

Lena Schuett

Second Language Support Programs in Bremen and Alberta
Under Review

How a Critical International Comparison Can Benefit
Education for a Multilingual Society in Germany

Sabine Doff, Andreas Grünewald, Nicole Marx (Hg.)

STUDIEN ZUR FREMDSPRACHENDIDAKTIK
UND SPRACHERWERBSFORSCHUNG

Band 5

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 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Schuett, Lena: Second Language Support Programs
in Bremen and Alberta Under Review. How a Critical
International Comparison Can Benefit Education
for a Multilingual Society in Germany / Lena Schuett. -
Trier : WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2016
(Studien zur Fremdsprachendidaktik
und Spracherwerbsforschung; Band 5)
Zugl.: Bremen, Univ., Diss., 2015
ISBN 978-3-86821-635-6

Umschlaggestaltung: Brigitta Disseldorf

© WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2016
ISBN 978-3-86821-635-6

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WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier
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Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier
Tel. (0651) 41503, Fax 41504
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STUDIEN ZUR FREMDSPRACHENDIDAKTIK UND SPRACHERWERBSFORSCHUNG

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Acknowledgements

I am deeply appreciative of the many individuals who have supported my research over the last several years and encouraged me to write and finish this dissertation. Without your encouragement, time, attention, constructive feedback, love and patience, I would not have been able to see it through. And even though this thesis has had its exciting ups as well as its crushing downs, looking back at this challenging process, I realize, it made me stronger and helped me to become the person I am today.

I wish to offer my most heartfelt thank you to all of you and in particular:

I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Dr. Sabine Doff for guiding and supporting me over the years. Under your supervision, I was able to choose a topic that was and still is of deep interest to me as a person and researcher. I would like to thank you especially for the critical and constructive discussions we have had over the years that helped to shape the dissertation and transform it into the piece of research that it is now. Also, I truly appreciate your assistance in encouraging me to pursue a scholarship, which are rarely granted but in my case, represented a pre-condition to live in both worlds while conducting research. I therefore would also like to thank the Central Unit for Research Development of the University of Bremen (*Zentrale Forschungsförderung der Universität Bremen*) for granting me my scholarship.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Yasemin Karakaşoğlu who also contributed to the quality of the dissertation by sharing her expertise in the field of immigration and integration in Germany, specifically Bremen, and not getting tired of pointing out how important work in this area is at this point in time. Moreover, Prof. Dr. Norbert Schaffeld and Dr. Silvija Markic have contributed to the outcome of this thesis with their valuable feedback and critical questions. Two other scholars who deserve my acknowledgement are Prof. Dr. Gerhard Bach and Prof. Dr. Stephan Breidbach, who first sparked the fire for me with respect to the role of educational institutions in immigration and integration processes, a topic that is so close to my heart. Thank you.

I am equally thankful to my colleagues at the University of Bremen. I was well-surrounded by an amazing team of fellow researchers and PhD students who constantly offered their professional insights and personal understanding. The department's research colloquium (*Foko*) as well as the network for PhD students (*Doc-Netzwerk*) represent excellent frameworks for academic discussions on ongoing research projects. My immediate colleagues – Tim Giesler, Alicia Jöckel, Dr. Joanna Pffingsthorn, Sylvia Prien, Dr. Annina Sass, Dr. Katharina Verriere, Fatou Julia Wolter – as well as those from the Institute for Foreign Language Pedagogy and Support of Multilingualism (*INFORM*) – Prof. Dr. Andreas Grünewald, Meike Hethey, Barbara Roviro and many more – provided me with a highly valuable support system by giving me constructive feedback, taking on peer review research tasks, and calming my nerves with a cup of tea or, rather, a glass of wine and good music. Thank you for everything, you are the best colleagues that anyone could ask for.

My highest gratitude, of course, goes out to my research partners who participated in my study and without whom the research project would simply not have been possible. Due to the nature of the project, which was based on two continents, in two countries, with different languages, cultures and educational systems, it was at times challenging to juggle the many different components. Even more so, I am grateful to the participants, educational authorities and school boards in Bremen and Alberta for investing their time, energy and knowledge into my research and helping me to succeed.

Finally, and most of all, I want to thank my family and friends. You are the greatest contributors to my project. Despite my many journeys around the globe while conducting research, teaching seminars, presenting at conferences and writing at various desks, you have always welcomed me with open arms and hearts, a full fridge and a roof over my head. Special thanks go to my loving flatmates, Anne Diers and Matthias Hein, for making sure I always had a home in Bremen, a full plate and was mentally ready for every new task along the way. Moreover, my deepest thanks go to Henrieke von Hoerner and Ludovic Jouval for taking me in their heart and home, encouraging me and helping me through the highs and lows of the writing process. There have been many more friends who supported me along the way – Julia Haberland, Daina Jackson, Sabine Klinger-Wendorf, Vartika Satija and Sabrina Smith have been among those true friends. My particular thanks go to my two proof-readers, the American Charlotte Milstein and the Canadian Alexa Helbig-Tewes, who worked long and late hours, oftentimes on a last-minute schedule, to make sure the language of the dissertation is up to the academic quality it deserves.

And then, of course, I have received immense support from my family. Again, due to the intercontinental nature of the dissertation, I was in need of different support at different times, and feel truly blessed by all my Canadian in-laws' love and support throughout the last few years. You Schuetts & Co are an incredible family and I am very lucky to call myself one of your own. You have all cheered for me, offered moral support and proof-read texts. Especially, Bob and Cheryl, you did not stop telling me that you believed in me and that in the end, it would all be worth it.

Last but not least, what would I have done without my immediate family? In particular, my Mami-Bi, you had to read texts, emails, comments, listen to presentations, scan in materials, develop layouts, brainstorm for titles, copy surveys...the list goes on. And even if you weren't always physically close, you were never further than a phone call away. I know that you are always there for me and, really, you are my biggest supporter. Special thanks also go to my dad. Helmut, I admire your good advice and logical approach for all of the challenges I've faced over the years. Your sense of calmness to resolve any issue has really meant a lot to me and I know that I can always count on you. My Sissi, you and Philipp, your love and laughter have kept me going. You have invested a lot of late-night hours in this piece of work, by offering both, professional support by helping me structure and format the dissertation, as well as moral support in form of many hugs, kisses, paid massages or nights out to take my mind off. In addition, I want to thank Marianne for your valuable insights into excel charts,

graphs and tables and all the time you have spent on my research. Also, thank you, Dieter and Natalie, for your critical and constructive feedback and the proof-reading over the years.

My final words are for my loving husband Robbie for whom I feel so much gratitude and love. You pushed me from day one to start this project and see it all the way through, you had to discuss content, help me make decisions, correct a million emails and applications, remind me constantly that you believed in me and my work, and of course, wipe off tears and celebrate with champagne... Thank you for being by my side. Always.

Calgary, September 2015

Lena Schuett

Please note: The appendices are not included in the publication. However, they can be accessed by the following link: <http://passdropit.com/dEO66iEJ>.

The appendices consist of the survey, its translation and the interview guide.

The link is password protected. Please enter the last word on page 91 as the password.

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“Learn a new language and get a new soul. You are a person as many times as the languages you know.”

(Czech proverb, cf. Fromkin, Rodman, Hyams & Hummel 2010: 353)

1 INTRODUCTION

This Czech proverb hints at one of the major challenges faced in this thesis. “You are a person as many times as the languages you know.” At first sight, the message portrayed in this sentence is beautiful, exciting and clearly advocates learning languages. Especially in our times, when globalization and internationality characterize evolving societies around the world. Being multilingual and multicultural is increasingly considered one of the key competences of modern human beings.

If we have a closer look at the proverb, however, it also tells us that we become a new person with every new language we speak, which means, consequently, that the new language determines our way of speaking, our way of thinking, our way of feeling, in brief, our way of being. If, on top of that, a person depends on that new language as the key to the world in which he or she is living, this individual needs to acquire the language in the best and most effective way possible. An enormous number of second language learners¹ around the world live in an environment in which they need to master a new language to fully become that “new”, well-rounded and well-functioning person. These learners have to be supported in their second² language acquisition in order to participate as successfully as possible in their society. In addition, this is not a one-way street. Competent second language acquisition is not only in the person’s best interest. Nowadays, modern societies encourage multilingualism because they also depend on it.

However, some of these societies have failed to acknowledge that this is not only true for the popular and internationally highly regarded languages such English and French. It is also true, or should be, for the rest of the, oftentimes, ignored, less popular heritage languages³ of second language learners. This thought is the starting point of this thesis and pertains to the urgent need to improve the still rather unsatisfying situation for culturally and linguistically diverse students⁴ in many countries, Germany being one of them.

1 The definition of “second language learners” will be provided under Chapter 3.1.3.

2 It might be the learner’s third, fourth or even fifth language. A definition of second language acquisition that serves as the working definition for this thesis, will be provided under Chapter 3.1.2.

3 The definition of “heritage languages” will be provided under Chapter 3.1.2.

4 A definition of the term “culturally and linguistically diverse students” will be provided under Chapter 3.1.3. This term will be used throughout the entire thesis and represents what “*Schüler mit Migrationshintergrund*” (pupil with a migrant background) means in

In the following section of this first chapter, the *Reasons and aim for the study* will be discussed in depth and detail. In addition to the research-based arguments that form the foundation of this paper, my personal motivations for conducting research in this specific field will be included. In the second part of this chapter, the *Structure of the thesis* will be illustrated, emphasizing the most important key aspects of each of the nine following chapters.

1.1 Reasons and aim for the study

As indicated above, the educational situation for culturally and linguistically diverse students in many countries is still unsatisfactory. Germany is one of those countries in which a clear performance gap can be observed between the native⁵ German students and their culturally and linguistically diverse peers with regard to their education. One of the influential factors for this gap is believed to lie in the language proficiency, in particular, the academic language proficiency needed to succeed at school (cf. e.g. Baumert & Schümer 2001: 379). This is especially true for one of the Federal Republic's city-states, namely Bremen.

In contrast to Germany, Canada belongs to the countries without a performance gap between the native students and their culturally and linguistically diverse peers. In Canada, culturally and linguistically diverse students sometimes even outpace their native peers. One of the influential factors for the success demonstrated by this student population is believed to be the long-standing language support programs with clearly-defined and standards (cf. OECD 2006: 155). Alberta is perceived as one of Canada's provinces with a variety of effective and efficient measures in place which support second language learners. Learners from Alberta have consistently performed above the national average.

Consequently, the aim of this thesis is to establish an international comparison of the educational context of Bremen and Alberta with regard to their respective second language support programs. Leading questions will therefore be how culturally and linguistically diverse students are treated in the German and Canadian educational contexts and how their linguistic competence, in particular, is supported within the systems.

Whether a combination of measures from both locations can, in fact, benefit the German multilingual society represented by the city-state of Bremen – a German state that has recently reformed its school system and introduced new support frameworks for language support will be investigated. Stimuli for second language support pro-

the German context, or “immigrant student” in the Canadian context. As will be discussed under Chapter 3.1.3, the term “culturally and linguistically diverse students” emphasizes the cultural and language characteristics of these students. This term also includes “second language learners” and thus the two terms are used interchangeably throughout the thesis.

5 A definition of “native” will be provided under Chapter 3.1.3.