

## 1. Božena Alebić: My experience in dealing with the principle of individualization

Božena Alebić hails from Croatia (Split). She worked from 2004–2008 and 2010–2014 as HLT teacher of Croatian in Zürich.

In teaching Croatian abroad, it is indispensable to implement the principle of individualization, as the children are used to it from regular classroom instruction. For this reason, I always try to get to know each and every child in the shortest possible time in order to assess their linguistic competences, previous knowledge, abilities and difficulties.

With me, the process of individualization begins already with the selection and planning of themes. I am looking for a topic that can be treated at various age- and difficulty levels. Most of the time, I begin with a common phase, during which the requirements and the basic Croatian terminology for the theme are explained. There are usually a few already known and established concepts, whereas the new notions will have to be introduced. This is followed by an individualized written assignment, which can be executed alone or with a partner. For this purpose, I develop different versions of a worksheet, according to differentiated levels of expectation. I make sure that each version begins with simple tasks and that the level of difficulty increases gradually, with the most complex assignments at the end. This way, even the weaker students who master the first (easier) assignments can have a sense of achievement. I maintain the gradual increase in difficulty in all assessments and tests as well. For instance, this allows for tasking the weaker students with answering at least the first five questions, the mid-level students with completing the first ten, and the stronger students with all 15 questions. The main goal of this procedure is that each worksheet is optimally tailored to the needs and the abilities of the students.

I observe the principle of individualization with language practice and oral tasks as well. First, I make sure that all students understand the presented content. I often explain the same assignment in various ways and sometimes I explain them to weaker students also individually. I keep the content of the assignments and the themes of class discussions in such a way that they approach the experiential world of the children as closely as possible. I try to select topics and assignments that are of interest to them and touch on their previous knowledge and experiences.

Since the heterogeneous classes vary greatly in terms of age, gender, competence of Croatian, and interests, I have the students discuss many topics in small groups, rather than as a whole class. In the end, each group presents a short report about their discussion and their findings.

Compared to the regular classes in the Croatian Republic, the great heterogeneity in HLT classes is a formidable challenge. In the same group, there are often children from kindergarten to the eighth grade. It is very difficult to find a common work motivation in such a group, even if it involves a simple game of concentration.

Aside from individualization, other pedagogical principles are also an inherent part of my classroom, most importantly, the principles of independence, playful learning, and creativity. I try to apply the principles of creative learning and creativity whenever possible, since even the term “play” itself has a motivational effect on the students. In this context, we engage in language games, concentration games, memory games, etc., all of which provide a great learning experience. It takes a great deal of creativity and engagement to organize one’s classroom instruction in this fashion; the joy and the response of the students, however, show that it is very well worth the effort.

## 2. Saliha Salih Alcon: Individualizing and furthering independence, reasons and an example

Saliha Salih Alcon is from Spain. She has been living in Vienna for nine years and has taught as native language instructor of Arabic and Spanish for two years.

In my Arabic language classes, I have students with greatly differing levels of linguistic competence and requirements.

Many children are from mixed marriages, where generally only the father speaks Arabic. These children can barely speak and understand Arabic. The HLT classes for them are, most of the time, the only possibility to learn Arabic “right”.

Additionally, there are children in my classes where both parents are Arabs. Since they come from different Arab countries and speak very different dialects, they also have problems understanding and speaking high Arabic or Modern Standard Arabic.

Many of my students can write, but not read and comprehend, others have a pronunciation that needs urgent improvement. Others speak well and understand quite a lot, but are unable to read and write. Overall, this means that almost every child has different language and reading competences, differing levels of skills, requirements and learning needs. My first task is to determine the level of each child and to assess in which areas they need to be furthered.

Against this background, the pedagogical principles of individualizing and independence are very important. To treat the class as a “homogenous group” and to put before them the subject matter would be utterly impossible; it won’t work without individualizing and differentiation of instruction. I further the independence of the students, so that they not only learn, alone or in groups, to solve problems and develop their ability to think about their own skill levels and instructional needs.

Another very important principle is the skills orientation of the instruction. For myself, that means that I consider carefully before each lesson or range of topics which functional, linguistic, personal and social competences the students have to acquire or further develop, and how I ultimately ascertain that this competence development has indeed occurred.

Example: Planning of an instructional unit (within class grouping) for the lower level. Theme: living together of different religions.

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1. Introduction: I ask the children if they have ever been to a church or mosque and let them briefly speak about it. I explain to them that we are going to discuss this topic together and indicate what the class format will look like.

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  2. Elaboration: We are watching together a brief video sequence about churches and mosques in Arabic. After clearing up comprehension problems, I divide the children into two groups. Those who are able to read receive a cloze text including the missing words to cut out and paste. When the task is completed, they come to me. I discuss with them how they have solved the problem, what they know well, and how they can further improve their skill level. They then receive a picture of a church or mosque for coloring. The other children meanwhile practice writing the first letter of the terms «mosque» and «church» in Arabic, which they copy and practice from the words on the board. When they are done, they show me their work and receive feedback. Ultimately, they also receive a picture for coloring.

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  3. Back-up phase: By means of the colored churches/mosques, I verify the mentioned terms, such as (tower/minaret, priest, etc.)

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  4. Conclusion: We debate the issue together as a class that being an Arab does not necessarily mean being a Muslim, as there are many Arabs who are Christians, and that a respectful interaction with each other is important for a harmonious life together.
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### 3. Gaca Radetinać: A small example for student orientation and my role as learning coach

Gaca Radetinać hails from Bosnia. She lives in Karlskrona (Sweden) and has been teaching there for many years as native language instructor for Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian.

In my classroom, I try to avoid being too controlling as much as possible to allow the students themselves to become as active as possible. This even works with relatively “conventional” lessons. I was not necessarily familiar with this kind of instruction, based on my own educational training. It is however the only possible approach, as the students are used to this kind of instruction from their regular classes in Swedish schools. I became acquainted with this type of teaching and the changed role of the instructor here in Sweden, also in conversations and class visits with Swedish colleagues.

#### Lesson topic (double lesson)

Children's rights

#### Class level

2nd –6th grade (older students work on a different project); 14 students.

#### Background and objectives

Regardless of whether one lives in a welfare state like Sweden or in a poor country, it can happen that children's rights are violated. Many times, they are not sufficiently aware of the UNICEF children's convention. Each school has the responsibility to educate children about their rights; in Sweden it is mandated by school law.

As HLT instructor, it is important to convey this information to the students in their first language as well and to discuss the issues with them.

#### Materials

- About 20–30 pictures (e.g. from magazines or from the internet) of children with different facial expressions: happy, sad, apathetic, etc.
- Five pages with ideas for discussion “describe the mood of the children in your pictures with at least three adjectives; think about why the children feel this way or that way, invent a little story about one of the pictures that will help to understand the child's expression!”).

- Copies of the most important articles of the Children's Rights Convention, preferably in a simplified version (see internet).“

#### Course of the lesson

1. I inform the class briefly about the topic and the goal of the lesson.
2. I place 20–30 pictures on the floor. One or two children assist me in doing so.
3. The children form groups of two. Each team selects 2–3 pictures and receives a page with ideas for discussion and the task, to report their findings to the class in ten minutes. (In forming the teams, I make sure that linguistically weaker children work together with a linguistically stronger child).
4. Ca. 10 minutes of discussion and note-taking in the teams.
5. I form two circles, one with three and one with four teams (= 14 students). In both circles, the teams show their pictures and their respective findings. (It is not necessary that everyone hear everything, hence two circles). I remain as listener in the background.
6. Short input from me about the Children's Convention: What is it, since when does it exist?, etc.
7. Each child receives a page with the children's rights (<http://unicef.se/barnkonventionen>). The children form groups of three and select three rights, which they want to discuss and then present to the others (what does this right stipulate, which concrete examples come to mind, etc.). I make sure that all rights are discussed at least once.
8. Presentations (plenary, entire class).
9. I advise them about the new app “Alla Barns Rätt” (All children's rights) and recommend that they review it at home. Outlook: next week, we are going to discuss other rights.