media literacies." Instead, as an example, I offer the following performance objectives for the first unit of the course:

- Students will be able to identify and discuss the role of education in their own lives as well as in the pursuit of sustainable development and improving people's lives
- Students will examine inequality in access to and attainment of education, particularly between girls and boys and in rural areas, and about reasons for a lack of equitable access to quality education
- Students will create multimodal compositions discussing the power of education and motivating others to demand and use educational opportunities in the appropriate register
- Students will identify their own learning needs and formulate strategies to satisfy them

The overall design of this course is such that students continually produce work towards a portfolio. This includes memes, presentations, essays, multimodal compositions, and a public service announcement/ad (социальная реклама) on the topic of students' choice. In general, choice is emphasized in this course because global issues touch us in different ways, and students should be able to engage with any facet of, for instance, education and educational issues.

The portfolio, then, offers multiple advantages to both the instructor and the learners. First, it asks students to offer what they deem their best work for grading thus reducing the anxiety to

produce exceptional work throughout the semester. Due to personal circumstances (e.g., work, taking care of a relative or oneself), students may not have the luxury to commit the necessary time to all assignments which tend to pile up in a language course. However, they can devote more focus to issues that matter to them and include the results of this work in their portfolio. Second, the portfolio typically has a reflective component, allowing students to reflect on their learning. In this case, students will be reflecting not only on their developing competence in the Russian language but also on their emergent understanding of global issues and the needs of others. Third, due to its selective nature, the portfolio allows the teacher to grade less: instead of grading every single assignment, the instructor will grade only what is submitted in the portfolio and focus on providing substantive feedback on all other assignments.

The pedagogical approach used in this course is the Multiliteracies Approach (ML) which places meaning-making at the center of the curriculum and views interaction with authentic texts as a gateway to a variety of skills, such as perspective-taking, critical thinking, intercultural competence, and a nuanced understanding of the various aspects of language (such as pragmatics, genre, style) through interpretation, collaboration, problem-solving, reflection, and self-reflection (Paesani et al., 2016). The four elements of ML instruction (they can be used in any order) are situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. Situated practice begins with brainstorming on and relating to the focal topic and then exposes students to textual examples or models. Overt instruction provides students with metalanguage and theory related to the topic at hand. Among other things, overt instruction can prepare students to engage in critical framing or functional and critical analyses of experiences and texts. Finally, transformed practice allows learners to apply their knowledge by producing their own texts. Careful sequencing of these elements of the ML approach can allow teachers to create instructional units that guide learners from simple to complex tasks, to achieve a more meaningful engagement with texts and lived experiences.

Objectives	Assessments	Strategies
Identify and discuss the role of education	Reading reflection Oral presentation	ML, authentic texts, reflections, debates, and role-plays
Examine inequality in access to and attainment of education	Essay Reflection	ML, authentic texts, reflections, discussions
Create multimodal compositions discussing the power of education and motivating others	Public announcement ad	ML, authentic ads, reflections, discussions, group/pair work, peer feedback and evaluation
Identify learning needs and formulate strategies to satisfy them	Self-reflection Short essay Action plan	ML, reflections, discussions

Most work in this course is not formally graded but rather feedback is provided on it. Students choose what work they want to submit for formal grading as part of their portfolio. In this portfolio, reflections will be graded on a pass/fail basis (submitted / not submitted); essays and presentations will be graded using an analytic rubric; public announcement ad and other creative projects will be peer graded based on an analytic rubric. All work that goes into the portfolio must be submitted in two drafts: the first draft submitted for feedback and the final draft revised on the basis of that feedback.

Important criteria for evaluating essays include ideas and content, organization and transitions, and register (context-appropriate vocabulary and grammar). Criteria for presentations are the same, with the addition of multimodal communication (effective use of visuals), delivery (pace, intonation, pronunciation, body language), and interaction with the audience (ability to answer questions). Criteria for peer evaluation of creative assignments (e.g., public announcement ad) include ideas and content, use of multimodality, persuasiveness, and creativity. The reason for peer grading, in this case, is that creative work is typically meant to be shared with others and its quality is best evaluated by the perceptions of the intended audience rather than the instructor alone (who may not be well-qualified to evaluate creative work anyway).

Part IV: Development

Students in this course will explore authentic texts, such as blogs, vlogs, news articles, infographics, and UN reports. In addition, they will be using the LinguaMeeting platform which connects language learners to native speakers of their target language. Through these conversations, students will have a chance to not only be exposed to a different perspective (that can be achieved through reading alone) but also to engage with those perspectives and connect the personal to the cultural. These conversations with native speakers will provide further impetus to class discussions: students will prepare questions for their partners in class, ask those questions in their sessions, and then report back to the classroom.

An important resource for the instructor of this course is de la Fuente's (2022) edited volume filled with examples of pedagogy promoting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in foreign language education. The contributors to this volume provide helpful ideas for designing curricula and instructional tasks. Here are a few examples:

- Barbas-Rhoden's chapter suggests beginning the course by brainstorming students' different identities and recognizing the fact that some identities come into play more in specific situations through hypotheticals (e.g., which identity is most important to you when you walk the campus alone at night?). This exercise sensitizes students to each other's experiences and teaches them about the complexity of identity.
- de la Fuente's chapter recommends organizing instructional units around a problem (or a dilemma that needs a solution) and designing learning objectives using the framework for sustainability literacies. de la Fuente is attentive to the traditional focus on grammar in language courses and as such, proposes that complex grammatical or syntactic

constructions can be integrated into task design (e.g., the instructor can provide models for answering questions or expressing opinions).

- Seijas and Parra's chapter describes several entire instructional units. In their unit on cities, for instance, students work in class discussing the definition of a sustainable city, interview a virtual exchange partner about their city, research their partner's city and its sustainability efforts, and, finally, write a report with recommendations for making that city more sustainable. This chapter also provides an example of how a service like LinguaMeeting can be used to support students' learning.

Another key resource, of course, is the UN's website containing not only the Sustainable Development Goals themselves but also resources such as infographics and articles related to global issues and a teacher handbook containing learning objectives and sample activities for each goal.

Some stakeholders may find the content of this course controversial, and I cannot predict if my future supervisor will support this endeavor, given that many topics in this course may be sensitive. However, I intend to consult the local language center, the office of instruction and assessment, and the disability resource center (some or all of the above, depending on what is available in the institution). My biggest priority is conveying the importance of this work to students and building a healthy atmosphere of sharing, akin to the one described by San Pedro (2017) where students are not expected to share anything that the instructor is not prepared to share themselves. In other words, I will model and scaffold the appropriate behaviors, lead by example, and avoid prying or pushing students before they are ready to engage in a discussion. In addition, I believe it is important to start with the stories of anonymous others (from news articles, literature, or other media) before discussing students' own experiences with uncomfortable situations. This can serve two purposes: 1) prepare students to engage with others respectfully, and 2) help me identify students who may need additional preparation/sensitization before sharing can begin.

Part V: Implementation

My university already has a policy regarding pronouns and names. I will reiterate this policy in class and work on preventing and working with possible microaggressions, as we have discussed and read about in the CDIPS program (McEntarfer & Iovannone, 2020). On the first day of class, students will be asked to write their names and pronouns on a sheet of paper. There will also be a column for pronouns used in Russian. Those who are not comfortable or not sure what to write down can leave the relevant fields blank, but I will follow up with these students to help them (this may be especially important for pronouns in Russian). The list of pronouns and names will be stored on the course website and for the first week of class, all students will be asked to wear name/pronoun tags. Our first activity class activity will hopefully promote this awareness of names and pronouns: it is the identity task from Barbas-Rhoden's chapter summarized above.

As we also discussed in our CDIPS workshops, it is important to explain terms that we may no longer recognize as academia-specific. I will do that during the first class period, going

over the syllabus, office hours, and extra credit (all of these are not common terms outside of the university context!). This may be especially helpful to first-generation students, although many first-year students will benefit from an overt explanation of each of these terms. My office hours will be open for all questions and concerns and will do my best to make students aware of scholarships, fellowships, awards, and grants and explicitly remind them that I am happy to provide letters of recommendation should anyone want to apply for these opportunities.

Thankfully, the electronic version of the textbook used in this course can be accessed for free through our library – this will help offset the cost of the course. Other materials that we will use will be free online materials (videos, news articles, and blogs). Students experiencing poverty will be directed to library resources for completing course assignments – the library provides computers, video cameras, and other expensive equipment.

Since the course focuses a lot on sharing personal experiences and connecting them to global issues, culturally and linguistically diverse learners will be encouraged to share and bring their backgrounds to bear on course content. Students will also always have the choice as to which topics to choose for their coursework and which assignments to submit for grading (and invest time into). This component of choice is intended to encourage diversity – be it in the ways students approach assignments, the content they select, or the personal connection that they wish to make with course topics.

Part VI: Evaluation

Some components of evaluation are built into the course itself. In particular, regular reflections from students as well as their course portfolios will help me evaluate whether the objectives of the course have been met and whether the content motivated students to think about global issues, including issues of diversity.

However, this data may not give me much information about how students perceived their own learning, whether they enjoyed our discussions, and how I can improve the course in the future. To this end, I want to get the following feedback from students: a survey with Likert-scale and open-ended questions at the end of each instructional unit; and semi-structured interviews in the middle and at the end of the semester.

I can use the survey data to make changes as I move from one unit to another (time permitting) and to record specific feedback for each unit so that I can update my syllabus before the next academic year. Surveys are a relatively simple way to elicit feedback from all students in the course.

It will likely be more difficult to recruit students to participate in interviews which typically take more time and are somewhat more face-threatening, especially when course grades have not yet been finalized and the course instructor is administering the interviews. To mitigate this inevitable circumstance, I will convey to students that I am highly motivated to provide them with the best learning experience and as such, all feedback is crucial, especially negative feedback. Conducting interviews twice in the semester should be manageable and it serves two purposes:

1) I can use interview data to make ongoing adjustments, and 2) students will be better able to recall early instructional units (better than if they were only interviewed once, at the conclusion of the semester).

I will use all these data points to continually improve the course and make notes for improvement in future iterations of this course. In addition, I will take notes and/or voice memos after every lesson, recording what I thought went well and what didn't. I will organize these notes at the end of each instructional unit and, time permitting, compare them to student feedback to see if my perceptions align with those of my students. Where I can, I will invite other faculty members to observe my lessons and provide feedback.