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Language support for children from a migration background in early-years settings in Bavaria with a focus on Munich

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Introduction

Migration is an inseparable part of the dynamically-changing world of the 21st century, a fact that explains the increasing interest of various scientific areas in issues that are related to the temporary or permanent settlement of people in countries other than their own.

With 82.2 million inhabitants, the Federal Republic of Germany has the largest population in Europe. Around 15 million people (20% of the population) are either immigrants or have at least one parent with a non-German background. More than a quarter of young people of an age relevant to education (up to 25 years) and as many as one-third of children under school age (33% of children up to the age of 6) come from migrant families (Rauschenbach, 2008).

According to the migration data about Munich, the capital of Bavaria, as of 31 July 2006 (Key Data, 2006), out of 1 313 093 inhabitants, 302 479 have a background of migration, which means 23% of the inhabitants are foreigners. In 1970 non-German nationals accounted for 13.8%; therefore, in the last 46 years their number has increased significantly. Groups numbering over 10 000 inhabitants include nationalities such as the Turks 3.4%; Croats, 1.9%; Serbs (including those from Montenegro) 1.9%; Greeks 1.7%; Italians 1.6%; Bosnians 1,3%; Poles 0.9%. 9 917 children under 6 years account for 14.4% of the total number of foreigners in Munich. Therefore, there is an evident need for finding tools for improving the

process of integration of children with a migrant background in Germany, especially bearing in mind that the numbers have increased during the last six years.

Taking into consideration the limitation of having to rely only on data from English-language sources, as well as on the author's first-hand observations during her one-month research visit in Germany, the current paper aims to present the main policies and practices in the field of language support for children with a background of migration in early-years settings in Bavaria, with particular focus on the city of Munich. In this regard, the paper seeks to accomplish the following primary objectives:

- 1) To present some of the main features of contemporary preschool education in Munich (Bavaria);
- 2) To give an idea of the number of children with a background of migration and their situation in the early-years settings in Bavaria;
- 3) To describe the application of the screening tools used in Munich for assessing the level of German language prior to school entry;
- 4) To emphasize the important role of the Intercultural Education and Language Section (part of the Department of Education and Sport of the City of Munich) in language support for children from families with a background of migration.

Some current facts and figures connected with preschool education and care in Munich

In the introduction of *The Munich Approach Booklet* (2009, p. 3), the Deputy Mayor, Christine Strobl, proudly emphasizes that Munich has been running kindergartens since 1907, which from the beginning were under the auspices of the Education Department and so have always been part of the education system; therefore, work with children aged between 3 and 6 years obviously involves not only supervision but also guidance and education. She also emphasizes equal opportunity as an overriding principle in the field of education; in other words, family back-

ground alone should not determine (and possibly hamper) a child's progress through the school system.

The "Munich approach", as presented in *The Munich Approach Booklet* (2009, p. 5), is a general pedagogic concept which is under constant development. The concept aims to provide citizens of all ages, from children to pensioners, with the appropriate educational services for a large city. The aim is to help every individual fulfil his or her potential; or, in other words, provide "tailor-made education".

There are approximately 1 180 nursery groups, kindergartens, and after-school clubs in Munich, approximately 400 of which are public (in that they belong to the City of Munich) while the rest (about 780) are private, mostly non-profit centres either with church governance or run by other welfare agencies. The large number of private kindergartens is connected with the fact that, since the early 1990s, some of the childcare services have been transferred to private operators in order to expand available places (The Munich Approach Booklet, 2009, p. 3). According to the press release of the Department for Education and Sport of the City of Munich (Presseinformation, 2011), in 2011 the number of children in public nursery groups was 3 030, while in private ones there were 7 831 children. The number of children in kindergartens is different and not proportional to the number of groups: the number of children in public kindergartens (17 095) is close to the number in private ones (19 051) because some of the centres of the latter have a smaller number of groups within them.

In Bavaria, the maximum number of children in a kindergarten group is limited to 25. This number can be reduced if the group includes children with special educational needs; according to the regulation in Bavaria, one disadvantaged child is the equivalent of 4.5 children without special needs. This means that if a group includes two children with special educational needs, the maximum number will be reduced by 9 children. Similarly, there is a ratio for children with a background of migration: one child with a background of migration is equivalent to 1.3 children of native German origin. However, if a group includes children with immigrant backgrounds, the maximum number of children does not have to change;

instead, more staff can be assigned. Therefore, including children with special needs means a reduction in the total number of children in the group, whereas groups with a certain number of immigrant children can apply for additional staff. In Bavaria, one educator is required per maximum of 11 children in the kindergarten (BayKiBiG, 2012).

According to the official press release of the Department for Education and Sport of the City of Munich (Presseinformation, 2011), there are plans to spend 100 000 000 euros for building new nurseries before 1 August 2013, which is when the law defining a mandatory place for every child aged between 1 and 3 years who requires one will come in effect. According to Rauschenbach (2012, p. 11), this “need” is currently estimated at around 37% in the West and 51% in the East. This means that in the West another 260 000 nursery places will need to be made available between March 2011 and August 2013 if the interim goal is to be reached.

When developing an awareness of the control of education and care control in the pre-school settings in Bavaria, once again we should note that in Germany, public administration does not directly provide the majority of these services (at least in the western *Länder*) but co-operates with a variety of non-profit service agencies. Here, church and voluntary organisations play a vital role; around two-thirds of centre-based early education/care provisions across the country are run by these so-called “free providers” (*Freie Träger der Jugendhilfe*) (Oberhuemer, 2012). Therefore, educational specialists from the City of Munich, Section for Preschool Education and Care control the work of the educators, and for those in the public domain there is one controlling person who is responsible for 10 to 12 kindergartens. Eighteen people control the work in all 780 private and church kindergartens; but the aforementioned private agencies are themselves responsible for kindergartens as well, so these 18 people actually control the quality of the agencies’ work.

As per the official press release of the Department for Education and Sport of the City of Munich (Presseinformation, 2011), during the 2011–2016 period, 330 000 000 euros (separate from the aforementioned 100 000 000 euros for building new nurseries before 1 August 2013) are planned for investment in the sector of nurseries, kindergartens, “hort”

(some of the places where children in the age-group 6 to 10 go after school), and children's centres. These funds are expected to create 3 516 places in nurseries; 4 525 places in kindergartens, 1 625 places in "hort" (out-of-school provision for children from entry to school up to 10 or 12 years), and 1 600 places in day centres. This means the investment per a place in a new kindergarten in a large building is around 20 000 euro; the amount for a place in a "hort" is 25 000 euro, while for a place in a nursery it is 38 000 euro.

According to Presseinformation (2011), with regard to the need for early childhood educators, the local Government has started a programme for the re-qualification of unemployed primary school teachers in order to give them the qualification, knowledge and skills to work with children of preschool age.

Children from a Migration Background in Early-Years Settings in Bavaria

More than a quarter of children in centre-based settings in the western part of Germany come from families where at least one parent was born outside Germany; over half of those children do not speak German at home (Leu & Schelle, 2009, p. 11). The OECD Background Report for Germany indicates that "children with a migration background enter kindergarten later than German children. Roughly 25% of foreign children aged between 3 and 6 years do not attend kindergarten at all; for German children (with a migration background), this figure is almost 19%" (OECD, 2006, p. 71).

Many of the day care centres in Munich have a large number of families from other countries: some of them are attended by children from up to 30 different nations. These institutions need special conditions and educational approaches, as well as close contact with children and their parents in order to cope with this situation. It requires a special approach that describes the theory of intercultural education for all Munich day care centres, based on academic understanding. The day care centres in

Munich make great efforts to improve the chances for education and to support children in a suitable way.

The large number of children with a background of migration, in combination with the PISA findings which illustrated how disadvantaged many immigrant children are within the school system, has led to a flurry of policy initiatives in this area. In a number of *Länder* it is now a requirement for children to participate in a language screening assessment prior to school entry. However, there are considerable regional variations in the types of assessment used, as well as in the kinds of focused language support measures implemented; some of them begin when the children are two years old, whereas others do not begin until the last year in kindergarten.

In the area of language and literacy, there are already many initiatives that are underway. Figures from a recent monitoring report by the Bertelsmann Foundation (Bock-Famulla & Große-Wöhrmann, 2010, as referenced by Oberhuemer, 2012) show a considerable difference in the enrolment rates of children from German-speaking and non-German-speaking families. The difference is most marked in Schleswig-Holstein, in which 91% of non-migrant children, but only 60% of migrant children, have enrolled. Similar discrepancies can be found in Bavaria (95/75%), Bremen (96/75%) and the city-state of Berlin (100/80%). If the transition to more focused approaches towards language and literacy is to take effect, there is an obvious need for a redistribution of resources and targeted funding for work with these children and their families (Leu & Schelle, 2009). However, it is important to bear in mind another point of view, expressed by Pfaff (2010), who maintains that the current focus on German is at the expense of children's ethnic mother tongues.

Beyond this, an extensive network of early childhood language coordinators across Bavaria was launched in 2008 with considerable government funding support. These language advisers, who undergo a targeted and evaluated course of training, work closely with early childhood centres on a regional basis. The impact of this network on the language and literacy related work of the centres has been assessed over an extended period of time by a research team at the State Institute of Early Childhood Research in Munich (Oberhuemer, 2012).

Rauschenbach (2008) presented the first national report on education, titled "Education in Germany", commissioned by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* (KMK) and the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) and generated with the support of the German Youth Institute (DJI) in Munich. This document includes, among others, a detailed analysis of *education and migration*. It poses the question whether making kindergarten mandatory would help children from a migrant background achieve better results, but concludes that such a change would be neither justified nor appropriate, considering the relatively large number of 4- to 6-year old children from a migrant background who already attend. With more than 80% of migrant children having been to a kindergarten before school enrolment during the last two years, the call for mandatory kindergarten education is not the answer and the danger of unintended side effects is far too great. But as Rauschenbach (2008) surmises, educational and care provision should be made available for the large majority of children from a migrant background who were born in Germany, and more emphasis should be placed on supporting goal-oriented language acquisition by children aged between 2 and 4 in particular, since this is the age when children learn to speak; therefore a second language can be learned quite naturally during this time. There is a need for additional intervention beyond the currently-planned language support during the last year of kindergarten.

According to The Munich Approach Booklet (2009, p. 24), intercultural education in Munich has a tradition that goes back many decades. It is directed at all children in the childcare facilities, whether German or non-German. The main objectives are to create a basis for getting on with one another regardless of nationality, mother tongue and religion, and to teach these children tolerance and respect for other cultures and lifestyles. Children like having different kind of foods on the menu, learning about other countries and participating in different religious celebrations; in this way, they discover that life in a multicultural community is an enriching experience.

Intercultural instruction and language development are inseparable from one another. On the other hand, the development of language skills

is seen as an integral part of the child's development as a whole (The Munich Approach Booklet, p. 24).

Screening assessment of the level of German language prior to school entry

The early education debate has led to increased interest in issues of pedagogic documentation and, in recent years, a number of observation schedules and documentation approaches have been piloted (Oberhuermer, Schreyer, & Neuman, 2010, p. 177).

According to Oberhuermer (2012), in a number of *Länder* it is now a requirement for children to participate in a language screening assessment prior to school entry. There are considerable regional variations in the types of assessment that are used, as well as in the kinds of focused language support measures that are implemented. In Bavaria, since the autumn of 2005, the German language competence of 4½ year old children whose parents are both born outside Germany is assessed by kindergarten educators with the help of a specially-developed observation instrument called "SISMIK". Furthermore, since 2008, the language competence of *all* children is assessed towards the end of the penultimate year in kindergarten, again through a prescribed assessment procedure (Ulich & Mayr, 2006, as referenced by Oberhuermer, 2012). The observation instrument used for children whose first language is German is called "SELDAK". In both cases, the assessment is based on individual observation of the child during his or her daily activities. The results show the level of development of the child's vocabulary, manner of speaking, sentence construction and grammar, as well as their ability to understand requests to do something and requests in general. This assessment is performed in order to give teachers and parents an idea of children's German language development and, if required, to plan further educational work with them. For children from migrant backgrounds, the results are often low because more of these children do not speak or understand German particularly well, since they are learning German as a second

language or they grow up bilingual, as their parents do not speak the German language well or not at all. After this assessment, one and a half years before school, there is an optional 240-hour preliminary German course, free of charge for parents, aimed at developing German linguistic skills and linguistic interest in children with a migration background. On the basis of the SISMIK assessment results, such cases can be recommended for participation in the 240-hour preliminary German language course; 120 hours take place during the first half of the year in the kindergarten, during the other everyday activities of the child, in his/her own group of children. The other 120 hours are spread throughout one year (the last year before school) in kindergarten and at primary school. In kindergarten, the promotion of the development of language skills occurs during the whole day with all children, but also during special assessments based on topics which are interesting to the children. In school, children have 1½ hours (two classes of 45 minutes each) weekly. Besides intensive language instruction, the children have the chance to get to know their primary school in a playful way. Parents are responsible for bringing their child to these courses, which take place in the primary school, and accompanying him/her back to the kindergarten, but it is often the teachers who make the necessary organization to assist parents with this.

The SISMIK questionnaire (Ulich & Mayr 2003) was developed by the State Institute of Early Childhood Research (IFP) in Munich as part of the project titled "Speech development of immigrant children – targeted observation and encouragement". It concerns the verbal behaviour and interests towards speaking of immigrant children in early-years settings within the Bavarian capital. The questionnaire is specially adapted for observation of immigrant children from 3½ years old to primary school age, who have grown up in domestic environments using other languages besides German.

The questionnaire's introduction specifies that "immigrant children" refers to children whose families have come to Germany from a different cultural and speech environment. They can be holders of foreign passports, migrants (often immigrants of German origin, coming from Eastern

European countries), multinational families (for example, the mother is German while the father is English, etc.), or settlers who have acquired German citizenship.

The first few paragraphs of the introduction specifically state that the questionnaire is to be used by German-speaking educators, i.e. the main focus is on communication in the German language. Although the family language (mother tongue) is equally important for the speech development of immigrant children, in most cases it cannot be adequately evaluated by German-speaking educators. However, the SISMIK questionnaire does include several questions (mostly aimed at parents) regarding the level of speech development in the family language as a stimulus for observation of this area as well.

In order to gather the necessary information, the educator should conduct lengthy observation of the child in natural, everyday situations; in some cases, evaluation requires that specific situations be created (e.g. repeating a made-up word, retelling a story, etc.).

Supplementary data includes the birth date, family language, nationality, sex of the child; the starting date and schedule of kindergarten classes; the frequency of missed classes and reasons for them (illness, travelling abroad to parents' countries, etc.).

Most questions feature answers given as statements, where the educator must fill in the relevant information regarding frequency, level and/or specific variants of occurrence.

The questionnaire consists of 4 parts:

- Part 1: Verbal behaviour in speech-relevant situations (group discussions, role-playing games, browsing picture books, etc.).
- Part 2: Speech competence (specifics).
- Part 3: Language(s) spoken by the child's family.
- Part 4: The child's family.

Part 1 includes observations of verbal behaviour of the child in various situations, e.g. at the breakfast table, in role-playing games, as a partner for play during free time, in separate conversations in German with

the educators, in group “circle” discussions; moreover, a description of the child’s behaviour in cases when he/she has trouble understanding and/or expressing something, when browsing picture books (individually or in a small group), when listening to and retelling short stories. Additionally, the questionnaire notes the child’s interest in reading and writing, his/her attitude to making rhymes, making up words, as well as foreign languages.

Part 2 presents the child’s German language competence in detail, expressed in the following observation areas: the understanding of tasks and prompts, dictionary and specific ways of speech, grammatical and sentence structures.

Part 3 describes the child’s handling of the family language(s) while attending the kindergarten, as well as an evaluation of the child’s communication skills in his/her mother tongue(s) by the parents and other adults speaking them.

Part 4 presents the living habits and language practices in the child’s family, the professions and work schedule of the parents, as well as the family’s relationship with the kindergarten as an institution, i.e. the level of information the child’s mother and father receive regarding the kindergarten’s daily activities, their visits, as well as any questions they may have in relation to their child’s education.

The questionnaire ends with a section outlining the subsequent actions the educator will take regarding the child if this is deemed necessary; it contains the conclusions of his/her observation and eventual steps to be taken in the future.

The SISMIK results are used in two ways: firstly to draw up teaching plans for the children, and secondly to register the children in need of particular support for the preliminary German course.

According to the Presseinformation (2012) during the 2011/2012 school year in Munich, 429 German-language courses were held, which were attended by 3860 children with migration backgrounds; in comparison, the same source states that the courses which began in 2002/2003 with only 10 children, five years later, in 2007/2008, were attended by 339 children.

Additionally, since October 2010, there has been a programme promoting the 240-lesson German course, and kindergarten educators and primary teachers have been trained to work with children during this course. So far, 26 courses have been held and 520 people have been trained; it is expected that many more will be trained since the programme will continue until July 2013.

Support of children from families with a migration background: Intercultural Education and Language Section in the Department of Education and Sport of the City of Munich

The Intercultural Education and Language Section in the Department of Education and Sport of the City of Munich is responsible for providing support to the early childhood practitioners in the field of intercultural pedagogy and language. This unit has existed for 30 years. It began with one person, but today there are 21 people who collaborate with the staff in kindergartens, nursery groups and places where the children from 6 to 10 can stay after school.

The concept of the Intercultural Education and Language Section has grown over the past 30 years. The central interest of the Intercultural Education and Language Section is to foster tolerance, respect for other religions, life and cultural forms to all children and to create a basis for collaboration and coexistence despite differences in ancestry, language or religion. Cross-cultural day care centres, which educate, raise and take care of children, see the main point in the "pedagogy of diversity"; children from all over the world learn tolerance and become acquainted with diversity and different languages, which they see as their greatest resource, and all parents as partners in order to achieve the best educational results for their child.

The aforementioned Section provides the facilities for numerous projects covering as wide a range of intercultural aspects as possible – cuisine, art, music, cooperation with parents and, in particular, language development (The Munich Approach Booklet, 2009, p. 24). It is especially

interesting that the idea of a multicultural environment in early years settings is also contained in the little book named “Welcome to the Kindergarten” (Zintl, 2007), given to each child attending kindergarten in Munich during his/her first day. The book introduces children to the kindergarten environment by presenting one typical day in the kindergarten in coloured illustrations featuring two dolls (a boy and a girl), along with simple phrases translated into 10 languages.

The Intercultural Education and Language Section is responsible for all 400 public day care centres and kindergartens; the private and church-run ones can also use their expertise. Since 2002, there have been 50 educators who work in preschool settings and are trained to give support to their colleagues in these kindergartens and day care centres in the field of intercultural education and language. Currently there is a project that aims to increase their number, and now there are 146. The 21 collaborators from the Intercultural and Language Section support their work in kindergartens, making sure that all the staff in the different kindergartens work according to the same principles concerning intercultural education and language, and achieve the quality in this regard according to the curriculum. For the last four years these 21 specialists have been busy with the implementation of large projects that assist children to develop their language.

The first project was initiated by the Bavarian Ministry of Social Affairs. It ran from October 2008 to December 2011. In this project, colleagues from the Intercultural Education and Language Section went to the day care centres and worked with the entire team in order to improve the pedagogy concerning language and intercultural education.

In March 2011 another project was started by the German Federal Government and it is expected to continue until December 2014. In this project, staff work directly with the children in the day care centres, helping them to improve their language skills. The specialists from the Intercultural and Language Section are working closely with the staff in early years settings, who are given all the help they need from them.

Conclusions

Intercultural education in Munich has a tradition that goes back many decades and features a wealth of good practices, as well as a selection of useful policies. However, based on the data from the English-language sources of information cited herein, as well as on the author's first-hand observation, and taking into consideration that one in three children has a migrant background, it can be concluded that support must be provided earlier in order to compensate for inequalities in family and social starting conditions at the source. Active language learning support should begin much earlier than the current one and a half years before school, so that it can be applied at an age when children learn languages and speech in a natural way. In addition to the currently-planned language tests and subsequent support during the final year of kindergarten, more measures must be taken.

Another issue is the assessment of the level of speech development in the family language. Although the mother tongue is equally important for the speech development of immigrant children, the "SISMIK" observation instrument used in Munich to assess the German language competence of 4½ year-old children whose parents are both born outside Germany only covers it perfunctorily, through several questions aimed at parents. The main limitation here is that, in most cases, the family language cannot be adequately evaluated by German-speaking educators.

The Intercultural Education and Language Section in the Department of Education and Sport of the City of Munich plays a key support role, providing assistance to the early childhood practitioners in the field of intercultural pedagogy and language. With a multitude of relevant projects completed and pending, their contribution to language support of children from migrant backgrounds is steadily becoming more pronounced.

The challenges of migration in Germany will continue to increase, especially among younger children. However, in spite of all the difficulties related to migration, it is good to see many examples of active steps to improve integration which are taken in kindergarten and at school.

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Abstract:

This paper presents some policies and practices in the field of language support for children from migrant backgrounds in early-years settings in Bavaria (Germany), with a special focus on the situation in the city of Munich. The paper describes the content and the application of SSMIK screening tool used for assessing migrant children's level of German language prior to school entry, as well as the important role of the Intercultural Education and Language Section (part of the Department of Education and Sport of the City of Munich) in supporting children from families from migrant backgrounds.

Keywords: language support, migrant children, Munich, SSMIK

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