DIALOGIC ORIENTED
SHARED BOOK READING PRACTICES
FOR IMMIGRANT CHILDREN
IN GERMAN KINDERGARTENS

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Dialogic Oriented Shared Book Reading Practices for Immigrant Children in German Kindergartens

An Updated Version of a Doctoral Dissertation

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It's good to have an end to a journey toward; but it is the journey that matters,
in the end- Ernest Hemingway

For my beloved family in Samarinda
Shared book reading has been a common daily activity in German kindergartens. Unfortunately, it has not been so much of a particular research focus to be explored. So far, one mostly quoted study which discussed shared book reading in the German context is the study conducted by Wieler (1997). While, in the international context, there have been quite a number of notable studies which indicated that book reading influenced the outcome measures in preschool children’s language growth, emergent literacy and reading achievement (cf. Bus et al, 1995; Hargrave and Sénéchal, 2000; De Temple & Snow, 2003). Therefore, this case study was conducted to fill this particular research gap.

The findings of this study revealed how practices of dialogic oriented shared book reading might look like in German kindergartens. Furthermore, the findings described the dialogic oriented shared book reading strategies the early childhood educators working in the German kindergartens might have been able to employ. In addition, how they employed the strategies were especially discussed. The findings also showed how children who were still acquiring a second language could participate when given the dialogic or interactive reading situation. Thus, these findings are expected to give theoretical and methodological contributions to the existing studies concerning adult- child shared book reading as well as to practically support the improvement of language promotion programs in Germany. Nevertheless, due to the limitation of the study, some recommendations for further study are also made, especially related to such issues as research design and generalizability of the results.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction
I.1. The Importance of Early Childhood Education and Care

Early childhood education and care has been conceived as crucial for children’s development as indicated by the results of a number of various studies in the field (McCartney, 1984; Phillips et al, 1987; McCartney & Jordan, 1990; Barnett, 1995). These studies revealed important findings which addressed relevant issues such as quality of care and amount and timing of care (Lazar et al, 1982; McCartney & Jordan, 1990; Schweinhart et al, 1993; Barnett, 1995; Reynolds, 2000; Lamb & Ahnert, 2006; Mashburn & Pianta, 2007; Burger, 2010). Higher quality child care was found to give both short-term and long-term impacts to children’s cognitive and social development (cf. Phillips et al, 1987; McCartney & Jordan, 1990; Barnett, 1995; Cleveland et al, 2007). The short-term effects were defined as the ones obtained within a year or two after children exit an early childhood education and care program whereas the long-term effects were the ones obtained in latter stages of education that the children went through, for instance high school (cf. Barnett, 1995). The short-term effect of early childhood education and care on children’s cognitive development could take a form of the immediate “boosts” of IQ points. While, the long-term effect would relate to school achievement, grade retention, placement in special education as well as social adjustment (Barnett, 1995).

Furthermore, these short and long-term effects were especially significant for children with disadvantaged background, i.e. from impoverished homes, at-risk or with migration background (cf. Barnett, 1995; Stegelin, 2004; Fried & Voss, 2010). On the other hand, children from highest income families got negative effects. Moreover, children from highly supportive home environments did not seem to profit much. They even had lower cognitive and social development progress when being cared outside their homes compared with children whose home environments were poor. This might indicate that the quality of care in children’s early year, instead of merely the income of the parents, would be the key to the difference (Barnett, 1995). In addition to that, “teacher-child interaction” was also considered as one of the indicators of this high quality process in the early childhood education and care practices (cf. Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Sylva et al, 2004; La Paro et al, 2004; Pianta, 2005 and Pianta, 2007).

I.2. Early Childhood Education and Care in Germany

In some countries, such as Germany, children with disadvantaged background such as the ones with migration backgrounds have become an emphasis in the education reform be-
cause their participations and achievements at schools are regarded as lower than their native German speaking peers (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2010). After the publication of PISA 2000 results that have brought presumed problems of inequality in German education to surface, a reform in the education system was initiated starting from early childhood education level. Laubeová (2006) mentioned that the problem of inequality was obviously not concerning “the quantitative participation at education, but the quality of their promotion”. In other words, the statistical distribution of children or students with migration backgrounds in the German schools might not the main problem. Furthermore, Bos et al (Bildungsberichterstattung Ruhr, not yet published, 2011) implied that somehow the statistical numbers of immigrant children enrolled in kindergartens could not really indicate whether they were according to the proportions in the population.

Therefore, if the core problem was not the matter of statistical number of participation in the early childhood education and care services, the actual problem would be on the kinds of educational programs that children obtain. For many, it is not a surprising fact that a big number of children or students with migration backgrounds go to the lowest tracks of secondary education, which later on will affect their possibilities of future academic and professional career. This over-representing number has been claimed to be caused by the children’s lack of language mastery, i.e. German. Leubová (2006) argued again that this frequent claim stating that the lack of language mastery was caused by the non-attendance of immigrant children in the early childhood education and care institutions is not fully proven to be true. She further continued by saying that the attendance rate of immigrant children in kindergartens was only slightly lower than the native German speaking children. This implicitly suggested that there could be a problem in the quality of the programs provided in the educational institutions, in this case kindergartens, themselves.

Consequently, one of the implications of the reform in the level of early childhood education in Germany is in forms of a variety of language promotion programs targeting immigrant children, which are offered in institutions such as in kindergartens (Jampert et al, 2007). The language promotion programs to promote language competencies of children are in the first place regarded as important based on the underlying idea that language is “a key competence” for equal opportunity of children’s educational career as well as future life (Jampert et al, 2007). In addition, it is also widely believed that there is a “strong inter-relation between reading and language abilities” (Bowey, 2005, Gasteiger- Klicpera et al., 2009). Language development, including vocabulary and grammatical development have been found to be able to predict later reading achievement of the so-called “normally developing” children (Bowey, 2005).

Furthermore, in a more general and broader sense, language itself is one of the impor-
tant central capabilities marking one’s life (Nussbaum, 2003). Accordingly, it is claimed by Vygotsky (1978) as ‘a critical bridge between the socio-cultural world and individual mental functioning’. Moreover, the acquisition and development of language is also considered as the most significant milestone in children’s cognitive development (Berk & Winsler, 1995). A child language delay is therefore believed to lead to isolation and withdrawal as well as to learning difficulties and poor academic performance. In other words, if children have difficulties related to their language development, most probably they will have difficulties in learning in general. Moreover, in the case of children who have to master more than one language, for instance the immigrant children in Germany, it often happens that they face great difficulties and confusion in developing the mastery of the languages. Sometimes the difficulties and confusion result in a risk of losing the ability in one of the languages they have learned (Wong-Filmore, 1991). This will certainly have an impact on their future academic and social life unless there is a help from their caregivers, who are parents and educators, since children acquire language – both first and second language- through interactions (Birner, 2008).

Children’s language acquisition, especially second language acquisition, has been so far an interest of many researchers (McLaughlin, 1984; Levy, 1985). However, there have been as well different points of views with regards to basic underlying hypotheses, such as whether or not there are differences in first and second language acquisition processes or whether the differences related to “substantive changes in human mind” (Sopata, 2010). Moreover, there are also at least two distinctive types of childhood bilingualism commonly recognized, namely “simultaneous” and successive (consecutive) bilingual acquisition (McLaughlin, 1978). Simultaneous bilingual acquisition happens when a child learns two different languages from his or her very early ages, i.e. up to three years old according to McLaughlin (1978). Meanwhile, successive (consecutive) acquisition occurs when a child learns the second language at a later stage in his or her childhood.

In the context of children acquiring German as a second language, the different stances also existed. Thoma & Tracy (2006) noted from their empirical research results that children’s second language acquisition could be a similar type to the first language. The results of their study showed that children at the age of three to four who learned German as their second language at the first time might already develop the most important morphosyntactic properties (e.g. syntactic construction, subject-verb agreement) within half a year, just like their native German speaking peer. They claimed that the results were in line with the results of some other studies conducted by researchers such as Rothweiler (2006) and Kroffke & Rothweiler (2006, as cited in Thoma & Tracy, 2006).

They further argued that such aspects as the cases and gender paradigms, the articles,
classes of words, prepositions and irregular verbs were important to promote. Moreover, the vocabulary of the children acquiring German as a Second Language, as indicated in their study was still behind the lexical repertoire that the native German speaking children could already actively develop at the same age. Nevertheless, overall Thoma & Tracy (2006) concluded that the children aged three to four acquiring German as a Second Language showed to some extent similar characteristics as their native German speaking counterparts and they could do it relatively quickly and easily given the right support.

On the other hand, Sopata (2010) in her study argued otherwise. She studied the acquisition of verb placement in German as a Second Language of children aged three to four years. Her study results revealed that the children acquired their second language in a different type from the first language acquisition, which was contrary to the results found by Thoma & Tracy (2006) as described above. In addition, the results of her study specifically showed that children’s acquisition of second language inflectional morphology differed from the first language acquisition. Concerning the syntax domain, the children’s acquisition seemed to be “a variant of second language acquisition” (Sopata, 2010). None of these results seemed to support the results of Thoma & Tracy’s (2006) mentioned earlier.

Regardless of these various stances, there are still some other relevant considerations that should be kept in mind concerning bilingual children acquiring a second language, such as those from Hakuta & Diaz (1985) who stated that there would be a possibility that bilingual children develop an early capacity to focus on and analyze the structural properties of language. Furthermore, bilingual experience could also be helpful in developing an early awareness of language (Levy, 1985; Clyne, 1987). Thus, going back to the core matter discussed previously, the initiative of the German government to promote language mastery starting should be considered as a necessary step. Moreover, Gasteiger- Klicpera et al (2009) suggested that language promotion programs should begin as early as possible and be tailored to the needs appropriate to the participating children’s initial abilities. They also hinted from one of their empirical study results that children speaking more than one language were found better at applying phonological working memory. In addition to that, Tracy (2008) underlined several common phenomena regarding children’s acquisition of German as a Second Language. In her previous study, Tracy (2008) noticed that children got acquainted with problems related to the use of several aspects in sentence production, namely: 1). verbs (e.g. V2, V2 finite, focus particle phrase and irregular verbs); 2). case and genus; 3). articles; 4). prepositions of place, and 5). plural forms. Taking these facts into account, the focus of the language promotion programs in German kindergartens should be given addressing these conditions and needs.

However, another problem has emerged concerning the readiness of the whole com-
ponents of the early childhood education system in Germany itself in dealing with the change. In Germany, the early childhood education and care has had its long tradition of being focusing on social pedagogy which advocates that education and child upbringing are intertwined. In the so-called “Early Childhood Education and Care” (ECEC) system in Germany, the concept of education has been aimed at developing abilities which will enable children to learn, to develop their achievement potential to act, solve problems as well as to form relationships (cf. Bundesjugendkuratorium et al., 2002 in Leu & Schelle, 2009). Thus, education in an ECEC institution has not been really defined as a school-oriented approach (cf. Leu & Schelle, 2009). The educators serving at these institutions have been therefore regarded not as teachers, just like their counterparts in primary education or secondary education. Moreover, they have been called “educators” (German: Erziehern/Erzieherinnen) or social pedagogues (German: Sozialpädagogen/Sozialpädagoginnen).

In order to be able to work in a kindergarten in Germany, one must firstly go through a specific vocational training course upon the completion of secondary education. The duration of the training course is two or three years depending on the state in which the training takes place. There is also a possibility of a one-year work placement or internship after the training. After completing this initial qualification, one can be considered as a child carer or social assistant. To be a qualified early childhood educator, another post-secondary training is required. The training lasts for three years. Therefore, it might take up to five years in total for one to be considered a professional “Erzieher” or “Erzieherin” (Leu & Schelle, 2009). Nevertheless, as already noted out earlier, the profession of an early childhood educator in Germany are unfortunately still incomparable to teachers.

Referring back to the problems and the educational reform mentioned previously, according to a study conducted by Gastegeiger-Klicpera et al. in 2009, there have been a number of developed language promotion programs in almost every state in Germany during the recent years. Thus, it could be assumed that the early childhood educators have been facing more challenges in their everyday tasks in kindergartens. Not only do they have to take care about the children, but also they have to start educating them through some instructional activities, to enhance their literacy competences so that they will be ready for schools. Some other studies concerning early childhood educators and their professional competence aspects, which included interaction, have been also conducted by several other researchers such as Fried (1985, 2009), Honig et al, (2004), Becker-Stoll & Textor (2007), Beller & Preissing (2007), Hemmerling (2007), Teschner (2004), Tietze et al (2005), and Kuger & Kluczniok (2009). The results of these studies showed that the quality of the educator-child interaction processes had a significant impact on children’s development. The study conducted by Fried (1985) pointed out results which specifically addressed the effects of
the interaction with on children's phonetic development gain. While her other recent study in 2009 also indicated that efforts in improving the early childhood educators' professional developments should be done in the first place to enhance their capabilities to support children's language learning. Moreover, there are several aspects such as their knowledge base, skills repertoire, levels of expertise and experiences that have to be taken into consideration as they are important for an effective language learning interventions (Fried, 2009; König & van der Aalsvoort, 2009, Gasteiger- Klicpera et al, 2009).

It has been pointed out earlier that reading ability has been assumed as strongly correlated to language abilities in general. Thus, reading activities have also been encouraged in kindergarten setting as well as home setting. Unfortunately, to date there seems to be a lack of empirical research done concerning this activity, in comparison to the abundant studies with international settings. One of the most notable studies in German context was conducted by Wieler (1997), who researched the practices of shared book reading in home setting. Apart from this study, however, little has been known regarding how the early childhood educators have practiced this activity in kindergartens.

The previous studies in the field have indicated that adult-child book reading activity, including the one conducted in the institutional setting, gives beneficial effects to children’s cognitive and language development (Whitehurst, 1992; Bus, van Ijzendoorn and Pellegrini, 1995; Hargrave and Senechal, 2000, and Blewitt et.al, 2009). Moreover, the adult-child interaction which is embedded during the book reading session has also been proved to be potential for learning (Cochran-Smith, 1986; DeBruin-Parecki, 1999). A particular shared book reading type called “Dialogic Book Reading” has gained supports from researchers such as Whitehurst (1992), Zevenbergen & Whitehurst (2003), Cutspec (2006) and Trivette & Dunst (2007). This type of reading has been claimed as one of the most effective activities to facilitate children’s language learning, even for younger children and children with specific needs, such as the ones from lower socioeconomic background (cf. Cutspec, 2006).

Furthermore, in the context of Germany, the notion of dialogic book reading as a supportive activity to promote literacy has also come to attention. It has been discussed quite publicly in the online resource such as Kindergarten Pädagogik Online Handbuch. An on-going large scale quantitative experimental research has also been conducted by a team of researchers from the Faculty of Psychology of the Justus-Liebig University of Giessen. Even so, there is still rather insufficient information around. Therefore, an empirical study researching how the early childhood educators perform shared book reading activity, particularly dialogic book reading, in the context of German kindergartens which offer language promotion programs to immigrant children would be interesting and of necessity.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review