5 Key aspects of current pedagogy in the host countries: education and school related considerations

5A Background text

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1. Introduction

The school systems in Central, Northern and Western Europe are shaped by the social paradigms and key issues in educational policy as explained in the previous chapter. They represent a certain guideline as to the principles and role perception which determine how schools and instruction operate in these countries. The human image, along which a school system and society orients itself, influences what teaching should be like, as well as our perspective of the students. The ideological underpinnings which support education and the school systems in those countries are the commitment to equal opportunity, integration, interculturality, multilingualism, inclusive education, democracy education and participation in society, as described in chapter 4. This influences directly or indirectly the perception and treatment of our students, the instructors and the understanding of learning and what the goal and substance of school actually should be.

The previous chapter discussed the most important instruction- and school-related quality criteria in Central, Western and Northern European countries. The criteria are organized according to three essential areas or perspectives:

- Perception of the student

- Perception of the teacher

- Understanding of learning and instruction

2. Perception of the students

Student orientation

The instruction in the schools of the referenced immigration countries usually follows the principle of learner orientation. The expectation is that teaching in terms of structure, selection of content, and in the organization must align with the needs of the students. Learner orientation means to start with the students' individuality, and to recognize the students as individuals with their own independent personalities, respectively (Helmke 2012).

In the student-oriented classroom, learners are treated seriously and valued as personalities, regardless of their academic performance and success.

This suggests that the interests, the biography and the background, the life situation and the specific needs of the learners are perceived and respected. All this has a positive effect on the students' self-confidence and motivation to learn. At the same time, it has a positive effect on the relationship between the teacher and the students who feel better and more accepted as a person in a learner-oriented classroom. It also means that students may turn to teachers not just for subject-related issues, but advice for other questions and problems as well. The instructors' educational function is thereby enhanced with advisory functions.

Aside from this emotional-affective dimension, the learner-oriented classroom instruction is based on the respective level of development of the learners and incorporates their previous knowledge, starting position, experiences and living environment.

The learners are seen as acting, active subjects – and not just as mere objects by the instructor or the instructional program.

A central postulate is therefore that the learners in a student-oriented classroom should be motivated to engage in their own activity as fully as possible.

As a result of this instructional concept, the teacher is no longer central to the instruction, which is now planned and shaped from the perspective of, and together with, the learners (Wiater 2012). Or, as expressed by Helmke (2012): learner-oriented instruction distinguishes itself in that the students' classroom participation is high and that the students are actively involved in the process. This changed definition of roles in the learner-centered classroom represents a marked difference from the traditional teacher-centered instruction, which many teachers of heritage language education remember from their own studies and training. See section "new understanding of roles: learning coach and learning moderator".

Support orientation

If classroom instruction is learner-oriented, it also affects our view about student performance and how this performance is assessed. The instructors who want to contribute to the individual competence of learners must certainly have acquired sufficient knowledge of diagnostics and similar skills. Moreover, they must be able to adapt the level of the activities and problems, just as the questions and tasks to be solved to the learners' needs and requirements. This is particularly relevant for the heterogeneous HLT classes with different age and skill levels, where tasks and questions for assessment have to be formulated appropriately and for different performance levels, respectively (see below "differentiation and individualization" as well as chapter 6).

In order to be able to optimally support students, a foster-oriented instruction must view and assess the performance of the learners with an individualistic and learning goal -oriented perspective.

Assessment for the promotion-oriented instruction is not only summative, but always takes place in a formative fashion as well.

This means that performance will be observed, commented, and discussed with the learners over a longer period of time. A promotion-oriented assessment implies that learning objectives are clearly defined and that they are transparent for the learners as well. Moreover, promotion -oriented instruction means the inclusion of all participants as much as possible: learners, parents, teachers of regular education classes, and other experts.

The topic of promotion- oriented assessment is further elaborated in chapter 7; for a good brochure with practical recommendations, models, checklists, etc., see Nüesch, among others (bibliographic references).

Competence orientation

The principle of skills orientation has been a leitmotif for educational instruction in many countries of Central, Western and Northern Europe for about a decade. This means:

- The students' educational objectives are represented in form of various areas and levels of competence. The focal point of academic learning is therefore no longer the thematic canon of fields or content-based goals, which have to be covered, but a series of sequential skills or competences which the students must acquire.

- The students' level of proficiency and progress will be assessed by their attaining a certain competence level (instead of achievement, the operative word is more commonly performance).

In the instructional sciences there are several definitions of the term "competences". Most commonly accepted in the German-speaking areas is Franz E. Weinert's definition: "Competences are the individual's existing or learnable cognitive abilities and capabilities to solve certain problems, as well as the thereby related motivational, volitional [determined by will] and social readiness and abilities in order to apply the solutions to problems in variable situations successfully and responsibly." (Weinert 2014). It is therefore not just a matter of knowledge of facts, but rather the ability to solve problems, and involves ultimately the required attitude and motivation as well. In this context, didactics distinguishes between technical competences and generic competences. Technical competences comprise all those that are closely related to a school subject; in terms of HLT, that would apply to "The students know at the end of their third school year the writing system of their first language and are able to write simple messages in that language". The generic competences would include abilities and capabilities which are necessary to cope in life and are not necessarily related to a school subject. This includes, for example, personal competences (autonomy, reflection, etc.), social (ability to cooperate, ability to deal with conflict, etc.) but also methodological (ability to communicate, ability to solve problems, etc.). It is understood that the development of these skills can and must also occur in HLT.

The call for competence orientation is closely related to teacher orientation and support orientation. In summary, it can be said that the competence-oriented classroom distinguishes itself by the following characteristics (see Lersch 2010 and Meyer 2013):

- Cognitive activation of the students through demanding, but well balanced, coordinated assignments

- Linking of the newly acquired skills with existing knowledge and capabilities

- Intelligent practice

- Search for appropriate practical application

- Individual follow-up of learning processes

- Reflection on the learning progress by students (metacognition)

- Define consequences for inappropriate behavior; deal with discipline problems without fuss and without disruption of classroom instruction

- As classroom instructor, do not exude uncertainties or insecurities

- Ensure a smooth running of instruction for the period, avoid illogical connections and unnecessary disruptions in the proceedings

Criteria for reflection on one's own leadership style are found below (Reflection, discussion and deeper analysis [5C, 6 and 7]). For further analysis of this aspect, consult the publication by Meier et al (2011): Competent leadership of students; Zürich: Verlag Pestalozzianum.

3. View of the instructor

Importance of classroom management

Efficient classroom management is one of the preconditions for qualitatively superior classroom instruction. Classroom management forms the temporal and motivational frame for teaching; it contributes to the avoidance of unnecessary disruptions and chaos. International research has shown that there is a direct link between classroom management and the extent to which students make progress. The voluminous meta-analysis by Hattie (2013) confirms that with well-organized classes and a high engagement by the teacher in terms of classroom management, there exists a clear (medium to high) effect on the learning performance of the students. Among the important factors in this case are the instructors' personal attitude (motivation, engagement) and the extent of their ability to recognize and to react to students' behavioral problems.

Central to the specific work in the area of classroom management, including for HLT, are the following points (see Woolfolk 2008):

- Good preparation of the classroom (materials, seating chart, organizational matters, etc.)

- Highest and constant activation possible of all students through attractive, activity-oriented assignments; recognize and re-channel dissimulated activities

- Establish clear, plausible and preferably commonly agreed-upon rules and behaviors and make them accessible (e. g. hang a poster with class rules or discussion rules)

New understanding of roles: learning coach and moderator

For the students, competence-oriented and learner-oriented classroom instruction means to be highly active. For that to occur, the instructor must plan appropriate learning activities (quite possibly for various levels!) and accompany the learners in their activities and actively support them, if needed. In doing so, the instructors increasingly assume the role of "learning coaches", that is, of initiators, supporters and evaluators of learning processes; they assume much less the traditional role of lecturer.

In order to fulfill this changed concept of roles, the instructor must first be able to assess the learning needs and the requirements of the individual students (see above support orientation). Further tasks consist of planning the learning situations in a stimulating manner, both didactically and content-wise, developing learning paths, selecting learning tasks and observing learning processes and intervening when problems arise.

As part of the follow-up and at the end of a learning sequence, there is an assessment of learning success (who has learned what; which goals and competences require further practice; what kind of evaluations or grades are eventually to be assigned?).

Beyond that, it is a matter of reflecting the students' learning in discussions with them and to document the results. The current practice of keeping a journal or creating a portfolio to collect representative pieces of work and activities is ideal for that purpose, and also lends itself well for implementation in HLT classrooms.

In the follow-up of learning processes, it is essential to stimulate the learners' thoughts about their own work, to point out their strengths, as well as their developmental potential, and to offer them appropriate learning opportunities. Part of this learning guidance scheme involves the explicit reference to strategies, designed to help the learners optimize their learning efforts. These strategies may focus directly on the learning objective or the skills to be acquired (e. g. strategies for text revisions, dictionary or internet searches) or indirectly further learning as a whole (strategies for planning the work, creating learning tandems, etc.). Workbook 5 of the series "Materials for the HLT classroom" deals specifically with the referenced learning strategies.

All this means, of course, that the contact and the cooperation between teachers and learners is configured differently and tilted increasingly toward partnerships between teachers and learners that are more intense than in the traditional classroom teaching where instructors primarily lectured from their pedestal as public officials. The changed understanding of roles and cooperation can be a challenge, particularly for HLT instructors who may have been socialized along the more traditional concept in their home countries. However, they must realize that their students are mostly used to this new instructor image from their other classes. Consequently, they are reluctant to engage themselves in a teacher-centered classroom that is guided by a traditional-authoritarian concept.

4. Understanding of learning and teaching

Constructivist approach

Most schools in Central, Western and Northern Europe subscribe to a so-called constructivist understanding of learning. This is based on two key assumptions (see Woolfolk 2008):

1. Learners are active subjects in the learning process and "construct" their own knowledge (on the basis of their everyday knowledge, they develop their own ideas and "models" about the alternation of day and night, about wars, or about the disparities between rich and poor).

2. Social interactions are important for this process of knowledge construction.

The constructivist approach to learning is premised on the idea that learners actually need the environment only as a stimulus and matrix for their development. The essential impulses for learning however emanate from the learners themselves. According to this view, students are actively and specifically looking for those things in their surroundings which pose a problem ("Why does it get dark at night?", "Why do so many people from my country live as migrants abroad?"), in order to build insights by solving the problem. Learning is therefore understood as a constant rearranging of knowledge elements. The learners' existing and self- built structures are expanded, realigned, or entirely built anew with each new learning process or step.

Constructivist didactics prefers constructing and applying knowledge and competences over mere memorizing, recalling and reproducing of facts, concepts and skills (Woolfolk 2008). Constructivist methodology emphasizes the development of problem solving abilities, critical thinking, questioning, self-determination and open-mindedness for different ways of problem solving. From a constructivist viewpoint, the following recommendations are relevant for education:

- Learning should be based on complex, realistic and relevant learning environments and issues; these in turn stimulate the learners' "knowledge construction" and learning by discovery.

- Learners should be supported in adopting and discussing different perspectives and points of view. In order to be able to do this, they should also be offered different approaches to the same topic. Students should also get the opportunity for fair discussions and exchanges of ideas.

- Learners should be made aware that they are responsible for their own learning and progress (this means at the same time the strengthening of their self-awareness and that learning is the result of the constructivist process).

The importance of knowledge transfer and the mere learning of facts, which characterizes traditional classroom instruction, is thus very much reduced. This requires HLT teachers to rethink the planning of learning tasks as well. Instead of "learn the names of the following plants and animals by heart" the assignment may read "in groups of three, discuss which plants and animals play an especially important role in the different levels of the forest, take notes and create a small poster about it".

II

Independent and autonomous learning

As part of the constructivist approach, classroom instruction in the schools of Western, Central, and Northern Europe also emphasizes the important dimension of independent and autonomous learning. Central to this is the idea of the concept of self-directed learning. This means that the learners themselves guide (regulate) and monitor their learning process and progress (including homework assignments and longer-term projects, such as a presentation) on their own, autonomously. Independent learning also means that students can make autonomous decisions about different aspects of their own learning, and that they are responsible for them.

These decisions concern particularly the following areas:

Learning objectives:	What do I have to/want to know?
Learning content:	What do I have to/want to know/ learn?
Learning methods:	How do I learn this, which methods and strategies do I use?
Learning media:	What resources do I use for this?
Timeframe:	How much time do I need for this or do I have at my disposal?
Pace of work:	How fast do I work?
Learning partner:	Do I work alone? Do I work with a partner? Or in the group?

Whereas the learning objectives and learning contents (in everyday reality at school), are mostly prescribed, the learners have some choice with regard to the time, the pace, the learning partner and sometimes also the learning methods they want to use. This could also be implemented in HLT classes, as long as they are planned in an open and learner-oriented way (see chapter 6). Of prime importance for self-directed learning are the above referenced learning strategies. They are a prerequisite for the learners' ability to independently and autonomously organize and direct their own learning. The teachers' ability to offer their students learning goals and learning contents for different proficiency levels is highly conducive to independent and self-directed learning, including building of the competence for self-assessment. The students

themselves then select the proficiency level that best fits them and their circumstances. (Example: texts about Turkey in the 19th century in three levels of difficulty; Learning review about agriculture in Italy on three proficiency levels).

Relevance to everyday life

Learner-oriented instruction takes into account the learners' needs, and must in the choice of its contents closely orient itself with the students' current and future living environment. This means that chosen contents must be current and meaningful for the students. As aptly suggested by Wolfgang Klafki more than 50 years ago with the following question: "What significance does the content of a theme, or the experience, ability or skill gained from this topic, already have in the intellectual life of the children in my classroom, what significance should it have for their cognitive development– from a pedagogical point of view?" (Klafki, 1958). However, not only the present-day significance is relevant for the choice of contents, but also the importance of the various themes for the future of the students.

It is up to the instructors to select subjects that are relevant and realistic in terms of present day circumstances as well as their significance for the future.

The postulate of infusing instructional content with the living environment is a great professional challenge for the teachers and their subject competences, and poses problems and requirements for the learners as well. For HLT instructors, this postulate suggests first and foremost the following: awareness that their students are growing up in the world of migration, in and between two cultures, and with experiences that differ significantly from the experience of the students in their countries of origin. Themes like "life on the farm", "fairy tales and legends", "I myself in 20 years", "minorities" etc. must be treated differently if they are used in regular classes in Croatia, for example, as opposed to the Croatian HLT in Switzerland or in Austria. In the latter case, it is vitally important to recognize the additional background experiences and competences of the children who grow up biculturally, as well as their often weaker knowledge of their language and culture of origin. Moreover, there are a number of topics which are traditionally taught and accepted in the country of origin (e. g. patriotic or historic themes), but are significantly less relevant in the context of migration – whereas topics such as "life in and between two cultures", "minorities" etc. are very current and meaningful here.

Age-appropriate instruction

As already mentioned in the section "learner-centered orientation", teaching and learning should be guided by the students' level of development, the composition of the learning group and the individual personality of the students. The dimension of age appropriateness is increasingly important, particularly in multi-class instruction, which is characteristic for HLT. In terms of developmental psychology, the learners in heterogeneous multi-level learning groups should be supported differently and individually and according to their previous learning experiences.

A student in first grade needs and would like to work on something else than a third grader.

A merely quantitative differentiation in terms of homework load is generally not sufficient in such cases. A qualitative choice of age-specific contents and methods would be more appropriate.

The particular challenge for HLT consists in the fact that the age and first language competencies often differ vastly, Thus, it can happen that a sixth grader, who has been attending HLT classes for only two years, is considerably less proficient in reading and writing in the first language than a third grader from an educted family. Nevertheless, the older student should not be asked to work on texts for small children that demand too little and would humiliate and demotivate him/her. Instead, s/he needs linguistically simplified versions of age-appropriate reading material and much individual support.

Differentiation and individualization

The postulate for differentiated and individualized instruction, which has been active for 30 years, is a logical consequence of the call for a teaching model that takes into account the competences, interests, needs and age of the learners (see above). Figuratively expressed:

Instead of serving an identical menu to all the students, to be consumed and digested in the same time and amount (which would be completely illusionary), each student should receive the menu which is best for him or her, easy to digest and wholesome.

This sounds, and is, demanding, particularly for those instructors who are unfamiliar with this concept from their own studies and training. At the same time, individualization and differentiation have become so prevalent in practice as well as in the teaching materials, that there are scarcely any instructors left who follow the classic frontal teacher-centered model. Naturally, ways and solutions can be found that are realistic and feasible both for regular classroom instruction as well as heritage language education: in a class with 20 students, it is not necessary to develop 20 individual learning programs, it is enough, initially, if reading materials or writing assignments are offered at three or four levels of competence, such that each child will likely find something suitable for his/her needs. In lieu of complete individualization, it would be more appropriate to speak of an internal differentiation of teaching and learning in this case (according to different skill levels and age groups). Additionally, there is the external differentiation, according to school types, not in HLT, but the state school system, especially at the secondary level I (secondary school, secondary schools with expanded or reduced requirements, respectively, special schools, etc.).

Teachers can influence internal differentiation in class directly, i.e., they can and should plan different kinds of learning tasks at different levels of difficulty and complexity, offer different kinds of exercises of variable lengths so as to serve the needs of all the different learners. In a sense, the class as a unit is dissolved. Each learner is allowed to work on an appropriate learning task and, as a result of it, he or she is supported in the best of ways. „Adaptive teaching" is another term used for this kind of instruction, which is shaped according to the students' individual characteristics and abilities and which adapts learning tasks, learning support material, teaching materials, media, etc., accordingly.

Outlook

The teaching and learning dimensions in chapter 5 reflect the essential points of the current pedagogical and methodological practices in the immigration countries of Central, Northern, and Western Europe. Obviously, the list is not conclusive, particularly since the pedagogical and didactical sciences are constantly developing. One recurrent element, which was not explicitly mentioned, needs to be emphasized: the learners' motivation.

The task of any type of classroom instruction is to offer positive learning stimuli and encourage the learners to work and be active.

The key issues mentioned all point in this direction and view teaching from this perspective. Only those who are motivated can take on the responsibility for their own learning, can set goals autonomously, can plan and reflect on the next learning steps and be the agent of their own learning activities. Teachers can achieve this goal by structuring their classes meaningfully and by committing themselves to nurturing their students' acquisition of knowledge, their competences and attitudes – in short, by furthering their students' personalities.

II

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