

1. Djordje Damjanović: My start as an HLT teacher in Vienna

Djordje Damjanović hails from Bosnia/Herzegovina. He has been living in Vienna for 22 years and has worked there for almost as long as an HLT instructor for Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian.

Before I came to Austria, I acquired a diploma for technical crafts (TW) in Croatia and taught this subject in Zagreb. I had to leave Yugoslavia due to the war and arrived in Vienna in 1992. My first year as a teacher for refugee children in Vienna was in many aspects similar to, or even the same as, the experiences of my students. I was a refugee, just as they were. I did not want to come here, nor did they – we had to. They did not speak German – and neither did I. By chance, we met in the classroom.

I was working at secondary school and was only tested for my qualifications for the subject TW. Later on, I was later told that I needed to teach Austrian history and geography and other subjects – and in the mother tongue of my students. I only had Austrian school books to rely on, in spite of my poor knowledge of German. In preparing my lesson plans at the time, I learned in a very short time more than ever before. We were all learners. Coming from different backgrounds, with indirect pathways to education, my students succeeded in their pursuits, with many of them going on to university careers.

In the following academic year, I already assumed the position of a real HLT instructor who was also tasked with the cultivation of the mother tongue. I taught native language education classes in the integrative as well as in the cursory variants. The greatest challenge was that my students' competence in their mother tongue varied enormously, and that there were practically no teaching materials available. We only succeeded more or less in our task with the help and assistance of colleagues, the municipal school council, educational commission, the Federal Ministry of Education, and our excellent networking. In a short time, it dawned even on those who had been skeptical toward the native language education concept, that I could be useful not only in class and in the school, but also in working with parents and communicating with the migration community.

Multilanguage classes require multi-language instructors. After 20 years, we have come so far that my former students and I now teach together!

2. Hyrije Sheqiri: To be an HLT teacher: a task with pride and responsibility

Hyrije Sheqiri is from Kosovo/Kosova. She has been living in Sweden since 1995. She assumed Albanian HLT classes in Ronneby, Karlskrona, and since 2007 has been responsible for the Albanian HLT in Karlshamn.

The memories of my earliest times as HLT teacher in Sweden are associated with strong emotions for various reasons. For one, it was a time of war in Kosova. There were many Albanian children in the refugee camps. Although many of them had no residence permits, they were permitted to attend school and be taught in their native language. Many were traumatized by the war and the expulsion; none of them spoke Swedish. Understanding the new society and school was extremely difficult for them, as were the new and unfamiliar customs and traditions. It is not surprising that they gladly attended the native language education classes and that I was not only their teacher, but to a certain extent also their mother, advisor, sister, psychologist and translator! In short: I represented for them their language, their culture and native country. And I became aware of their love, their pain, their worries and their wounds to the fullest extent. My role in the center remained as the one of native language education teacher, and I fulfilled that task with great determination. The work was demanding, exhausting and responsible, but also beautiful and satisfying.

Much effort was required to create appropriate teaching materials for the Albanian HLT that would also be compatible with the Swedish curriculum (HLT in Sweden is part of the regular school program and subject to their prescribed curricula). Swedish school-books and materials served mostly as models for the teaching materials that we created. To adapt these for our needs and goals was demanding and required professionalism. We acquired the corresponding skills mainly in our daily close interactions with our Swedish teacher colleagues, but also in collaboration with the HLT teachers of other language groups.

3. Birsen Yılmaz Sengül: Many things were different for me...

Birsen Yılmaz Sengül hails from Turkey. She has been living in Nuremberg for three years, where she works as HLT teacher for Turkish.

Many things were different for me compared with teaching in Turkey!

Each class comprised students of different age groups. Native language Turkish education classes took place in the afternoon, following the “normal” classes. For that reason, many children were hungry and could not concentrate well. Also, many just did not feel like pulling themselves together to learn Turkish for two hours, following five or six hours of regular classroom instruction.

The participation in HLT was and is voluntary. Consequently, many students participate in optional classes only irregularly or not at all. Many would rather play outside with their friends or have fun in the shelter. And the level of competence of those who attended left much to be desired as well. The reason for that is that the mother tongue is rarely spoken in the home, and only poorly and incorrectly. Many parents themselves only speak Turkish incorrectly and have not even fully mastered its colloquial form, although they may not even be aware of it.

Since HLT is optional and not relevant for the class grades, there is little motivation and engagement on the part of the students. For this reason, I attempted to increase interest in a playful manner. Each class is now structured to offer a playful 15- minute lead-in, followed by a soft introduction into the Turkish language. To that end, I looked for and created various games that help the children to better understand and apply the Turkish language. This way, I managed little by little to raise their motivation and participation, which became more regular and, moreover, inspired more students to attend HLT classes.

Another persistent problem is that we are not regarded as real teachers here. Not by the parents, nor by the students, and sometimes not even by the Bavarian teachers. I have been asked whether I am a real teacher or only someone who offers a Turkish class once a week. The primary reason for this disdain is probably the fact that officially we are not allowed to issue grades, and that our grades have no relevance for the official grade report. The parents’ participation in parent-teacher meetings is therefore quite low. Moreover, some of the regular classroom teachers consider HLT unimportant. Many even explicitly recommend that parents not send their children to HLT, as they might otherwise confuse the languages.

Another problem that I was unaware of in Turkey, was the greatly varying levels of language competence of the students. Thus, it can happen that a student in fifth grade has the competence of a second-year student. Though we have teaching materials supplied

by the Turkish state, it is very difficult to adapt these to such a heterogeneous performance level. New for me, as well, was the fact that I have to teach every day in different schools. This makes it very hard to establish contacts with German teachers. Another problem, of course, was that in the beginning, I had to first acquaint myself with a totally different school system in order to learn and understand its structure.

4. Hazir Mehmeti: Old and new challenges

Hazir Mehmeti is from Kosovo/Kosova. He has been living in Vienna for 17 years, where he works as a teacher for Albanian HLT classes at various schools since 1999.

When I began to teach as HLT instructor in Vienna, I had many displaced children and adolescents from war zones in my classes. Aside from the problems and trauma caused by the political situation, there were also several methodological-didactical difficulties. My students back then were accustomed from home to other and much simpler teaching methodologies relative to the ones in Austria. Interdisciplinary activities and active, more specific learning were unknown to them, as they had been mostly accustomed to the passive lecture format in large classes.

Here in Austria, the contact with the students is totally different and affords the possibility to work individually with the students and go into more detail. I myself learned these other approaches, emphases and methods mostly in seminars which are offered here to HLT instructors. This was an important contribution to my own integration as teacher in Austria. An important element was and is the exchange of experiences with colleagues.

A particularly challenging aspect was the work with a “multiple class system”, with groups of students from different age groups and levels of competence. Teaching in such heterogeneous classes demands its own methods and pedagogical principles, specific and extensive planning and a great deal of creativity. The most popular of these was and is for the students the playful approach to learning, which sounds much simpler than it actually is and still remains a challenge.

The best practices that have proven successful are, for example, bilingual learning which promotes a better understanding; learning through music and role playing, with which I have had very positive experiences in many ways. In the procurement of teaching materials, today I very much involve the students (internet and library research) and I also use the internet in Albanian and German.

5. Valeria Bovina: Useful tips for HLT newcomers

(see also chapter 12)

Valeria Bovina hails from Bologna/Italy. She has been working as a teacher of Italian HLT in Zürich since 2009.

The first year as a teacher in a new country, in a new school system, in a new school culture, in new structures – is difficult! I have tried to somewhat systematize my experiences in this regard and to suggest a series of recommendations. They may perhaps help other beginning or newly-arrived colleagues and facilitate a somewhat smoother start in the demanding, but beautiful task as an HLT instructor.

Tips for dealing with the *school administration* (and, depending on the structure, with the *school board*)

- make an appointment to introduce yourself
- show readiness and interest for cooperation
- inquire about the holiday schedule of the school and internal events (sports days, camps, professional development, etc.)
- inform yourself about school-specific internal customs and traditions (faculty room; coffee machine, closing doors...)
- inform yourself about organizational and infrastructural issues (where to make copies, the state of the room you leave behind, etc.)
- ensure that adequate classrooms are made available (sometimes unsuitable rooms are assigned to HLT classes because “foreign children” touch everything and make noise...)
- in case of conflict, make contact with the coordination office of the corresponding HLT (consulate, teachers’ association...), the local education authorities or the union

Tips for dealing with *caretaking services*

(The janitor or head of caretaking services is often a central figure in the school, not at all just a subordinate custodian!)

- Make an appointment to introduce yourself

- Inform yourself about house rules and observe them (rules pertaining to the schoolyard and play equipment, eating and drinking in the classroom, trash ...)

- Receive the keys to the school and store them responsibly and securely

- Apologize if something went wrong...

Tips for dealing with *teachers of regular curriculum classes*

- Present yourself, e. g., in the faculty room or at a school conference, seek and establish contacts

- Show readiness and interest for cooperation

- Show that you are available to the school as a resource specialist for a certain language and culture

- Do not be discouraged if local teachers initially appear reserved and aloof, and if you have the impression of being “invisible”

- Inquire about internal schoolhouse practices (coffee machine, copier, etc.)

- Try to explain the function and importance of HLT and invite interested persons to an exchange and reciprocal class visits

Tips for dealing with *parents*

- cultivate and maintain good contacts through conversations and parent-teacher conferences (at least twice per year)

- present content, goals and methods of your own teaching

- explain important pedagogical and didactic-methodological points

- clarify the role of parents and teacher (= specialist for instruction!)

- remain fair, calm, open, but also clear and determined in response to possible criticism

Tips for *professional development and cultural offers*

- acquaint yourself about local professional development and avail yourself of these opportunities (offers by pedagogical institutes and teacher training colleges, the Department of Education, etc.; further information may perhaps be obtained from the school administration)

- attend courses to better master the local language (important for integration and cooperation!)

- acquaint yourself about the cultural life in the new domicile (cultural programs, museums, libraries, associations, events, offers for students...)

Before and after class ...

- arrive in the classroom at least 10 minutes before the class starts (reserve the time to lay out and prepare everything)

- it is very important to restore everything to its original state and place following the class (board, tables, floor...)
