

# Introduction

## 1. Promoting intercultural competence in HLT: reasons and significance

Children and adolescents in the migration destination countries (as well as in many places elsewhere) grow up in culturally and linguistically very heterogeneous contexts. This diversity is most of all reflected in the context of daily life at school, where there are scarcely any classes left without multiple languages and cultures being represented and where the proportion of children with a migration background does not reach or exceed 30, 40, or 50 percent of the student population. The heritage language education classes (HLT) remain the one exception within the institutional context of the school. Although there are dialectal and, partially, national differences (e.g. Arabic speakers from different Arab countries), we can nevertheless speak of an Arabic, Turkish, or Albanian HLT.

A central task of the school is to prepare the children and adolescents for life in society. In our case, this means preparing the students for life in a multicultural and multilingual society. This challenge pertains to regular curriculum classes as well as to HLT, whereby mainstream education classes -in accordance with the curriculum - tend to mediate content and themes related to the host country, whereas HLT more likely emphasizes a) those which are related to the country of origin, its culture and language, and b) themes related to life in the immigration countries. In order to carry out their educational functions, however, both must actively contribute to developing a series of competences which are indispensable for a successful life in multicultural, multilingual societies. These include, for instance, conflict ability and tolerance, interest and acceptance (instead of rejection) relative to other cultures and a way of life, as well as the willingness to reconsider one's own values, norms and role expectations.

For children and youths from immigrant families, there is another important aspect of intercultural competence: the orientation in and between the culture of the country of origin and the one of the host country. Significant conflicts that harm development may result from the tension field between the cultures and their partially inconsistent norms and social values. The HLT instructors can make more valuable contributions in this regard, as they are often better acquainted with both cultural contexts than the regular curriculum teachers. The teaching suggestions comprised in this volume demonstrate in six thematically different topic areas what these HLT contributions might look like (see below). If their implementation, adaptation and extension leads to more exciting and stimulating lessons, the objectives of this publication have been met.

## 2. Goals and structure of this volume

The present guide supports the HLT students and instructors by means of exemplary themes in the development of intercultural competences. These should enable the children and adolescents to become capable of acting in the confrontation between the conditions of their living environment and the societal context. The strengthening of their multicultural and multilingual identity can serve them as a valuable resource when it comes to communicate adequately in a diverse, often contradictory and uncertain society, to articulate expectations, and to deal with conflicting situations.

This volume is comprised of six thematic units with an identical structure. Each begins with a short introduction and includes seven concrete teaching suggestions that are related to different areas of competence (see below; also the overview at the end of the booklet). The teaching suggestions are matched with the designated grade and proficiency levels; however, almost all of them can be applied at the lower or higher levels with corresponding adjustments.

The orientation on the actual environment and living environment of the children and youths was a central criterion for the selection of the themes for the six units. In order to support the students optimally and authentically in their possibilities for action and in their self-effectiveness, the teaching suggestions were designed to include discussions of conflict potentials, possibilities, resources and resolutions and to promote intercultural learning as a cross-sector task at all levels. Always included in the design and highly desirable is the cooperation with regular curriculum education or with other HLT groups.

The six units are presented in the following order (in parentheses are the central competence areas):

- 1 **Culture and identity:** alike and yet different!  
*(Promotion of identity development).*
- 2 **Migration stories:** the world in our class  
*(Biographical learning).*
- 3 **Our languages:** we speak more than one language!  
*(Awareness of daily life multilingualism as a resource).*
- 4 **Intercultural communication** – getting along with each other  
*(ability to communicate).*
- 5 **Conflicts:** seeking solutions together  
*(competence to avoid and resolve conflicts).*