

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).

6 Democracy and children's rights: we get involved! (*understanding the concept of justice and democracy*).

Many of these themes relate to students' personal experiences, observations and attitudes. Dealing with these topics in class demands of the instructor a great deal of sensitivity, confidentiality and a classroom climate characterized by trust and acceptance. Without these important prerequisites, it is quite possible that the students will not open up and that the above referenced goals will either not be attained or only partially.

3. Competence orientation in HLT education

The competence orientation as an important principle of current pedagogy is described in detail in the handbook "Foundations and backgrounds" (chapters 2, 5 and 9. For the topic of the present volume, three competences in particular are of central importance:

- a) The *perceptual competence*, here expanded with the recognition competence: this involves the cognitive development of the sensual – emotional ability to perceive the outside world and the inside world with all senses, to develop internal images, and to view oneself as a part of the communicative processes. The learners are taken seriously and recognized with their emotional worlds and forms of appropriation.
- b) The *reflection competence* deals with the development of the cognitive ability to make increasingly significant connections through language, i.e. abstracting notions, and to discuss and reflect on them.
- c) The (communicative) *competence to act* expresses that which is perceived and reflected upon through communicative action in one's own living environment. As a result, the individual can influence his/her own living environment and develop new forms of expression and new perspectives for acting.

According to Holzbrecher (1999/2009); see bibliographic references, the concept of intercultural competences implies a linking of the subject level with the level of the living environment and society, so that children and youths can experience self-efficacy themselves. Only this fourth category allows for the development of new perception patterns, reflection patterns and behavior patterns.

4. The living world concept as an important foundation

The importance of orienting pedagogy and teaching on the actual living world of the students was referenced multiple times in the handbook "Foundations and backgrounds"; see most of all chapters 5.4 and 2.3. The orientation to the living world occupies a central role as well, particularly in view of interculturality and intercultural competences. Incidentally, this also concerns the language aspects of the multilingual society: everyday life multilingualism – living in, with, and between different languages. This is a lived reality which should be examined and appreciated (compare particularly Unit 3 "our languages").

The HLT child as a subject of his/her living world is also always a member of a society. As such, s/he moves along a plane of subject, living world, and society. With these levels connect multiple intercultural overlapping and interaction situations. These require intercultural learning, examining of identity processes and social framework conditions. At the same time, they ensure that people experience themselves as subjects capable of functioning and self-acting. The following elucidates this important principle more closely.

Subject and living environment orientation

Children and adolescents move about in different contexts: family, public school, spare time, relatives, neighborhood, peer group (circle of friends) etc. Every one of these social contexts represents its own little living world with its own values and norms; their sum total comprises the living world of the individual. The living world orientation as a pedagogical principle means the orientation of the child as a subject in the here and now with his/her previous knowledge, attitude, different roles and internal images.

For children to perceive themselves as self-efficient subjects, capable of acting and able to assume the responsibility for themselves and the shaping of their living environment, they must deal with their identity and with their self-image as well as the perception of others. In doing so, they must develop sensibility for self-awareness and external perceptions and for dealing with inner resistance and external challenges. The orientation to living conditions also means that children and adolescents gain experience as participants in their immediate surroundings that are to be traced back to their temporally, spatially and socially structured living environment. In working with HLT students, one has to expect to deal with at least two kinds of cultural and ethnic backgrounds: those Here and those There. The former are spatially within current range, in the immigration destination country. The living worlds in the country of origin lie within a potential range, owing to the students' assurance that there too – e.g. among the relatives there – experience can be gained that they can revert to as resources.