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X. Family literacy programs in the Netherlands and in Germany: Policies, current programs, and evaluation studies

This chapter discusses current family literacy policies, programs, and evaluation studies in the Netherlands and in Germany. Following a short introduction providing the common context of both countries and their populations, the chapter is structured in two subchapters, each focussing in-depth on one country. First, in each subchapter we will describe the early beginnings and policy concerned with family literacy, pointing out that family literacy as a central, organized, and structured system of interventions in Germany is still in its infancy, while the Netherlands can look back on a more comprehensive history in this area (Emmelot, Van Schooten, Timman, Verhallen, & Verhallen, 2001; Nickel, 2007). This is followed by a description of different programs. Research on the effectiveness of the programs is presented for both countries in the subchapters, including a discussion of how the programs respond to family and cultural factors, and where efforts are going in both countries. The chapter closes with an overall discussion of similarities and differences of the current and future developments in the Netherlands and Germany.

X.1 Context: The Netherlands and Germany

We begin by providing the reader with some contextual information regarding the family literacy situation in the two countries discussed in this chapter. *The Netherlands* are situated in the north of Western Europe and have 16,405,399 inhabitants. 3,215,416 people (19.60%) with a foreign background (at least one parent born abroad) live in the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2010). The official languages are Dutch and in some regions Friesian. *Germany* is a federal state located in Central Europe. Of its 82,135,000 inhabitants 18.95% (15,566,000 people) have a migrant background (Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, 2010). The official language is German.

When taking a look at recent large-scale international student comparison studies, the reading literacy situation in the Netherlands and Germany can be put into an international perspective: The OECD mean reading achievement of 15-year-old students was 492 points in PISA 2006 (Programme for International Student Assessment). In the Netherlands the students achieved

an average of 507 points ($SD = 97$), a statistically significantly higher score than the OECD average. The students in Germany scored on average 495 points ($SD = 112$), which was not statistically significantly different from the international average (Drechsel & Artelt, 2007).

For younger students in grade 4 of elementary school, PIRLS 2006 (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) with an international achievement scale average of 500 scores provides some insights: Both country-averages are statistically significantly higher than the PIRLS scale average, with young students in the Netherlands achieving on average 547 and in Germany 548 points (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007).

PIRLS 2006 also provides us with some data on family literacy activities across countries such as expression-games in the family or library visitations with the family. The average family literacy index score in Germany is with 296 ($SD = 53$) points marginally but statistically significantly below the international average of 300 points. The situation in the Netherlands with 298 ($SD = 52$) points is nearly the same. The index of family literacy explains 6.3% of the variance in reading literacy in Germany, and 5.5% in the Netherlands (international average: 5.9%). The higher the value of explained variance, the stronger the role of family literacy for reading literacy in a country, while lower values suggest that a member state might be more successful in balancing different family conditions of reading literacy in school (Stubbe, Buddeberg, Hornberg, & McElvany, 2007).

Taking these results together, the average reading literacy competence in the two countries is on (Germany) or above (Netherlands) the international average for older students at the end of compulsory schooling. For younger students the international comparison yields more favorable results with substantial above-average results for both countries. The results also indicate that the extent of family literacy activities in the Netherlands and in Germany is comparable to the international average with higher (Germany) resp. lower (Netherlands) explanatory value for students' reading literacy. Despite the overall acceptable mean scores in both countries, the substantial number of students performing significantly below average in both countries needs to be considered. Children from immigrant or socially deprived family backgrounds are overrepresented in the weak performing subgroups. These students and their families are prime target groups of family literacy activities in both countries.

X.2 The Netherlands

X.2.1 Introduction

Family literacy programs in the Netherlands came to rise in the context of the country's policy on educational disadvantage, which was initiated in the 1970s in response to concerns about significant disparities between groups of children in key areas of school success and the arrival of undereducated labor migrants and their families from countries such as Turkey and Morocco (Van Kampen, Kloprogge, Rutten, & Schonewille, 2005). The policy regulated the allocation of additional resources to children at risk of school failure (i.e., children of low SES and nonwestern, immigrant parents). During the 1990s, early childhood education (ECE) became one of the pillars of the governments' activities to improve these children's position in education. In this period policymakers focused on home-based intervention (Van Kampen et al., 2005): Following examples in the U.S. and Israel, steps were taken to develop programs aiming to contribute to more stimulating home environments. The first program to be introduced was *Opstap*, an adaptation of the Israeli HIPPY program (Lombard, 1994). *Opstap* is still in use and undoubtedly the most elaborately evaluated program to date. We will describe the program and the outcomes of a large-scale longitudinal effect study in Section 2.1. Subsequently, a variety of family (literacy) programs were developed (Van Kampen et al., 2005). Some were adaptations of the *Opstap* framework for other age groups (see 2.2). Another nationwide program is *Boekenpret* (see 2.3). There are also a variety of local projects, none of which will be discussed here.

The late 1990s saw a shift in focus (Van Kampen et al., 2005). In 1998 the policy on educational disadvantage was decentralized to the level of municipalities. Additionally, there was an increasing interest of policymakers in center-based approaches to ECE focusing on preschool playgroups and kindergartens as contexts of implementation. Using intervention models developed in the U.S. (Success for All, High Scope), experimental center-based programs were designed, tested and found to be effective for at-risk children (Schonewille, Kloprogge, & Van der Leij, 2000). These positive experiences lead to the introduction of a specific ECE regulation by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (ECS) in 2000, which stated that financial means could only be used for ECE programs if these were offered in center-based settings. Naturally, this weakened the status of home-based programs (Kalthoff & Pennings, 2007). Although legislation has changed, the situation of home-based programs is more or less the same today: Resources are limited, making the position of these programs vulnerable (Kalthoff & Pennings, 2007; Smit, Driessen, Van Kuijk, & De Wit, 2008). This has led to a substantial decrease in the number of municipalities offering such programs (Beekhoven, Jepma, Kooiman, & Van der Vegt, 2009).

X.2.2 Programs

X.2.2.1 Opstap

The current Opstap program is a new version of the original adaptation of the HIPPPY program (see Section 1); the original program was revised because research had failed to show effects (Eldering & Vedder, 1992; 1999). Opstap is characterized by a focus on parents as instructors, the use of paraprofessionals from the parents' own community, and the combination of group meetings and home visits for instructing and supporting parents. The major difference with the earlier program is the curriculum. The developers of the new program specified age-appropriate and developmentally sequenced proximal goals for several skill domains, forming a time by domain matrix filled with meaningful and attractive activities (Van Tuijl, Leseman, & Rispens, 2001).

Opstap targets the basic mechanism of development and learning: co-construction in emotionally supportive parent-child interactions. Using a structured curriculum the program addresses several domains of child development, including emergent literacy, but also other types of (nonliteracy) abilities, such as emergent numeracy and problem solving skills. The curriculum comprises playful educational activities to be carried out by parent and child five days a week for about 20 minutes each day and 30 weeks per year, two years in total. In the program emergent literacy activities focus on aspects that are most influenced by the (home) environment, such as extension and enrichment of vocabulary, development of textual skills, experiences with written materials, and metalinguistic skills. The paraprofessionals are experienced mothers who speak the language of the parents and belong to the same communities. They receive an introductory course and are trained during the implementation of the program by professional supervisors. Paraprofessionals also receive a two-year course on child development issues. The program's target population consists of undereducated parents of four- to six-year-old children. Since many families are from ethnic minorities, the program was made available in Dutch as well as Turkish, Moroccan, and Papiamentu.

Effects of Opstap were evaluated in a quasi-experimental longitudinal study with a pretest-posttest design with Turkish and Moroccan immigrant families. The Moroccan group consisted of Berber and Moroccan-Arabic families: Berber parents come from rural areas in Morocco with very limited access to formal education. Most Berber mothers were illiterate. The evaluation study included 200 program families from 22 locations. At the schools of the

program children more than 100 control families were recruited. Families in both conditions were comparable in home languages and parents' educational and vocational level. Children were followed from their first kindergarten year (mean age 4.7 years) until the end of primary school eight years later. Note that the program ran parallel to kindergarten.

The short-term evaluation study (Van Tuijl et al., 2001) revealed a small, but statistically significant effect for Turkish children on Turkish productive vocabulary; additionally, the program had an effect on nonliteracy-related abilities in Dutch (i.e., mathematical concept development). For the Moroccan group as a whole there were no significant short-term effects, although separate analyses for the two subgroups revealed significant medium-sized effects on mathematical concept development for the Moroccan-Arabic group. The short-term follow-up, half a year later, no longer showed differences in achievement but did reveal significantly lower grade retention rates for both Turkish and Moroccan program children than for control children (32 vs 49% and 28 vs 52%, respectively).

In interviews program supervisors of the participating sites reported several short-term effects on parents: at the end of the program mothers had more conversations with their children, had more comprehensive beliefs about child-rearing ("child-rearing is more than feeding: it is knowing what your child likes and thinks"), and felt greater partnership with teachers (Van Tuijl & Siebes, 2006).

On the basis of an observation study the mediating effect of changes in mother-child interaction on achievement was investigated (Van Tuijl & Leseman, 2004). This study was restricted to Turkish families because of clear effects of the program found in Turkish children (see before) and because in Moroccan groups the home visits and videotaping were expected to give rise to high nonresponse. Randomly, 80 Turkish families were asked to participate of which 38% responded. At the start and the end of the program thirty (17 program; 13 control) Turkish mothers and children were videotaped at home during a sorting task. The results showed that program participation improved mothers' socio-emotional support behavior but not their cognitive distancing behavior. For Turkish vocabulary scores about half of the program effect was mediated by mothers' support, whereas for premathematical skills two-thirds of the program effect was mediated by mothers' support.

A follow-up two years later, in which two-thirds of the original sample participated, showed no effects on test scores but it did show lasting effects of Opstap on grade retention; 35% of the Turkish program children had been retained vs 51% of the control group. For the

Moroccan group, the difference in retention was almost significant (retention program vs control group: 44% vs 59%; Van Tuijl & Siebes, 2006).

In a long-term follow-up (end of primary school) 77% of the original sample participated. The attrition was nonselective. Program children showed significantly less grade retention than control children but no differences on a nationally administered test of language, arithmetic and general problem-solving skills (Van Tuijl & Siebes, 2006).

X.2.2.2 Other Stap-programs

In the wake of the Opstap program a series of comparable (partially) home-based interventions were developed for different age groups: Instapje (toddlers), Opstapje (preschoolers), and Overstap (first graders).¹ Since all programs were based on the Opstap model they have several features in common: They largely target the same populations (children from low SES and immigrant families), they acknowledge the role home languages play in child development in non-native families (most program materials are available in the languages spoken by the largest immigrant communities), and they consist fully or for a substantial part of literacy-related activities.

There are also differences. First of all, as a consequence of the range of targeted age groups, the programs vary in developmental focus. In Instapje the accent is on parenting behavior (Ince, 2007a; Riksen-Walraven & Meij, 1994): The program aims to contribute to the quality of parent-child interactions by encouraging parents – on the basis of activities around books, songs, and fantasy/object play – to be sensitive and responsive, provide autonomy support, set boundaries, and transfer skills and knowledge. In Opstapje there is a stronger connection with children's start in school: The program comprises activities that aim to further children's language and literacy skills, and their cognitive, senso-motor, and socio-emotional abilities (Ince, 2007b; Bekkers, Van Embricqs, & Van Loggem, 1995) and it offers activities in preschool playgroups to make (immigrant) children become acquainted with a Dutch school-like environment (Ince, 2007b). Overstap explicitly targets academic development: Parents and children engage in (shared) reading activities that are directly related to the Grade 1 curriculum. The program's main aim is to promote children's vocabulary knowledge, and their decoding and reading comprehension skills (Ince, 2009).

A second difference concerns the delivery of parent training. Like Opstap, both Instapje and Opstapje use home visitors from the same ethnic communities and speak the same language as the families they support (Bekkers, Van Embricqs, & Van Loggem, 1995; Ince, 2007a,

2007b; Riksen-Walraven & Meij, 1994). Similar to Opstap, the home visits in Opstapje are complemented by group meetings (Ince, 2007b). Overstap, on the other hand, only provides group meetings (Ince, 2009).

Finally, the programs vary in duration and intensity of parent training. Instapje lasts for 26 weeks and parents are visited every week. Opstapje lasts for two years and offers 30 meetings per year (home visits and group meetings). And, Overstap lasts for one year during which parents are invited to ten group meetings.

All three programs were the subject of effect studies. Instapje was evaluated in a quasi-experimental, posttest-only study involving Surinamese families, one of the program's original target groups (Riksen-Walraven, 1994; Riksen-Walraven, Meij, Hubbard, & Zevalvink, 1996). The researchers compared an experimental group of 37 mother-child dyads with a control group of 38. They found indications for a program effect on parental support during parent-child interactions: Using video data the researchers observed significant differences in favor of the experimental group regarding three of the targeted quality variables (sensitivity/responsiveness, autonomy support, boundary setting). Additionally, they found Instapje children to have substantially higher scores on a cognitive skills measure.

Opstapje was the subject of two studies. Kohnstamm, Meesters, and Simons (1997) conducted a quasi-experimental, posttest-only study with two measurements. In the first, immediate posttest, a program group of 46 children was compared with a group of 51 nonparticipants; both consisted of Turkish immigrant children only. The researchers found no significant differences on two vocabulary measures and an emergent literacy test. The second measurement examined possible long-term effects by comparing 33 Opstapje children from the first measurement with a group of 18 Turkish classmates on receptive vocabulary, RAN, working memory, and IQ. Once again, there were no significant differences between the groups. Tellegen, Winkel, Wijnberg-Williams, and Laros (1998) conducted a posttest-only study in which they compared the scores on a nonverbal intelligence test of 90 (Surinamese, Moroccan, and Turkish) immigrant children that had participated in either Opstapje or Opstap with those of 83 children from the same ethnic background that had taken part in a validation study of the test. The researchers found a significant difference of 12.5 points in favor of the Opstap(je) group.

Overstap was evaluated by Kook (1996). Using a pretest-posttest design with matched experimental and control groups (in both cases, $N = 104$), consisting of native and immigrant children, she examined program effects on the three targeted abilities (decoding skills, reading

comprehension, oral language). Immediately after program termination the author established effects on word reading of unisyllabic words and on receptive vocabulary. She also found a positive program effect on parents' attitudes toward reading. Six months after the program Kook conducted a follow-up study using the same measures. The effects observed in the immediate posttest were maintained, and, interestingly, additional effects were established for word reading of polysyllabic words and reading comprehension.

X.2.2.3 Boekenpret

Boekenpret is a reading promotion program for children from birth to age six. It focuses on (native/immigrant) low SES families and combines home-based activities with activities in institutions such as preschool playgroups, child care centers, schools, libraries, and child health centers (Ince, 2006; Vereniging van Openbare Bibliotheken [VOB], 2006). Parent involvement is organized via the latter institutions: They approach parents for participation, provide materials, organize parent meetings, and/or supply paraprofessional home visitors. The focal activity in Boekenpret is shared story book reading (Ince, 2006; VOB, 2006): The goal is to build shared book reading routines, both at home and in centers/schools, and to promote interactive shared reading by encouraging parents and educators to stimulate children to take on an active (verbal) role in the interaction.

There have been several effect studies on Boekenpret. In a qualitative treatment group-only study, Bos (2002) conducted observations and interviews in 15 Boekenpret families before, during, and after program participation. The researcher found significant positive differences between measurements before and after the program in children's emergent literacy behavior, mothers' literacy attitudes, the presence of reading materials, library membership, and the frequency of shared reading and other literacy-related activities, as well as in the observed interaction quality during shared reading. In a larger treatment group-only study, based on self-reports of 153 families, Osinga and Lub (1997) investigated the effects of Boekenpret on participating children and parents. They examined whether the duration of participation in Boekenpret was related to higher scores on two emergent literacy scales and a shared reading engagement scale (measuring children's emergent literacy behavior and their active involvement in shared reading activities, respectively). For preschoolers the authors found significant differences on one emergent literacy scale and the engagement scale in favor of the children who had participated in all program components (i.e., both the baby/toddler and the preschool component). For kindergarteners they only found significant differences on single

items. Additionally, Osinga and Lub examined whether prolonged participation resulted in richer home literacy environments in terms of parental attitudes, their literacy activities and their strategic behavior during shared reading. For parents of preschoolers the researchers found significant duration effects on the literacy activities and strategic behavior scales. For parents of kindergarteners they found significant effects on reading attitudes and on some of the items in the strategic behavior scale.

X.2.3 Concluding remarks

A variety of family literacy programs are offered in the Netherlands. For most programs discussed here the outcomes of effect studies indicated positive effects on children's literacy abilities, general school success measures (e.g., grade retention), parental attitudes and behaviors, and the quality of (literacy-related) interactions, even on the long term. However, we have also seen that the quality of effect studies varies, which has likely affected the validity of the findings: In several cases the conclusion that a program is effective is merely tentative.

As the current focus is on center-/school-based early childhood education, the future of exclusively home-based family literacy programs in the Netherlands is insecure. At the same time, however, there seems to be a rising interest in parent involvement in center-/school-based programs. In 2008, for instance, a report was published on the request of the Ministry of ECS (Smit et al., 2008), in which various models were outlined for enhancing parents' participation in center-based ECE activities. Even more recently a program was brought on the market—*VVE Thuis* (“ECE at home”; Kalthoff, 2009)—in which home-based activities are offered that are complementary to the most-used center-/school-based ECE programs in the Netherlands. Whether these initiatives lead to success still remains a matter of speculation.

X.3 Germany

X.3.1 Early beginnings and policy

Family Literacy as a central, organized, and structured system of interventions is still in its infancy in Germany (Nickel, 2007). This results in comparatively few German family literacy programs, and even fewer studies on the effectiveness of family literacy programs in Germany. There are at least three reasons for this. First, despite school law which provides

parents with many rights for involvement in their child's schooling, educational and intellectual advancement is *seen as an institutional task* in the public opinion, first and foremost a task of the schools (Textor, 2007). This opinion still holds true in the face of paradigm shifts in the scientific community and seems to have influenced educational policy for a long time. Only recently have families gained attention in the educational field – following widely recognized evidence from the PISA 2000 study showing the strong correlation between educational, socioeconomic, and immigrant family background with children's performance in schools. Currently, pedagogical debates on how to involve families in their child's school and schooling have also picked up in the context of the great reform changing many schools from half-day to full-day schools (BMFSFJ, 2005). Nevertheless, research on parent engagement in schools is still scarce in Germany, and particularly absent are empirical, longitudinal studies investigating forms and conditions of parental engagement. Second, compared to other countries there is *no strong tradition within informal educational institutions* of involving families in the educational and intellectual advancement of children. In Germany different public, private and parochial institutions offer family support activities. In a broad sense, the measures offered are meant to help parents with raising and advancing their children. As defined by German law (§ 16 family education resp. § 28 family consultation SGB VIII, Child- and Youth Services Act) these measures, however, mainly focus on marriage support, general parenting and overall family support, and less on the educational and intellectual advancement of children (Textor, 2007). Therefore, there is no tradition of family literacy programs integrated in the existing structures of family enrichment. As a consequence only few programs have been started by family support providers during the last twenty years. The programs implemented were often adopted from other countries and regionally bounded. The idea behind these programs has mainly been to help children from educationally disadvantaged families and families with immigrant backgrounds with measures of family literacy.

Third, *early childhood education has not been perceived as an important issue* until recently in Germany. Kindergarten and pre-kindergarten years were almost unquestionably accepted as purely a time to play, with a clean cut at the age of six with the beginning of elementary school, where academic learning supposedly started. Only in the 1980s did (literacy) researchers in Germany begin to assume that children do not start school as a blank slate, but rather develop certain (pre-)literacy skills beforehand (Hurrelmann, 2004; Nickel, 2007). However, it was not before the early 1990s that a political debate about the importance of

early childhood education was started. As research increasingly documented the importance of early childhood education for the overall capacity of the educational system (see internationally among others Heckman, 2008), early childhood education was placed on the political agenda (Fthenakis, 2007). This development was supported by the aftermath of the disappointing performance results of German students in the international comparison study PISA 2000. As one of the seven action points within the mutual paper from all 16 German education ministers, the improvement of early childhood education was demanded.

Beginning in the early 2000s, formal educational curricula (“Bildungspläne”) were developed and implemented. However, these first formal curricula focused primarily on institutional early childhood education and did not cross the borders to other formal and informal areas of education. They scarcely included the family as an important source and place of education (Nickel, 2007; Textor, 2007). It is only recently that a new generation of formal curricula has been developed and implemented, where informal educational institutions – including the family – are increasingly seen as important contributors in an educational network (Fthenakis, 2007). The situation described is also mirrored in research: Empirical research focusing on early childhood education is a fairly recent topic in Germany, with research on early literacy in the ages from 0 to 3 being next to non-existent, and universities now starting to put increasing effort into professorships within the area of early education.

To sum up, family literacy is a topic with increasing attention in Germany following a long phase of limited activity and awareness in this area. The next paragraph gives an overview of current literacy programs in Germany and research on their effectiveness.

X.3.2 Current family literacy programs in Germany

Different groups of family literacy programs can be distinguished in Germany. One (major) group of programs is home visiting programs. Frequently used programs are HIPPY (Kniefl & Pettinger, 1997; <http://hippy-deutschland.de>), and the Dutch “Opstapje” (Sann & Thrum, 2005; <http://opstapje.de>), deduced from HIPPY. HIPPY and Opstapje are both rather broad family education programs and address socially or educationally disadvantaged families and families with immigration backgrounds in Germany (for further program descriptions see the Netherlands section above). In contrast to the Dutch programs the program materials of the German adaptations exist only in German.

In one evaluation study of HIPPY (Bierschock, Dürnberger & Rupp, 2009) about 90% of the parents stated that they invested as intended at least 20 minutes every day in the HIPPY exercises. Parents read to their children more often and reported that their children's language abilities, their fine motor skills, and their social competencies increased. Additionally, a shift was often reported from reading in the native language to reading only in German or in both languages. Neither a control group nor objective achievement tests were employed in this evaluation study.

The evaluation of Opstapje (Jurczyk, Sann, & Thrum, 2005) had a quasi-experimental design with 84 families in the intervention group and 20 families in the control group. After 18 months the global level of activity in the families (including shared reading) as reported in parent questionnaires increased significantly compared to the control group. Positive differences in the children's overall cognitive, motoric, and social development according to developmental tests were not tested for statistical significance. Neither the mothers' instruction quality nor the children's interest in constructive play or their emotion regulation, measured from video-taped interactions, improved statistically significantly compared to the control group. While about 80% of the scheduled home visits took place, the parents reported only a medium compliance to fulfilling the program activities and work sheets in-between the home visits.

Another group of programs aim specifically at improving (bilingual) literacy skills of children with immigrant backgrounds, and offer parenting support with the overall goal of fostering the child's general development. They use moderated group meetings to involve mothers as experts on their child's literacy development. Moreover, these programs involve to some degree a second institution next to the family (e.g. kindergartens or primary schools). A program from this group implemented quite frequently in Germany is "Rucksack" (or "Rucksack KiTa; "backpack" or "backpack kindergarten"; www.raa.de/produkte-und-projekte-3.html) originating from the Netherlands. Rucksack is also deduced from HIPPY and is directed at children from 4 to 6 years. It rests on two foundations: First, mothers with immigrant backgrounds whose children are enrolled in the same nursery school or kindergarten join weekly group meetings. The group meeting moderator – a trained mother or an educator with the same cultural background – teaches the mothers to perform literacy activities with their child in their native language. Second, educators in the cooperating nursery schools and kindergartens introduce the weekly topics to the children's groups with literacy activities using the German language. Rucksack is complemented by „Griffbereit“

(“ready at hand”), aiming by means of weekly bilingual mother-child play groups at one to three year old children, and “Rucksack II” (or “Rucksack Schule” = “backpack school”). Pursuant to the program’s principles it is generally implemented in the first three years of primary school.

Presently, the different Rucksack programs have been evaluated only by interviews and questionnaires administered to parents, educators, and teachers (Kleine-Salgar & Wehner, 2007; Naves & Rummel, 2009). The mothers were very satisfied overall with the program and felt, for example, more competent in supporting the personal and academic development of their children. They were relieved that they could use their native language, and reported that along with their children’s fluency in their native language improving, their own fluency improved as well during the course of the project. The mothers, who acted as moderators, the educators and the school teachers were all not sure to recognize improvements in the German language due to the Rucksack programs. No control group was employed.

One genuine German family literacy program is the Hamburg pilot project “Family Literacy” (FLY; Elfert & Rabkin, 2007; <http://www.li-hamburg.de/projekte/projekte.Foer/bf.1110.family/index.html>). The project was started in 2004 in eight schools and kindergartens. The target groups are educationally disadvantaged families, mainly with an immigrant background. The program spans a period of two years: the last year of kindergarten and the first year of primary school. The aims of the program with regard to families are mainly to improve parents’ abilities to foster their children’s literacy development and to improve cooperation between parents and educational institutions (i.e. kindergartens and schools). The program rests on three main foundations: (1) Parents participate in the children’s regular lessons. For example, parents might sit in on circle time and/or read (picture) books to children in small groups. (2) Parents work on literacy topics and materials parallel to the children’s classes together with a second teacher. (3) As “highlights” out of school activities like field trips to the library or a museum are arranged. Information conveyed and activities performed under the umbrella of the three foundations are based on best practice experiences. Contents can therefore partly differ between participating institutions.

In an evaluation study of the FLY project (May, 2007) the parents reported that they carried out more literacy related activities such as shared storybook or picture book reading and writing at the end of the project, but tests for statistical significance were not reported. The parents also stated that their child’s language skills as well as their child’s enthusiasm about

learning improved and that they developed more certainty in learning and playing with their child. Standardized achievement tests were used but results have not yet been published.

In addition to the described “high intensity” family literacy programs, a number of (internationally implemented) low intensity programs aim at advancing the exposure to books in families. Pediatricians participating in “Buchstart” (“Bookstart”; e.g. “Buchstart Hamburg”, www.buchstart-hamburg.de) or “Lesestart” (“Reading Start”, www.lesestartdeutschland.de) give a bag filled with picture books, book vouchers, parents’ handbooks etc. to parents of approximately one year old children. In some cases the programs also offer open parent-child meeting groups dealing with the topics language and picture books². Parents who took part in the evaluation of Bookstart Hamburg (Thoma, Schulte-Markwort, & Barkmann, 2007-2009) were rather satisfied with the materials in their Bookstart bag. Literacy related behavior in the families such as shared picture book reading and establishing a reading ritual increased in the families in the first year after receiving their Bookstart bag. Nevertheless, this might have happened anyway in this time period, and comparisons with a control group were not drawn. The vocabulary of the Bookstart children seemed to have improved substantially compared to a control group after one year in the program. Yet, more detailed information about sample size, the control group and instruments used are missing and in-depth analyses of the data still have to be carried out.

X.3.3 Integrated family literacy programs in research in Germany

Along with these rather broad approaches, two parental trainings have recently been developed that focus on the promotion of phonological awareness as a specific preliterate skill.

“Lobo vom Globo” (Lobo from Globo; Koglin, Fröhlich, Metz, & Petermann, 2008) addresses four to six year old children whose native language is German. The program aims to give children an insight in the phonological structure of oral language and to help them enjoy the contact with language. Parents meet weekly during five weeks: They get information about language development and general educational competencies, they learn exercises to be carried out at home, and they share program experiences with other parents. Children practice hearing the phonological structure of words, rhyming, structuring words into syllables and phonemes, and rearranging syllables and phonemes. The exercises last about 15 minutes and are included in a 30 minutes game time.

The program was evaluated using a quasi-experimental design ($N = 70$; Koglin, Fröhlich, Metz, & Petermann, 2008). 92% of the parents in the intervention group attended all five meetings. No other implementation checks were reported. Statistically significant effects with medium effect sizes in favor of the intervention group were identified for a particular range of phonological awareness. Five year old children profited more than four year old children.

The second parental training (Rückert, Plattner, & Schulte-Körne, 2010) focuses on joint book reading and activities to foster phoneme differentiation. It takes 16 weeks during which the parents meet four times with similar aims as in the “Lobo vom Globo” program. Parents are asked to do five activities with their children each week. These activities include reading out to their children, dialogues about the reading material, and exercises to foster phonological awareness and awareness of letter-phoneme correspondences.

The program has been evaluated using a quasi-experimental design with three groups ($N = 52$; Rückert, Plattner, & Schulte-Körne, 2010). One group took part in the parent program, one group took part in the “Hören, lauschen, lernen” (“Hear, listen, learn”) program which is a well established and evaluated preschool program aimed at promoting phonological awareness (Schneider, Küspert, Roth, & Visé, 1998). The third group took part in both the home and preschool program. The majority of the parents judged the program positively and implemented the activities regularly at home but with a decreasing compliance in the course of the program. Children in all groups improved their phonological abilities significantly and to the same extent. Due to the lack of a control group no effect sizes relative to natural maturation processes could be reported.

Another recent program is the Berlin Parent-Child Reading Program developed at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin for fourth graders (usually aged 9-10 years old) and their parents. The program draws on knowledge about the development of reading comprehension as well as on empirical insights into the effects of training on students’ learning strategies and reading-related metacognition. It aims at improving individual literacy prerequisites, text comprehension as well as family literacy habits. Implemented over a three to four month period, each of the program’s 43 highly structured and standardized sessions (approx. 30 minutes each) involves shared reading aloud of a supplied text, mutual answering of basic understanding questions, and discussion of a set of elaborating questions (for a detailed description, see McElvany, 2008; McElvany & Artelt, 2009). The families receive all materials free of charge, including separate instruction booklets for parents and children, and conduct the program at home without further guidance. The results of the first quasi-

experimental evaluation study ($N = 116$ program and $N = 393$ control families) indicated that the implementation quality was high, but that participation was selective based on family background and children's achievement level. Nevertheless, participation in the program was found to have substantial effects on the development of vocabulary, reading-related metacognition and some family variables.

X.3.4 Conclusion

To sum up, there have been an increasing number of regional programs and initiatives implementing the ideas of family literacy in Germany. These programs have different foci and means, and respond differently to family and cultural factors. For example, the HIPPY program encourages reading in German rather than in the native language, while the Rucksack program is based specifically on a bilingual approach. A centrally organized state- or even nationwide approach on family literacy is still missing (Nickel, 2007). In the context of the new formal curricula, new family enrichment centers are supposed to offer sets of low threshold services to families in the area of education and literacy. Nevertheless, many issues have not yet been solved. Among these issues are (1) the necessary comprehensive education of program facilitators (concerning literacy and didactic knowledge as well as interaction with parents and children, cultural and social factors etc.), (2) the interaction of literacy programs with other support measures (especially for families with multiple challenges), (3) the question of the role and potential of the mother tongue in bi- or multilingual families, (4) the program concepts and their individual elements being based on scientifically sound foundations and (5) the cooperation of practice and research in evaluating the implementation quality and effectiveness of the family literacy programs/approaches with up-to-date methods.

X.4 Discussion

Considering similarities and differences between family literacy policy and programs in the Netherlands and in Germany, a major difference is the fact that the Netherlands have nationwide family literacy programs, while Germany does not. Moreover, the two countries seem to be partly developing in opposite directions: In the Netherlands, early childhood education started by focusing on home-based approaches and has now moved towards center-based programs. Germany, in turn, started with some center-based approaches, and now an

increasing interest in home-based programs can be observed. Further, the home language of the families seems to play a greater role in program concepts and program materials in the Netherlands than in most German initiatives.

Nevertheless, similarities emerge as well: Many programs in Germany resemble programs in the Netherlands, and in fact, most programs in both countries are to some extent based on internationally developed and implemented programs. Thus family activities in both countries actively profit from experiences in other countries. Additionally, it holds true for both countries that more research is necessary on the program effects as well as on implementation quality and other potentially mediating factors, and that the overall methodological quality of the research has to be further improved. Finally, lobbying work for family literacy is required for further development in both countries, focusing in the Netherlands on defending existing programs, and in Germany on establishing a stable and comprehensive structure of family literacy programs.

To conclude, coming from different histories with family literacy traditions, both the Netherlands and Germany are working on developing and maintaining family literacy programs, and research accompanying, guiding, and evaluating these efforts is necessary.

Notes

¹ There is also a program for second graders, *Stap Door!*, but this is primarily a school-based, peer tutoring program.

² The programs described here focus primarily on parents enhancing their children's literacy skills. Besides, projects exist that focus on center-based education with some parent involvement or on adult education within the framework of family literacy.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the *Nederlands Jeugdinstituut* (Dutch Youth Institute; particularly Mrs. Carolien Gelauff-Hanzon, Mrs. Hilde Kalthoff), the *Stichting Lezen* (Reading Foundation), Mrs. Daveri, Dr. Jeanne Kurvers (Tilburg University), Dr. Peter Tellegen (Radboud University Nijmegen), and Mr. Weber for providing valuable information.

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