

9

Selection of relevant content and themes

9A

Background text

Sabina Larcher Klee

1. Points of reference for the selection of content and themes

(Basil Schader)

In the rough planning of their instructional year, semester or quarter, HLT instructors generally orient themselves according to the following determinants:

Regulatory guidelines

1. Curricular HLT guidelines from the country of origin, insofar as such provisions exist (see chapter 1 A).
2. Curricular HLT stipulations or similar regulations by the immigration country, if such documents exist (see chapter 1 A). HLT curricula of the countries of origin tend to concentrate mostly on content from their own culture, history, civilization and language studies. HLT curricula from the host countries (see examples in the bibliographic references for chapter 1 A) on the other hand focus strongly on themes in conjunction with orientation, integration and life together in a migration situation.

These two different focal emphases need not conflict, though they pose for HLT instructors an exciting challenge of having to recognize both perspectives – which indeed corresponds entirely to the reality and the background experiences of their students. See also chapter 2 A.

Teaching materials and other educational materials

3. HLT teaching materials or similar materials from the country of origin, if such materials exist (see chapters 1 A and 10). As evident from the feedback of many HLT instructors, the materials provided by the countries of origin require sometimes significant adaptations, as they are linguistically much too demanding and/or have too little content-relevance to the specific situation of growing up as a migrant.
4. Other materials which HLT instructors have collected and didactically adapted (from books, magazines, websites, educational materials from the immigration countries, etc.; see chapter 10).

Local institutional circumstances and possibilities

5. Circumstances and possibilities that arise from the cooperation with regular classroom instruction in the host countries (see chapters 12 and 13). Whether and to what extent such possibilities exist (mutual choice of common content and themes, cooperation projects, project weeks, etc.), depends greatly on the country-specific integration of HLT into the regular school system. Where HLT and regular classroom instruction are closely linked institutionally, e.g. in Sweden, many diverse and fruitful possibilities present themselves; where HLT is largely isolated, even small, occasional instances of cooperation represent an achievement.

Pedagogical and learning-psychological considerations

6. Needs, interests and requirements of the students in terms of language and content (see chapters 3–5).

-
7. Orientation towards present pedagogical and learning-psychological principles and standards (see chapters 3–8).
-

Items 6 and 7 constitute virtually the A and O of concrete teaching practice and planning. They are addressed in further detail in Chapter 11.

As a complement to the mentioned chapters, a few points are further elaborated below. Their consideration in the choice and creation of content and themes is of high importance for classroom instruction that corresponds to the linguistic and cultural reality of HLT students, their background experience, their learning needs, and their bicultural-bilingual competences.

2. Considered instruction – preliminary considerations about content and topics

Since the late 1960s there has been a consensus that the school-based promotion of the prevalent language of instruction is of vital importance for the successful integration of children with a migration background into the local school system. (Allemann-Ghionda et al. 2010). The significance of the students' first language or language of origin remains controversial, poorly data-supported, and continues to be discussed in view of the learning success: it is fundamentally a question of whether bilingual and bicultural socialization is a resource or a problem for the children and adolescents (ibid.; see also chapter 15 in this volume). Even though numerous findings further suggest positive effects, and the learning and the command of several languages is seen as a potential, the affected students are subjected to and shaped by this ambivalent context. This also applies to the programs and contents of HLT.

This may perhaps be due to the fact that these programs and contents are rarely systematically evaluated in terms of their effectiveness. In the context of increasing competence orientation, it is a matter of closing research and knowledge gaps and developing new perspectives in view of the educational success of the affected students. Societal acceptance and the recognition of migration languages by the schools must be continually and carefully reviewed: although it is undisputed that they represent a significant economic and social resource (Kavacik/Skenderovic 2011, page 33), they are subject to political trends that strongly impact the schools. How can HLT instruction, and how can the choice of appropriate themes and contents play a supportive role here?

Research findings about classroom instruction suggest that children and adolescents with a migration background tend to have a positive educational development if instruction enables systematic transfer processes and transfer of achievements, be they in HLT or in regular classroom instruction in the host country. The effects of language comparisons and the support for language transfer processes (Göbel, Vieluf & Hesse 2010) support these findings. The development and support of reflective-critical competences in the classroom is furthered by respect for diversity, particularly in terms of intercultural learning and intercultural competences (Blanck 2012, page 143).

The recognized importance of language comparisons and intercultural learning suggests that HLT instructors should emphasize transfer processes and reflexive-critical competences as central to a comparative or, more precisely, a considered instruction (Blanck, ibid.).

Themes and contents should be evaluated in terms of how far this is achieved and enabled, respectively. The professional dimension of instruction covers a broad spectrum of methodological approaches to diversity and the specific shaping of the content of the educational offerings (see chapter 5). In a considered approach to education, which supports transfer, the guiding question for instructors and learners is: "could it also be different?" With this question, themes and contents are subjected to a comparison and thus to a systematic reflection. Thus, Self and Other, perhaps also the foreign, are central to a critical, but un-ideological classroom instruction.

3. "Could it also be different?" – Promoting language comparison and transfer as well as critical competences for reflection

Linguistic and cultural diversity must first be recognized as such: in the context of considered instruction, this means embracing differences and commonalities, not a binding attribution of characteristics or abilities. This holds true for HLT as well as for regular classroom instruction. The determination of themes and contents must therefore recognize the goal, the specific nature, the areas of application, as well as the underlying cultural concept of intercultural competence and language transfer competence. A successful example of this nature are the themes of the Zurich HLT framework curriculum (2011) for the educational fields "language" and "Mankind and Environment".



In doing so, how does it compare with the demand for metacognition, as it was formulated earlier – key word comparison and transfer? Which prerequisites does such comparative instruction have, which for one should lead to the acquisition and/or perfection of the heritage language and, for another, to the development of intercultural competences (see framework curriculum 2011, page 7)? Which decisions must be made about topics and contents?

Fundamental for enabling systematic transfer processes and performances and promoting the critical reflection competences of children and adolescents, are the following process steps for instructional planning: educational concerns and curricular considerations (HLT curriculum of the country of origin, framework curriculum of the immigration country). In consideration of the students' requirements (see chapter 5), appropriate content will be created and determined that enables comparison and transfer. By means of a combination of selected approaches – historical, geographical, cultural, structural or personal, etc. – instructional themes are determined which have the potential to be developed as alternatives. In this sense, the practice part of the present chapter (9 B) offers different perspectives: topics in connection with the culture of origin; the question of the in-between; themes which directly involve the transfer, as well as topics that are not directly related to culture and language. With a view to the desired effects, as detailed in the Zurich framework curriculum, appropriate methodological procedures are chosen. To that end, it is necessary to briefly review the changed concept of learning and the corresponding competence orientation, as well as to briefly address the understanding of intercultural competence.

a) Competence orientation and concept of learning

Competence orientation includes an expansion of the concept of learning, in that concepts such as knowledge, skills, aptitudes, attitudes and motivation can be newly integrated (see chapter 5 A). Considered instruction, thinking in alternatives and the competence of achieving transfers are connected with it. Educational planning and design is correspondingly oriented along learning and student performance, both short-term as well as long-term (ranging from learning in individual instructional sequences all the way to life-long learning). Learning in the sense of a competence orientation must therefore be understood as a process, with changed demands on the learners as well as the instructors. Thus, the demands on the facilitation of metacognition (in terms of the transparency of learning steps), on the planning of the processes and the learning time, structuring of classroom instruction, etc. have become more challenging. This certainly applies as well for HLT.

Although competence-oriented instruction does not reinvent teaching, nor turn it on its head, it does require a consistent orientation towards the learners and learning, respectively. The consistent focus on the personalizing of learning requires that the diagnosis, the corresponding tasks and the organization of the learning surroundings, the metacognition as well as the evaluation of performances and the learning gains, respectively, require high competences in terms of structure and planning on the part of the instructors.

b) Intercultural competence

In describing cultural competence, there are two models for discussion: list models, and structure models. Whereas the former simply enumerate relevant partial competences, the structure models assign partial competences to different dimensions of a systematic process. It seems all the more important to elaborate further, as exact details are often lacking, even in framework instruments (e.g. in the Zurich framework curriculum). The answer to the query of what purpose intercultural competence actually serves and in which situations it is relevant, ultimately depends on the partial components from which it is comprised, in which situations these partial components become visible, and if, or how, they can be learned or taught, respectively (Rathje, 2006, page 3).

In view of an independent development of children and adolescents, it is therefore central to work on a basis of a belief-focused model that emphasizes the following convictions: culture exists within human collectives (Hansen 2000) and does not refer to a society or nation per se; cultures distinguish themselves through differences and contradictions. This means that in all complex collectives “not only variety, but diversity, heterogeneity, divergences and contradictions” exist (ibid., page 182). Thus, culture can be understood as a tangible store of different view points and perspectives, which differs from collective to collective. People, children and adolescents belong to different collectives which distinguish themselves by different cultures. The complexity for students with a migration background is therefore great.

Security and stability is however not attained through simplification, through national and local fixation, but through the creation of the normality of differences.

A culture, “this is its most essential criterion and its most effective and profound achievement, defines normality, and this normality in its own way has an effect that is equally binding and obligatory as social and political structures” (ibid., page 233). The solidarity of a culture is a result of the familiarity and the normality of its differences, and not of its coherence.

Applied to the question of intercultural competence and its development in classroom instruction (see also chapter 4 A), it includes the ability to create the missing normality in intercultural interaction and to enable cohesion in that unknown differences become known. In other words: intercultural competence “is a creative ability to endow this new order between people of different cultures and render it fruitful” (Wierlacher 2003, page 216). The result is culturality (Rathje 2004, page 301) and not nationality.

Bibliography

- Allemann-Ghionda, Cristina et al. (eds.) (2010): Migration, Identität, Sprache und Bildungserfolg. Zeitschrift für Pädagogik, 56. Jahrgang, 55. Beiheft.
- Bildungsdirektion Kanton Zürich (2011): Rahmenlehrplan für Heimatliche Sprache und Kultur (HSK). Link: <http://www.vsa.zh.ch/hsk>
- Blanck, Bettina (2012): Reflexiv-kritischer Umgang mit Vielfalt. In: Julia Košinär; Sabine Leinweber; Heike Hegemann-Fonger; Ursula Carle (eds.): Vielfalt und Anerkennung. Hohengehren: Schneider Verlag.
- Göbel, Kerstin; Svenja Vieluf; Hermann-Günter Hesse (2010): Die Sprachtransferunterstützung im Deutsch- und Englischunterricht bei Schülerinnen und Schülern unterschiedlicher Sprachenlernerfahrung. In: Cristina Allemann-Ghionda et al. (eds.): Migration, Identität, Sprache und Bildungserfolg. Zeitschrift für Pädagogik, 56. Jahrgang, 55. Beiheft, p. 101–122.
- Hansen, Klaus Peter (2000): Kultur und Kulturwissenschaft. Paderborn: UTB.
- Kavacik, Zuhail; Damir Skenderovic (2011): Renaissance der Homogenitätsideologie. Integrationspolitik und Sprache in Deutschland und der Schweiz. WBZ Mitteilungen, vol. 131, p. 30–33.
- Rathje, Stephanie (2006): Interkulturelle Kompetenz – Zustand und Zukunft eines umstrittenen Konzepts. Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht, 11 (3), p. 1–15.
- Wierlacher, Alois (2003): Das tragfähige Zwischen. Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik, 14 (1), p. 215–217.

