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Linguistic support for migrant children and families on the example of the solutions of the Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe in Elmshorn

Językowe wsparcie dzieci i rodzin migracyjnych na przykładzie rozwiązań Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe w Elmshorn

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Abstract

Introduction. Due to the currently intensifying phenomenon of migration, one of the particular challenges of the 21st century is cultural, educational, and linguistic support for migrants in the receiving countries. It is important that a child who finds itself in a position of dependence on the decisions of adult guardians, functioning in the space of a country that is previously foreign to it, experiences language education in a broad socio-cultural context, taking into account the interactions and interpenetration of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Aim. The aim of the study is to show linguistic support for migrant children and families on the example of the Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe in Elmshorn in the Pinneberg. The following are considered important for creating methodological premises for the language education of a migrant child: the process of language education in a broad socio-cultural context, taking into account the interactions and mutual interpenetration of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (in the context of the ecological theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner's concept of human development). Research problem: The main problem is: How are migrant children and families staying in Elmshorn supported in the linguistic field through the solutions of the Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe (in the context of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological concept of human development)?

Methods and materials. During the study visit (December 11-14, 2022) the authors carried out a diagnostic survey using the technique of participant observation of classes taking place at the Familienzentrum, non-participant observation conducted in educational institutions associated with and cooperating with the Familienzentrum, and informal interviews with employees (psychologists, educators, social activists, director).

Results and conclusion. The authors discuss a child in a migration situation, challenges in the process of multicultural integration in the example of Germany, and ways of supporting migrant families in the process of immersion in the language, and in the context of strengthening the microsystem and creating a mesosystem on the example of the Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe. All solutions proposed in the examined institution provide a chance for reliable linguistic and social support for migrant children and families.

Keywords: Linguistic support, migration family, Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe, Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory, child in a migration situation.

Abstrakt

Wprowadzenie. W związku z nasilonym obecnie zjawiskiem migracji jednym z wyzwań XXI wieku staje się wsparcie kulturowe, edukacyjne i językowe migrantów w krajach przyjmujących. Szczególnie ważne jest, aby dziecko, które jest

zależne od decyzji dorosłych opiekunów, zaczęło funkcjonować w kraju dotąd mu obcym i aby mogło otrzymać edukację językową w szerokim kontekście społeczno-kulturowym, z uwzględnieniem oddziaływań i wzajemnego przenikania się mikrosystemu, mezosystemu, egzosystemu, makrosystemu i chronosystemu.

Cel. Celem badawczym opracowania jest ukazanie językowego wsparcia dzieci i rodzin migracyjnych na przykładzie rozwiązań zastosowanych w Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe w Elmshorn – ośrodku opieki dziennej w powiecie Pinneberg w Niemczech. Za istotne dla tworzenia przesłanek metodycznych edukacji językowej dziecka – migranta uznaje się m.in. myślenie o procesie edukacji językowej w szerokim kontekście społeczno-kulturowym z uwzględnieniem oddziaływań i wzajemnego przenika się mikrosystemu, mezosystemu, egzosystemu, makrosystemu i chronosystemu, w których zanurzona jest każda jednostka. Z tego powodu rozważania opierają się o teorię ekologicznej koncepcji rozwoju człowieka Uriego Bronfenbrennera. Problem badawczy zawiera się w pytaniu: W jaki sposób dzieci i rodziny migracyjne przebywające w Elmshorn wspierane są w obszarze językowym poprzez rozwiązania proponowane w Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe (w kontekście ekologicznej koncepcji rozwoju człowieka U. Bronfenbrennera)?

Metody i materiały. Autorki podczas wizyty studyjnej w dniach 11–14 grudnia 2022 roku w Familienzentrum przeprowadziły sondaż diagnostyczny z zastosowaniem techniki obserwacji uczestniczącej zajęć odbywających się w Familienzentrum, obserwacji nieuczestniczącej prowadzonej w placówkach edukacyjnych zrzeszonych i współpracujących z Familienzentrum, a także wywiadów swobodnych z pracownikami opisywanej instytucji (psychologami, pedagogami, działaczami społecznymi, dyrektorem).

Wyniki i wnioski. Wśród problemów szczegółowych poruszanych w tekście autorki omawiają: dziecko w sytuacji migracji, wyzwania w procesie integracji wielokulturowej na przykładzie Niemiec oraz sposoby wsparcia rodzin migracyjnych w procesie zanurzenia w języku w kontekście wzmacniania mikrosystemu i tworzenia mezosystemu na przykładzie ośrodka opieki dziennej Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe w Elmshorn. Autorki stwierdzają, że wszystkie rozwiązania proponowane w badanej instytucji dają szansę na rzetelne wsparcie językowe i społeczne dzieci i rodzin migracyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: językowe wsparcie, rodzina migracyjna, Familienzentrum Lebens-hilfe, teoria Uriego Bronfenbrennera, dziecko w sytuacji migracji.

Introduction

In the humanistic pedagogy stream, the child is seen as “equipped with the natural software for learning” (Alvarez, 2017, p. 64) a learning subject, striving for self-re-

alisation, developing his or her resources and capacities in the process of dialogue with the other (Jarosz, 2019, 2021). The task of adults is to create the conditions for the real and active participation of children in the micro- and macro-social space, to support their development on the path towards maturity and adulthood, and to help them discover and develop their possibilities, self-regulate, and shape themselves.

Nowadays, there is a massive phenomenon of families migrating with their children, and no matter when and where the migration takes place, the situation of the child migrant is similar. Apart from drastic situations of spontaneous flight and separation from the family, the child finds itself in a position of dependence on the decisions of adults, usually members of its family, including most often the parents. It is not the child who decides to leave his or her country, town, village, or neighbourhood. The child passively submits to this decision (Nowicka, 2015, p. 124).

The social context of support in the light of Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory

It is considered important for the creation of methodological premises for the language education of the child migrant, among other things, to think about the process of language education in a broad socio-cultural context, taking into account the interactions and interpenetration of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem in which each individual is immersed (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1994). Each person is influenced both by what is closest, direct, and located in the microsystem and by what is more distant, which influences them indirectly. The child's microsystem is formed by the relationships with those closest to the child: parents, siblings, grandparents, and the roles the child plays in relationships with them: son/daughter, brother/sister, grandson/grandson. In the case of a child with a migratory experience, the microsystem is often eroded, as relationships with some family members who did not leave with the minor but remained in the country of origin are interrupted. It is also important to add that children with migratory experience usually function simultaneously in two very different systems, i.e., the familiar family system, where the mother tongue is used and the customs and relationships between family members are familiar to the child, and in the new system related to education in kindergarten or school, where different customs, different language and different cultural determinants of interpersonal relationships apply. The family and the kindergarten/school constitute the child's mesosystem.

A child with a migratory experience also functions, according to U. Bronfenbrenner's ecological concept of human development, in an exosystem, which is constructed by direct relations with people in the school, kindergarten, backyard, and neighbourhood environment, but also by indirect relations. Among the indirect relations, those of the parents (e.g., in the workplace, in the institutions where the caregivers frequent, which affect them and indirectly determine the child's functioning) are primarily singled out. In the child's exosystem, institutions and people sup-

porting migrants are therefore located. The exosystem is also formed by the people, institutions and places in which the child participates together with the parents (caregivers). The macrosystem, in turn, is formed by larger-scale events, e.g., continental or global in scope (e.g., the war in Syria or Ukraine). In addition, it is formed by: the formal and legal regulations of a region and country, political trends in the world or continent (e.g., welcoming vs. hostile attitudes towards migrants, and refugees), as well as actions resulting from patterns of functioning established in a given society (e.g., openness, friendliness of society towards migrants). The macrosystem is also the support and assistance solutions activated at the level of the country, individual regions, cities, etc. The chronosystem, for its part, is the historical dimension of individual functioning. It determines the experiences of a particular generational group, e.g. the experiences of children who are refugees from war-torn areas (e.g., Syria or Ukraine). This means that at a given historical moment similar experiences are shared by many people, e.g., many migrants need systemic support solutions in the country they arrived in, they need wise, thoughtful inclusion in the education system, support for language, social, emotional and personal competencies.

The child in a migratory situation

Migration can be seen as a form of human mobility (at the microsystem level, it concerns a particular family, and at the macrosystem level, thousands of people), involving the crossing of a national border and resulting in a relatively permanent change of their place of residence (Anacka, Okólski, 2018). Migration is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, conditioned by a range of diverse factors at the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem levels, including economic, political, and social (Ślusarczyk, 2014). Migrants are defined as foreigners, persons originating from another country, as well as persons who do not hold the citizenship of the country in which they reside (Herudzińska, 2018).

At the end of the twentieth century, issues relating to the temporary stay of adults abroad were highlighted in statistics and research findings. Problems resulting from the temporary (incomplete) separation of children and parents were pointed out (Danilewicz, Izdebska, Krzesińska-Żach, 2001; Danilewicz, 2003; Matyjas, 2008), the issue of visiting families (Szlendak, 2011) and the issue of the so-called “Euro-orphanhood” or “social orphanhood.” Attention has been drawn to the consequences of a child’s separation from its caregivers, e.g., loneliness, and the risk of adverse changes in its development (Izdebska, 2004). In recent years, migration of adults with children and migration of whole families has been more frequent.

Children are socially and emotionally vulnerable due to the cultural differences awaiting them in their new environment, for which they are not prepared. Their parents’/guardians’ decision to move often cannot be understood and accepted by them. It should be noted that children of different ages cope differently with adaptation to change. Adaptation in a new country is also determined, among other things,

by previous experiences, the level and extent of support received in the closer (microsystem) and further environment (exosystem and mesosystem). The situation of migration, however, is for children first and foremost a loss of contact with close people: the father who stayed in the country to fight, grandparents, distant family, friends from the backyard, the school playground, etc. Among the most common difficulties faced by the youngest migrants and their caregivers (apart from the feeling of loneliness and abandonment) are language barriers – unfamiliarity with the language of the host country, poor school performance related to lack of knowledge of the language, unfamiliarity with compulsory schooling regulations, unfamiliarity with the culture of the country in which the family was placed, fear of cultural difference, otherness or vagueness of expectations of the new environment, insufficient preparation of teachers and the school, including educational materials, to work with children from other cultures, difficulties in establishing emotional contact with children and in communicating with their parents (Machul-Telus, 2014).

Challenges in the multicultural integration process in the example of Germany

Germany is a country with a relatively long history of migration and applying solutions valued in Europe. In the 19th century, it was a destination country for a large wave of immigrants (Szczepaniak-Kroll, 2014). The notion of multiculturalism arrived in Germany in 1980 from Canada and “became inculcated in this country where, out of a population of 80 million, as many as 15 million inhabitants are people with a migration background” (Kruk, 2014, p. 128). The country is now populated by German-born foreigners, people of late resettlement, naturalised Germans or people with a history of migration (Kruk, 2014). For years there has been an ongoing debate in the country about integration, immigration and cultural and religious differences, e.g., the Islamic phenomenon. The source of the discussion is mainly the difficulties of newcomers to adapt in a new place. Among them, it is pointed out that 13.3% of young migrants drop out of education, 26.3% face poverty, which is linked to insufficient education and lack of stable work, and 38% of women of Turkish origin suffer bodily and sexual violence from their relatives. The list of problems is completed by the country’s above-average childbearing rate and religious and criminal problems (Kruk, 2014).

The beginning of the 21st century brought a particular openness in Germany’s immigration and integration policy towards foreign arrivals. In 2015, more than one million refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, and Libya arrived in Germany (Piepiora, Flis, 2018). At the time, the openness towards migrants was influenced by, among other things, “the recognition of multiculturalism as a positive value, the need to meet the expectations of immigrants who make up a significant percentage of the population, the demographic and economic needs of the country, and the requirement to equalise in European standards” (Szczepaniak-Kroll, 2014, p. 71).

Also now, at a time of Russian aggression against Ukraine, Germany is playing a leading role in the migration crisis facing Europe. Data from the European Parliament shows that Germany is the country that has registered the highest number of asylum seekers (European Parliament, 2023).

In the following part of the study, we will focus our attention on selected solutions for the linguistic support of migrant families and children arriving in Germany, using the example of Elmshorn, where the authors stayed in December 2022 to visit selected Familienzentrum centres and participate in the educational offer implemented in these centres. During the three-day study visit, the authors had the opportunity to observe (both participatory and non-participatory) classes with migrants, visited kindergartens, nurseries and schools affiliated and cooperating with the Familienzentrum, and conducted interviews on the support of migrant families with the institution's staff (educators, social activists, psychologists, and the director of the Familienzentrum in Elmshorn).

Supporting migrant families in the process of language immersion – strengthening the microsystem and creating a mesosystem on the example of Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe in Elmshorn*

Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe is a meeting place for migrant children and families in Elmshorn (a town about 40 km from Hamburg). It serves to integrate, educate and support individuals and whole families in developing language competence in their mother tongue and the language of the environment, i.e., German, simultaneously. The basic principle of the activities organised for migrants is to work on the resources and respect newcomers' experiences, culture, customs, and language. The support aim is to secure the native language while at the same time being immersed in German. This premise is key to gaining the trust of parents and their commitment to jointly achieve the educational goals of mastering a new mode of communication. Carers are encouraged to participate in activities together with their children. Forms of support are promoted through a wide-ranging information campaign, e.g., in the form of publicly available handbooks or guides left for free use in offices, kindergartens and schools. A major role in the language education process of migrant families is attributed to mothers.

The cultural and linguistic education of mothers, i.e., the creation of a new micro- and mesosystem, takes place, among other things, in various workshops. The offer of support is aimed at women representing different cultures, with different language competencies and different social experiences. The education offered in Elmshorn's aim is to support family microsystems through the creation of a new, supportive mesosystem and, in turn, a network of mesosystems. Participants in the workshops organised at the Familienzentrum develop social and language competencies and thus become active interactors with others, e.g., the people supported (from different countries) and the tutors. The social initiation experienced at the Familienzentrum

enables the migrant women to establish further interpersonal relationships, including with their children's teachers in kindergarten and school, with their neighbours, with people in the workplace, and above all outside their own cultural and linguistic environment. The beneficiaries of the cultural and linguistic education described here become guides for their families, combining the language and tradition of their country of origin with the culture and language of their country of residence. They pass on their experiences from the workshop to their children and their partners, thus creating a space for the acquisition of socio-linguistic and cultural competencies in their new place of residence.

Activity goals:

- ensuring acceptance and a sense of security in the group (strengthening the microsystem through empowering individuals);
- intercultural integration (mesosystem and exosystem formation);
- nurturing the native culture and language (strengthening the microsystem);
- developing German language competence (strengthening the microsystem);
- developing the social resources of people with migration experience (strengthening the microsystem, creating the mesosystem and exosystem).

The activities take the form of workshops, meetings in a group (in a circle), games, interactive games, using activation techniques. They are led by professionals from the Familienzentrum – migrants (e.g., from the Arab culture area, from Southern or Central and Eastern Europe) with pedagogical competence and advanced language skills. In this way, each language group is supported by a tutor from the respective cultural area, a person who knows the minority language and at the same time speaks the official language. This person also acts as a translator during the initial period of the migrant's stay in the new country. It is worth mentioning that the assistants from the respective cultural groups are role models for the migrant women, as they achieve professional success in the host country through their employment at the Familienzentrum.

Classes are conducted in German. Unintelligible issues are continuously reviewed and clarified by the instructors. Importantly, participation in the classes is voluntary. More advanced students bring other newcomers to the Familienzentrum: their friends, acquaintances, and neighbours.

The structure of the meetings includes the following stages:

- preparation – making the activity space together, forming a circle on the carpet, preparing drinks and snacks;
- welcoming class participants – based on the formula of greeting and introducing oneself repeated during each meeting. Participants, as their language skills improve, enrich their speech with further sequences, e.g., “I am Oksana,” “I am Oksana from Ukraine,” “I am Oksana, I came from Ukraine,” “I am Oksana, I came from the city of Kharkiv (from Kharkiv) in Ukraine, I have two children,” etc.;

- development of the lessons – among other things language games and activities (whole group, in teams, diads, or individual) are used to develop the lexical resources referring to objects and activities of daily life (e.g., pets, body parts, and food products). Illustrative worksheets prepared in the women’s native language and in German are used. The worksheets can be taken home by the participants to consolidate the vocabulary with their families;
- closing and tidying up the space – a regular part of the closing is tidying up the meeting place together. Involving the new participants in the preparation and tidying up activities enables them to familiarise themselves with the new place by becoming co-hosts and jointly responsible for the space.

Activities based on reciprocity are also offered for mothers and children. Solidarity participation in the offer enables families to immerse themselves in a new language and thus strengthen the microsystem. In addition, these meetings aim to highlight the importance of the relationship between the mother and her child in the new socio-cultural context and to develop linguistic competence. The value of the activities is the simultaneous acquisition of the same experiences, co-existence in a new culture, and the development of competencies that are important to function well in the host country. Mothers value the fact that they do not have to leave their offspring in the care of others, which allows them and their children to experience a sense of security.

Another initiative of the Familienzentrum is the “ABC Café,” which serves to strengthen micro-systems and create a mesosystem. It hosts meetings for parents and carers, where they receive a range of information on the specifics of the German school system, experience support in solving difficulties related to their children’s participation in school education, in addition to developing their social and language competencies. Parenting skills and the language relationship between carer and child are also strengthened.

The Café also offers a reading club for school-aged children. The club meetings aim to enhance the individual in the school microsystem and in the mesosystem by developing reading skills in German and an interest in reading. Children enrich their lexical and phraseological vocabulary and acquire and consolidate grammatical competence. Young learners also receive support related to school tasks, including homework and preparing for lessons.

Another proposal is preparatory classes for participation in school education, aimed at strengthening the individual’s competence in the new school micro-system. The preparatory classes are offered to children whose level of language proficiency does not yet allow them to perform school tasks. During the meetings, future pupils have the opportunity to master German at a level that allows them to start school. Preparatory classes are attended by children of different ages. Throughout the school year, more children join and those who are reasonably comfortable with the language leave the class. The teachers teach the whole class but differentiate the level of the

proposed tasks and take into account the individual competencies of the children, who work both individually, in groups and teams. During lessons, there is an intensive and dynamic exchange of verbal messages between the teacher and the pupils. Activating methods and techniques are used. Each child is given attention, each experiences the teacher's interest.

The Familienzentrum also offers psychosocial counselling, which is particularly important in the process of enhancing the micro-system. As part of the initiative, it is possible to receive the assistance of a language assistant, e.g., for the translation of official documents or somebody's presence at various formal and legal meetings.

Conclusion and discussion

As a result of the analysis of the research material, the authors conclude that all of the solutions offered at the institution surveyed provide an opportunity for reliable linguistic and social support for migrant children and families. Familienzentrum Lebenshilfe is an institution oriented towards the most comprehensive support of migrant families and children. Creating an atmosphere of acceptance and learning together and constructing experiences while undertaking different types of activities is crucial. Regarding U. Bronfenbrenner's concept, it should be noted that the emphasis in the Familienzentrum is on supporting microsystems and working using the potential of each microsystem to create a friendly exosystem (including changes in the social environment of migrants). The developed and systematically developed programme of the institution in question can serve as an inspiration for other organisations, not only those located in Germany. It can also provide a basis for change at a macro-system level. The developed solutions, methods, techniques and working tools can be applied in many other centres and support centres for migrants. The initiators of the project and the staff of the centre realise that, in all probability, the support concepts proposed by the Familienzentrum Elmshorn require monitoring and systematic evaluation of the measures taken, their modification and improvement in the context of the constant dynamic changes taking place at the level of each system in which the child and his or her family function in a migration situation.

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