



Alignment with the LIFE concept – what does that mean in concrete terms?

Alignment with the “LIFE concept” is a key requirement for all applications for the BMW Group Award for Intercultural Learning. The LIFE concept was developed in 1995 by the Bavarian State Institute for School Quality and Educational Research (ISB) in co-operation with the BMW Group, and has been continually expanded since that time with a variety of supplementary material which anyone interested can order free of charge. This summary is designed to help you understand the LIFE concept and thus the intentions of the BMW Group Award for Intercultural Learning.

The basic concept.

The idea at the root of the LIFE concept is the contradiction between our daily contact with people who are “different”, while at the same time perceiving them as conspicuously “apart”. This contradiction can only be resolved, thus establishing the **“normality of the other”**, if we are willing to get to know foreigners and their cultures – without prejudice, displaying an attitude of curiosity and respect. Among the most important elements of intercultural learning are thus becoming aware of one’s own sense of national identity and being willing to move away from it and adopt an open-minded, respectful and attentive attitude towards people from other cultures.

The learning process.

Accepting the normality of the other is not a prerequisite, but a **process of intercultural learning**. It was with the goal of promoting this process on an international and interdisciplinary basis that the BMW Group and the ISB initiated the LIFE concept. Under the philosophy of the LIFE concept, linguistic and cultural diversity represents an opportunity for every learner, and is in no way an insurmountable barrier to understanding. Constructive encounters with other languages and cultures broaden people’s own perspectives, enable them to see things from a different point of view, and cause them to review and reconsider their habitual thinking and behaviour patterns.



Criteria for success.

When is intercultural learning successful?

- When it is **not a one-way communication street** in which foreigners are not granted a voice of their own: it is only through dialogue that the two sides can learn from one another.
- When it uses the differences as an impulse to learning for everyone concerned, enabling them to **learn jointly from diversity**.
- When all participants in the intercultural learning process are **“at eye-level”** with one another.
- When foreigners are **not treated as an exotic or quaintly folkloristic phenomenon**, thereby creating an unnecessary social distinction.

Intercultural skills.

Ultimately, it is through intercultural learning that intercultural skills are developed. Intercultural skills are not only **the keystone of successful intercultural communication**, but also the **objective of integration and teaching activities** that lead to a better understanding of intercultural encounters.

On the route to acquiring intercultural skills, the **process of sensitisation to one’s own self-awareness and awareness of others** undergoes various phases of evolution; these can be observed in every conceivable form of cultural expression, for instance art, science, music and all other areas of knowledge and professional occupation. In this context, scientific knowledge is increasingly based on a **widened intercultural and transcultural logic** that also embraces **outside perspectives** – that is, the view of our own culture as perceived by those outside it. This type of cultural understanding accommodates the situation of the learner; instead of focusing entirely on the target culture, it also **mediates between the cultural point of origin and the target culture**.

