

### **b) Connecting to daily life and the fantasy world of the students, motivating writing assignments**

The topics of writing assignments should be closely connected with the students' living environment, as well as to their desires, dreams and fantasies. In order to establish this connection requires first and foremost appropriately motivating writing assignments. The following teaching suggestions offer a wealth of examples, from simple low-level writing tasks to larger projects. Secondly, it is necessary to prepare the students mentally for the task. This initial preparation is generally mostly oral and includes clear and unequivocal guidelines, expectations and criteria on which students can orient themselves. The accurate planning of writing assignments in terms of topic and intended reader reference is unquestionably part of the professionalism of today's instructors.

### **c) Expanded concept of text types, media and function of writing**

Whereas in earlier times the writing tasks in the schools consisted mostly of experience essays or renarrations, today's students are being prepared for a much broader range of text types, consistent with real contemporary life. Depending on the situation, this may involve the writing of reports, forms, sms, letters, posters, simple poems, applications, fantasy texts, picture stories, etc. This should also include using new media, such as a computer or hand-held devices with all their applications (word processing, e-mail, sms, blogs, chats). This applies to regular classroom instruction as well and leads to a large variety of exciting writing projects, as described in the teaching suggestions in the practice section.

### **d) Directed ("guided") and free ("inspired") writing**

Meaningful assignments should include directed and free writing opportunities, consistent with an effective writing promotion.

The main emphasis of directed writing is building and expanding linguistic partial competences (e.g. vocabulary, sentence beginnings, different syntactical patterns, textual structures). In focusing on each of these areas, students receive more detailed guidelines and objectives to implement. A particularly highly didactic form is so-called scaffolding, whereby students rely closely on a prescribed structure in writing their own content and thus expand their text competence with a new facet. Example: the variation of a letter by way of a new recipient, "parallel stories", where a figure, a place, or an object has been changed relative to the template. In light of the value of this approach, particularly for weaker heritage language students, chapter 4 offers further details; see also various practical suggestions in Part III.

Free or inspired writing signifies such writing occasions where students are prepared for a particular topic or writing project (e.g. through an oral warm-up for a fantastical theme or through a preliminary discussion in case of a non-fiction text), without having to follow a prescribed model. Clearly communicated expectations and possible criteria are also part of this type of writing. Totally free writing projects without prior preparations ("you have now half an hour to write something") tends to overwhelm many students. It is important to recognize that free writing encourages students to write in their own language even outside of the school setting (e.g. letters, diary, mails, etc.).

### **e) Process orientation and explicit mediation of writing strategies**

If students only think about the required final product, many of them may feel overwhelmed. It is therefore useful to focus on the process instead. The students should learn strategies about how to subdivide a writing process into manageable steps and how to solve them in a logical sequence. Some of these important steps are: finding ideas, activating previous knowledge – planning and setting up of the text structure -writing the text – revising the text -presenting the text. In order for students to acquire and use these writing strategies efficiently and sustainably, the mediation of these strategies must be followed explicitly. The techniques and learning strategies in part II facilitate this goal. The two worksheets that summarize the most important points are intended for students from about the 4th grade on.

## **4. Additional observations concerning text writing in the heritage language**

One of the characteristics of heritage language teaching is the students' heterogeneity and the fact that many of them experience considerable difficulty with the more demanding literacy aspects of their first language. The challenges for writing in the heritage language that arise from this are reflected in the following observations.

### **a) Introduction to the writing system of the first language**

The students who learned the alphabet in the immigration country instead of their country of origin, must first be carefully introduced to the phonemes and graphemes of their first language. For the languages that are based on the Latin writing system, this involves primarily those letters that do not exist in their school language (e.g. ð, ç, ı). Thus, many teachers only introduce these letters at the end of the first or the beginning of the second grade, in order to

avoid confusing the children who are learning the alphabet in their school language. With non-Latin based alphabets there is less danger of confusion with the local language; however, the entire alphabet must be learned in the first language.

### **b) Acquiring and expanding a differentiated vocabulary in the first language**

Many of the migrant students have considerable vocabulary gaps in their first language. Moreover, their vocabulary and language skills consist of expressing family-related themes in dialect. For everything else – in particular school-related situations or more challenging topics – they use the school language or the language of the country in which they reside. Thus, the vocabulary of these children and adolescents is divided into two parts, which runs counter to the efforts of developing comprehensive bilingual competences. Therefore, an important goal of heritage language teaching must be the development and build-up of a differentiated vocabulary which also includes standard language forms. A distinction should be made between the vocabulary which the students should actively master (active or productive vocabulary) and therefore must practice intensively. This should include, most of all, commonly used words, as well as words which the students have to understand but not necessarily use themselves (receptive or understanding vocabulary). The importance of vocabulary building exercises is underscored in the wealth of suggestions and exercises provided in chapters 14 and 15 of this manual.

### **c) Introduction (guide) to the standard language**

In addition to a limited vocabulary, another characteristic of many migrant students is that their mastery of the first language is (almost) always limited to a dialectal variant and that they lack a command of its written language or standard form. One of the tasks of heritage language teaching, therefore, is a careful introduction of the standard language, the command of which is a prerequisite and the key to the written language and students' ability to write correctly. The important principles for this introduction (which begins in the first school year) comprise:

1) Careful teaching: the children's enjoyment of writing is the priority goal and must not be compromised by excessive norm orientation.

2) A comparative and exploratory approach: instead of a purely normative approach to teaching, the differences between standard language and dialect should, whenever possible, be mediated by an approach that favors student discovery and comparative learning.

3) Many appropriate practice opportunities: students' acquired vocabulary and language skills in the standard language must be practiced repeatedly and with appropriate writing tasks until they are fully internalized.

### **d) Scaffolding: providing support structures "scaffolds" for linguistically weaker students**

The school language used in the classroom is more complex in terms of vocabulary and formal structures than everyday language. Acquiring this "classroom language" and, connected with it, textual competence (the competence of interacting with a written text, both productively or receptively) is a daunting task. A currently used, successful approach to support students in German classes and German as a second language classrooms is the aforementioned scaffolding method. This approach is also ideally suited for teaching heritage languages. Students receive supportive scaffolding for certain aspects (e.g., vocabulary, sentence construction, textual structure) in form of a sample or a structure which they can use for orientation. For instance, this could be in form of an outline as in the "Eleven-poems" (see # 21.1), which can be filled in with the students' own words. Another example is providing building blocks or elements for certain parts of a text (e.g. beginnings of sentences of appropriate verbs for a picture story) which the students may use to write their own texts. Specific steps for a simple text can also be provided (e.g. a recipe or an instruction) for how to accomplish a particular task. In all of these instances, the use of the "scaffold" to accomplish parts of the language task (e.g. text building) helps to reduce the burden on the students in the creation of a text. In adopting and applying correct examples of words and phrases, they are actively broadening their language repertoire. Many of the teaching suggestions, particularly in Part III (Suggestions for promoting particular aspects of writing), present simple variations of scaffolding (see 14.1: word fields, 15.2: alternative word test, 16.3: parallel texts).

For further information about scaffolding, see among others <https://www.uni-due.de/imperia/md/content/prodaz/scaffolding.pdf>

### **e) Observations about orthography**

Since grammatical and spelling rules and problems are at least partially language-specific, they will not be addressed in detail in this publication. Nevertheless, the following should be observed as a general principle for effective grammar training:

- 1) *Basic vocabulary orientation*: the acquisition of a grammatically correct vocabulary as well as the correction of mistakes should be oriented towards frequently used vocabulary. The more often a word is used, the more important is knowing and applying its correct spelling.
- 2) *Selective correction*: marking all mistakes leads primarily to discouragement. It is more useful to point out the three to five most important types of mistakes or individual errors and to plan an effective, multi-stage training to correct them.
- 3) *Useful improvements, long-term training*: the traditional method of repeatedly re-writing an incorrectly spelled word is of no benefit in terms of educational psychology. Useful and effective training leads to improvement if the words in question are practiced in various different sequences over a period of 2–3 weeks.
- 4) *Help with self-help*: a thorough introduction to the usage and handling of dictionaries is a prerequisite for students' ability to effectively avail themselves of these tools.

## 5. Evaluation and assessment of written work: important considerations

- **Assessment function:**

The assessment of students' written products should not only be the job of the teacher. A communicative writing concept that involves the target group (see above 3.a), considers the feedback of other readers as equally important and useful, and should already be implemented during the writing process. Also useful in this context are writing conferences (see chapter 11.1), with which the students are already familiar from their regular classroom lessons. The instructor fulfills primarily the role of a final corrective authority who can and should provide constructive criticism for further improvement.

- **Criteria orientation:**

One of the major problems with the traditional method of essay correction is the great subjectivity and lack of transparency. In order to avoid this pitfall, clear guidelines should be provided, at least before larger writing assignments. The expectations should be outlined according to 4–5 criteria, which are best formulated in conjunction with the students. (Example: the text should be minimally 1 page in length, with a clear structure, comprised of introduction/main text/conclusion, and should contain at least 4 important pieces of information, etc.). The reference to these criteria in the discussions with the students and in assessing and grading the texts promotes transparency and motivation.

- **Promotional orientation in correcting and evaluating:**

This signifies that the instructor's focus is less deficit-oriented in terms of «what is wrong, what is missing?» and more guided by the question «what is present, what can be built upon and expanded?». As a subsequent step, the instructor will consider how to best plan and achieve improvements (with targeted exercises, deeper reflection, own usage and implementation) in an effective fashion. This is the only method that leads to long-term success and applies to heritage language teaching as well.

- **Evaluating the process:**

Traditionally, only a finished text is assessed. However, this method often fails to show particularly where the weaker writers experienced difficulties. This would require a closer look at the previous writing process. For instance, if a particular writing strategy has been practiced, it becomes evident if someone simply begins to write, or actually makes an attempt to follow the prescribed strategy.

- **Providing feedback:**

Simply returning a corrected and graded piece of writing is no longer acceptable by today's methodological standards. Promotion oriented teaching means providing the students with a constructive written or oral commentary about their texts, as well as specific suggestions and guidance towards further development and improvement of their work.