

**2nd report:
Experiences of Pedagogical and
Organisational Implementation of the project
'Free from Bullying'**

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Introduction

This is one of several reports from Roskilde University about the educational development project entitled 'Free from Bullying' (in Danish: *Fri for Mobberi*). Free from Bullying has been designed by Save the Children, and is carried out as a pilot project in cooperation with three Danish municipalities: Aarhus, Kolding and Gentofte. In each municipality, one school and two or three preschool centres (Danish *børnehave* age 3-5 years) test a series of tools aimed at preventing bullying. The project targets 3-8-year-olds, and is the first of its kind in Denmark, since prevention of bullying has previously focused on slightly older children.

A group of researchers from Roskilde University follow the project from start to end, describing its implementation, development and results in a series of reports issued on three occasions in the course of the project period. This paper takes stock of the progress about half-way through the process. The follow-up research project is funded by Save the Children Denmark in collaboration with the Mary Foundation, as well as the Danish National Federation of Early Childhood Teachers and Youth Educators (BUPL) and the Research and Development Fund of the National Federation of Social Educators (SL).

The report is based on interviews with all parties involved in the project Free from Bullying, i.e. representatives of Save the Children and of the three municipalities (both the administrative and the political level), as well as management, personnel and children at three schools and three preschools. Furthermore, a series of parents of pupils in reception class (in modern Danish called 'class 0') and class 2 at the three participant schools were interviewed. Accordingly, the report sheds light on the project from a multiplicity of perspectives.

Three main themes are addressed:

- Experiences using the project's tools and materials as regards prevention of bullying.
- Parental involvement in the prevention of bullying.
- The project's organisation – at the overall, municipal and individual centre level – and the consequences for dissemination, anchorage and ownership.

On the whole, the report shows that the tools developed have been taken up diligently, and that staff members in participant institutions¹ generally perceive the project work as meaningful. Accordingly, it has begun to leave its mark on pedagogical thinking, while some preschool centres are experiencing change in the children's social life in terms of more caring and inclusive behaviour. However, the paper also signals that the tools, in their present format, are age-inappropriate for schoolchildren. Furthermore, it shows that parental involvement in the project poses a major challenge, which is why this aspect has thus far featured mostly as one-way communication from the institutions to the parents, rather than as genuine participation. In addition, the report points out that Free from Bullying has a complex set-up, which has hindered its organisation and anchorage, both at the overall level and within individual institutions.

The report has been written both for participants in the pilot project and for others with an interest in the subject matter. Ideally, it will contribute to substantiating fruitful discussions about the prevention of bullying, both at the municipal level and within each institution.

¹ 'Institutions' is used in this paper as a generic term for educational establishments, covering preschools, schools and after-school centres.

We hope you will enjoy reading it.

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Tools and materials for the prevention of bullying

Experiences using tools and materials of Better Buddies

The core of Free from Bullying is a series of educational tools – termed ‘social practices’ – aimed at preventing bullying. These are described in the introductory booklet *Fri for mobberi – Sådan gør vi* [Free from Bullying: this is how we do it.]. Some of the social practices are imparted using various materials, compiled in a Free from Bullying Suitcase, while others do not require such aids. The tools remain under development, and new ones are being added throughout the project period.

In general, the preschool personnel express great satisfaction with the tools, which are found by the interviewees to be well-tuned to the teaching methodology already applied at the centres, while helping to direct the efforts to ensure the children’s wellbeing. The educational work with the children’s values and norms is fleshed out and becomes more tangible, when specific materials or well-described social practices serve as a starting point.

Free from Bullying also targets the early school years. Thus, Save the Children’s tools have been tested in three schools and corresponding after-school centres, though primarily in the reception classes (recently made compulsory and dubbed “class 0” in Denmark). Here, experiences with the tools have been somewhat mixed. A majority find the tools to be roughly suitable for reception class pupils, but age-inappropriate for children older than that. Save the Children is aware of this shortcoming, and has begun to review and develop separate tools for school use.

The present section describes the work with Save the Children’s tools and materials at three selected preschool centres, as well as three schools with their corresponding three after-school centres. There is a vast variety in the number of social practices that each educational establishment has worked on, as well as in the intensity with which they have chosen to do so. Nevertheless, not all social practices contemplated in Save the Children’s materials have been worked on in the institutions visited, which tend to select many of the same ones. However, it is interesting to observe how the same tools have been used differently by the various institutions. In the quote below, a reception class teacher reveals her reflections in this regard.

”You can obviously adapt it as you want. When you get a suitcase like that, I think you could pick five centres, and each will use the tools their own way. Indeed, somehow this is how it’s meant to be, because the concept involves certain elements, but in addition, one may fiddle with it. And I think that, over time, we’ll surely eliminate some parts and introduce something else. This is how it is and should be, because it kind of evolves along with both the children and the adults who use it, right?”

As the reception class teacher points out, the tools can be applied differently as deemed appropriate by each institution. At the same time, it seems likely that the use of the tools within each preschool or school setting will change over time. The present section tries to capture this versatility, seeking to substantiate pedagogical reflections within participant institutions regarding the use of the tools.

The introductory booklet

An important part of Save the Children’s compilation of material is the booklet ‘*Fri for mobberi – Sådan gør vi*’ [Free from Bullying: this is how we do it], which contains knowledge about bullying, as well as chapters on the professional educator’s role, parental involvement and conflict.

management. In addition, the booklet describes 12 social practices aimed at preventing bullying, of which the institutions are encouraged to choose at least three to be worked on.

When the project began, the booklet was read by nearly all staff of participant institutions. In one setting, they have used it continuously throughout the project period, since both bullying theory and descriptions of social practices have served as the starting point for professional discussions.

Teddy bear

A teddy bear is the icon of Free from Bullying, and has also been envisaged as a central figure in the preschools' and schools' work on the social practices and in day-to-day activities more generally. The bear comes in three versions: a big purple hand-puppet bear and two small bears in purple and yellow, respectively.

In the three preschool centres visited, the large bear is involved in the children's meetings to varying degrees. Its attendance signals to the children that this is a special session for their age group about to begin, and not just any gathering to talk about this and that. At one centre, it is the bear who opens the children's meeting and welcomes everyone by giving them a hug. At another place, the children take turns to sit with the bear during the meeting. In the schools, the big bear is used less, or left out completely, since the teachers find that it appeals more to younger children.

The big bear is a hand puppet, and it was originally envisaged that the staff would put it on and 'bring it to life'. However, most of the educators dislike talking through the bear. Some find the theatrical element awkward, while others feel that it creates a distance to the situation. One reception class teacher explains why she is not using the bear:

"If I wear a hand puppet, I feel like I have to play a role. And [when talking about bullying], I'd rather be myself".

However, the preschools use the big bear actively. At all three centres visited, it has occurred to the staff to let the bear 'whisper' messages to the grown-ups during the meeting, which are then passed on to the children.

In one centre, the educational staff involved the children in laying down some rules for the use of the bear. The children decided that it was not to be taken outside or used for play, because then it might be missing when someone needed consolation. Moreover, the children resolved exactly where the bear was to be kept. The rules were written down and posted next to the bear's place.

In all preschools, the bear performs a consolation function. Most children are happy with the bear, and like to be consoled by it, but a few would rather have direct contact with an adult without any go-between when they are sad. One centre in particular has made an issue out of the bear's strong powers of consolation. They now notice that the children have become tremendous at taking the initiative by fetching the bear whenever someone is distressed. For the children, the bear is a manageable medium, through which they can more easily carry out something as relatively demanding as consoling someone. Thus, the act of consolation becomes an option accessible to more children, since one can express care and sympathy merely by fetching the bear. A preschool assistant tells her experience of how the children's use of the bear has evolved.

"We've told them that they could use Buddy Bear to console each other, because then they go and fetch it to comfort the one who's sad. And it has been truly amazing to see what they've learned from it. [...] They

hardly use it anymore. Not because they've forgotten it, that is, but because Buddy Bear has enabled them to take part in consoling the others, and so today, if someone needs it, they just go up and give comfort without having to use the bear."

As the quote illustrates, with this group of children, the bear is beginning to outlive its usefulness as a consolation tool. It did, however, open the children's eyes to the fact that consolation is not a task confined to adults, but may also be performed by themselves. And gradually, they no longer need the bear to comfort their peers.

Furthermore, in several of the preschools and schools, the children have taken turns to bring home the big bear. Subsequently, these visits have given rise to talk among the children.

As mentioned, the role and space given to the teddy bear varies widely among the preschools and schools. Everyone has needed time to integrate the bear into day-to-day life as an educational tool. The first weeks with Buddy Bear are narrated by one preschool teacher from a centre, where the bear has today assumed a major role:

"And there he [the teddy bear] just sat, and kept sitting throughout the first two weeks. Nobody used him, not even us adults, to be frank. Because no matter what, it requires some conscious getting used to him being there, to remember that he's there, and even more, to remember to use him. So about a fortnight later, we held a new gathering, talking about how things were going with this big buddy of ours, and if anyone had used him. And I was the first to admit that I'd quite simply forgotten him on some occasions. Instead, I did the consoling myself. And then we agreed to try to practise using him. And since then, we've become a lot better at that, I'd say."

As the quote shows, it takes time and effort to get accustomed to a new tool. It does not come about by itself, but requires a conscious decision to try out something new.

The small teddy bears

Each child in the participant institutions has received a small teddy bear. A yellow bear has been given to the youngest reception class pupils, and a purple to the oldest reception class pupils and the schoolchildren. As the youngest children have grown older, they too have received a purple bear. The suggestion from Save the Children has been to use the bears in the institutions, so that the children should not be allowed to take them home.

In two of the three visited preschool centres, nearly all the children are fond of the bear and take well care of it. They play with it and use it to console themselves or others. Several children have made clothes, beds, etc. for their small teddy bears. A few children use it to speak on their behalf, when they have to say something difficult to another child. The bears also appear during children's meetings, where the children sit with them throughout. However, in one preschool, a teacher feels that the bear has not quite taken on the role intended for it. In her experience, the bear is mainly a toy, and the staff members use it only sporadically for educational purposes. At another centre, the personnel see the bear as a disruptive element. The children are not particularly fond of them, something the adults ascribe to the children already having so many toys. As one preschool teacher explains:

"We've talked about children of today having so much stuff, so many teddy bears and cuddle toys. So this small one, well, it really makes no difference. It means nothing to them. I think that years ago, when children

had fewer possessions, small things were appreciated, like a little teddy bear. Today it's another story, well, that's at least what we've found."

At the preschool centre concerned, they usually bring the bears along for the children's meetings, but often end up putting them away again, because the children fool about and throw the bears around. Another preschool has made similar reflections:

"Today's children have so many toys, so in a sense, this one could be just a stupid little teddy bear, right? It could represent anything, but given the fact that it's handed over in this fashion, that you can see how it takes care of them and has its place in class, I believe it has value – of some symbolic kind, right?"

The quote points to a vital point regarding the small bear. It is a toy with the *potential* to work as a pedagogical tool. However, for it to become more than just another toy, its symbolic value needs to be actively conveyed. It is evident that where the staff have taken to the bear and worked purposefully to attribute a role and a value to it, this is indeed what it stands for in the eyes of the children. This highlights the importance, in the project's continuation, of pedagogical discussions within the staff groups. Clearly, it needs to be talked through at each workplace how individual tools fit into the existing educational practice, thus actively choosing whether they want to work with them.

In the school context, the bears have not been successful. Reception class teachers generally find the children to be interested in the bears in the beginning, but they quickly lose value and are relegated to the background.

Save the Children's presentation suggests that the youngest children should have a yellow bear, and the oldest a purple one. As the smallest grow up, they are supposed to get a new bear. The educators react critically to this idea, finding it to be a poor signal that one's 'old buddy' is swapped for another. In addition, some point out that the purple bear appears in print in all the materials, thus making the yellow one somewhat peripheral. A few also mention the uneconomical aspect of changing the bears. Once the pilot project is over, the institutions will have to finance the teddy bears on their own, and this is not a trivial expense.

Children's meetings

All three preschool centres, as well as the reception classes and a few other early years classes at the three schools, hold regular children's meetings to address issues such as teasing, feeling excluded, friendship, consolation and courage. These exchanges are often prompted by Save the Children's conversation boards², though those present may also simply talk about whatever has happened among them in recent days.

Children's meetings are well-suited to the institutions' usual educational practice. The preschools have a tradition of regularly gathering the children in a circle to talk about various topics, or simply about whatever is going on in the children's day-to-day lives, so it has been easy for them to incorporate this social practice. The materials from Save the Children's suitcase – the big bear, the small bears, the conversation boards – in addition to the rituals that the various centres have begun to create to mark these occasions, have contributed to signalling that the children's meeting is a special type of 'gathering' or 'circle'. For instance, the meetings in one of the classes at Smilehullet

² The conversation boards are described below.

Preschool Centre starts off by listening to a short piece of music from a music box with tiny bears moving around, which one of the children has brought back from a trip abroad. The music box is used only for the children's meetings. At Vonsild Preschool Centre, the meeting is opened by everyone telling the big bear if they have gone through something in the past week that has made them happy or sad. At Humlebien Preschool Centre, the big bear gives hugs to all the children.

In all the preschools, the children's meetings are perceived as a positive event. It trains the children in coming forward to express their opinions and feelings in public, and in listening to each other. One teacher recounts:

"They've been great at sitting down and listening to each other. Even if someone points fingers saying 'that one over there, he did that thing', they keep listening, because they respect that the other must finish talking before they may start to defend themselves. And they actually get a good chance to talk about it. So it's as if the children's meeting has become the kind of place where it's okay to sit down and say stuff about each other."

The three preschools have tried out different ways of holding this meeting, e.g. in small as well as large groups, in separate and mixed age groups. There is general agreement that the meeting works best if the group of children is not too large. In Vonsild Preschool Centre, the children's meetings are mostly held in classes with differing age groups, though sometimes they split up according to age. They find the latter approach to work better. When children of all ages are together, the youngest tend to speak less, or merely repeat the contributions of their older peers. Conversely, the educators perceive an advantage in the younger learning from the older children, when they attend meetings together.

At Smilehullet Preschool Centre, one teacher observes that it varies widely how much each child talks. The youngest tend to say little, so the staff have discussed the option of dividing them by age. In the schools, reception-class and regular school teachers have found the number of pupils in a full class to complicate the holding of a meeting where everyone gets to talk. Overall, the personnel is concerned that all children should ideally say something in the course of a meeting, which requires the adult to retain a certain control

The minimum age required to benefit from children's meetings has been discussed in all three preschools. Opinion is divided. While Smilehullet considers testing this tool in the crèche (less than 3 years old), Humlebien has chosen not to hold meetings with the smallest children, finding them too young. This evidently stems from differing expectations as to what children should contribute to and gain from the meetings for them to be experienced as meaningful by the childhood educators.

Conversation boards

Save the Children's suitcase contains 16 conversation boards with drawings of children in recognisable conflict situations. The back of each board lists some questions, which the staff may use as prompts for their talk with the children about the picture. The conversation boards have been diligently used in all three visited preschool centres, and there is agreement that this is a useful tool which engages the children. One teacher explains:

"I think those posters have been great, because the pictures are spot on, and they're just the kind that children like to watch, that catches their eye, and this refers both to the colours and the way they've been drawn. They're very appealing to the children."

The same educator also finds the conversation boards to be effective in getting the attention of those children who are hard to engage through conversation alone:

“I find that those children who are hard to draw in just by conversation can be made to focus on the picture. The children’s lives are well reflected in those images, which are beautifully crafted, so that the children actually enjoy looking at them.”

Shaping the discussion around the visual stimuli of the conversation boards seems to help the children remember what they talked about at their meetings. The conversation boards are good at getting the talk started, and the children generally do really well at interpreting the scenarios portrayed. In one of the preschool centres, they have used the same conversation boards several times. The children are not bored, and the staff have found the children to be capable of seeing new things in the picture the second time. In those institutions that have worked most systematically with the boards, they observe an evolution in the children’s ability to reflect on the depicted situations, as they start to discover more nuances. One teacher recounts how the children initially focused all attention on identifying the aggrieved and the guilty party. Now they look at the spectators too, involving them when talking about possible solutions.

“It’s obvious to me that they’ve developed during the time they’ve worked on it. They’re starting to see more subtleties in the pictures, and they are coming up with more proposals to resolve the conflicts.”

Moreover, the educators find that the children are not just good at talking about the pictures, but also at relating them to their *own* experiences. The children recognise themselves in the conversation boards.

“A short time ago, there was a situation that corresponded exactly to a picture, which we then used in the context of what had happened. Without us telling them that this was why we took out that particular picture, it suddenly opened their eyes. Someone said: ‘My God, this is how I felt’, that is, as they sat down and talked about what went on in the picture.”

“If some situation has just broken out, we’ve been able to refer to one of the posters, and then the children can see what happens in that picture, and what it is that goes on in their own group.”

These two examples are far from unique. In general, the staff members find the children to be quick at seeing parallels between the pictures and situations from their own daily lives. Accordingly, many children are also capable of applying the overall discussions and reflections, revolving around the pictures, to what they face in the here and now.

“If some issues have been raised at the children’s meeting, then we’ve sometimes used the conversation board, simply suggesting that the kids recount their conflict by pointing at the people in the drawings. And this also helps tremendously to find solutions. [...] I have certainly experienced how it suddenly dawns on them. It was kind of like: ‘aha!’ Then we’ve got the solution right away, because they remember what we talked about. In this way, the pictures have turned into an active tool to understand one’s own and other people’s actions.”

The conversation boards may assist the children in understanding and managing conflict situations. It often requires help from an adult, who reminds them of what they talked about at a children’s meeting, or who just puts up the relevant conversation board and asks the children to look at it again. However, at Humlebien Preschool Centre, they have also observed the children – on their own initiative in internal negotiations and conflict resolution – referring back to discussions at the meetings.

Among the interviewees, opinion is divided as to which age groups are most receptive to the conversation boards. While one centre has chosen not to utilise this tool with the three-year-olds after trying it out just once, another has good experiences of using the conversation boards with the youngest preschool children, finding that the three-year olds demonstrate clear understanding of the task, and that they are able to read the pictures, even if they leave out some aspects. The three-year-olds are quick to see who is teasing or being teased, and they are good at feeling sympathy with those who suffer. However, the children need to be 4 or 5 before they are capable of reflecting on the situations.

In the schools, everyone concurs that the conversation boards are a useful tool that prompts good dialogue about important issues in the children's day-to-day lives. However, several teachers in the younger school classes request conversation boards more attuned to the issues affecting schoolchildren, and where the minors depicted look a little older. One suggests 'digitising' the conversation boards for school use in the form of small video clips.

At Skjoldhøj School, the conversation boards are used among reception class students for so-called 'play writing'. This means that the children write their own story on the basis of the pictures, using whatever signs, numbers and letters they already know. First, the whole class talks about the boards, and then they 'play write' their own individual stories. The idea is that the children, by 'writing' about the image, turn it into their own. Some of these sessions make use of stickers showing the teddy bear. Here, the children's job is to describe how the bear may help one of the people in the picture. Once the children have 'play written' their story, they tell it to the reception-class teacher, who writes it down 'the grown-up way'. In addition to its educational function, the 'play writing' also gives the teacher insights into each child's social comprehension. One reception-class teacher sees an obvious opportunity in repeating this activity at school level, thus turning the 'play writing' gradually into a real writing exercise.

Massage

"It really doesn't matter what else is on. As soon as we say 'now we'll do massage', they all drop whatever is in their hands, and they're ready. They have truly taken to it."

As the above quote indicates, the tactile massage programme has been a great success. It consists of a series of small stories accompanied by gestures, which the children, divided into pairs, take turns to perform on each other's backs. Meanwhile, a relaxing piece of music is played, and an adult tells a particular tale related to the movements. The massage ends with the children saying "thank you for massage" and "thank you for lending me your back" to each other. The rationale behind including a massage programme in the prevention of bullying is that it bonds people together under the maxim that 'the one you touch, you do not bully'. The massage is used in all three preschools visited, as well as in several younger school classes. Both at the schools and preschools, the children are very fond of the massage. The staff find that it creates peace and immersion, and contributes somewhat to social cohesion, since it is something that the group of children shares. One reception-class teacher recounts:

"Without telling them about the objective, it has a tranquilising effect on a group. Plus the fact that, when they say goodbye, there are more smiles to go around. So I think it makes them lower their shoulders, and when children lower their shoulders, there is less of an atmosphere for teasing and bullying. That's how I find it to work."

The quoted reception-class teacher is happy about the massage, whose effects she sees as beneficial to her class. At some places, the children have needed time to get used to the massage and to loosen up enough to enjoy it. Another reception-class teacher explains:

“Here in my class, I’ve got some hyperactive boys, a couple of kids driving in top gear, who have found it hard to start off by closing their eyes. You know, the one receiving the massage is supposed to close his eyes. But gradually you notice that ... ‘ahhhh!’ ... now they are able to close their eyes and enjoy that massage thing. But in the beginning... ‘ugh!’ ... relaxing so much that you could only close your eyes, that was a tough test for them!”

In the class concerned, it was helpful that another teacher was also present when the massage was first tried out, assisting in keeping quiet. Some of the preschool staff members have made the same observation. They have typically set two adults to the task of supervising the massage during a series of sessions in the beginning, so that it did not fall on a single person to read aloud, show the gestures and keep an eye on the children. The small preschool children particularly had trouble initially listening to the story and making the movements on their buddy’s back simultaneously. They were so absorbed by the story that their movements would stall, and they had to be helped to get started again. The instruction booklet for the massage programme contains a series of stories. However, one centre has chosen to repeat the same stories. This makes it easy for the staff to detect progress. Over time, the children have become much better at concentrating and performing the right movements. Thus, a significant lesson from the testing of the massage programme is that repetition is important, not just for the children to learn the gestures, but also for them to feel comfortable being so close to another child. One reception-class teacher shares her thought on this matter:

“I think it takes several goes, if it’s someone you don’t know. But then I find that if you schedule the tactile massage on particular weekdays, they become increasingly brave. So when you start up tactile massage, you must be in it for the long haul, continuing to do the same. Because this is what brings forth the comfort and repetition. ‘Okay, this is how you do it,’ they say. And now it’s legitimate to sit close to a boy. It’s permitted to sit real close. And everyone is in the same boat.”

As the quote illustrates, it may take time for children to get used to being close to another child, whom they have not necessarily chosen to pair up with. But along with the routines, confidence soon arrives. The educators generally find that it has become easy to carry out the massage activity, as the children are now familiar and happy with the procedure. A few interviewees, however, have experienced children with some difficulty in giving or receiving massage, as they dislike touching other children. Nevertheless, these cases are rare.

As mentioned, the idea behind the massage programme is that touching fosters bonds between the children. This indicates the importance of looking carefully at who exactly is massaging whom. However, the attention paid to this aspect varies between the different preschools and schools. In some places, the teachers decide. This may take place on each occasion, or the children pair up for a shorter or longer period. At Smilehullet Preschool Centre, they have often chosen to put an older and a younger child together. Other places let the children themselves choose whom to massage in order to make them feel secure about it. One preschool teacher tells how the staff group has indeed talked about the need to pay more attention to the manner in which the massage takes place.

“Because that’s the whole point: they have to touch each other. And this is where you see that certain children find it harder to touch certain other children, because they are not used to playing or being

together. 'I don't really feel like touching him', they may say, but this is precisely what they are supposed to learn, right? So we've talked about what to do: to get them to massage someone they're not used to. It's only now that we have realised this, because we think that they have been quite good at swapping partners. But it just may be that they've now reached a stage where they want to choose themselves, and they prefer to massage their best friend. And so, this is what we need to change a bit."

The quote indicates the importance of insisting on the objective of the massage: to teach the children to touch someone they would not necessarily otherwise touch.

Painting and drawing event

Vonsild Preschool Centre has carried out a painting and drawing event with friendship as the theme. In the run-up to the creative work, the children and staff talked about what characterises a good friend. After that, the children painted their best friend, subsequently discussing why they had chosen to paint this person in particular. The portraits were hung on the wall lit by a spotlight, and the parents were encouraged to look at them. This was a good experience, and the children have since talked at length about the pictures.

Skjoldhøj School has also carried out an arts project, where a group of pupils produced large paintings depicting the issues of bullying and teasing.

Older children befriend younger children

Humblebien Preschool Centre has tried out the social practice called *Older children befriend younger children*, which the staff perceive as a great success. As a prelude to establishing relations across the age groups, the teachers talked with the children about friendship, and with the smallest children also about what might be the use of an older 'buddy'. At a ceremony, it was revealed which children were to be paired up as the little and the big buddy. The staff had prepared a card for each child, with a photo of the child and his/her older/younger buddy, which were shown one at a time. The children found it exciting, and almost everyone was happy with their new friend. The cards with the children's photos have now been posted on the wall. In addition, the teachers had written a description of this practice, which they circulated to the parents some days prior to the establishment of these friendly relations. Here, the personnel set out the pedagogical thinking behind the scheme, giving the parents specific advice on how they might contribute to supporting the idea and turning the day into something special for the children.

Subsequently, younger and older buddies have engaged in various activities together. For instance, they have been on joint excursions, and the staff regularly encourage the older to help the younger, say, to put on their outdoor clothes and boots. Furthermore, the older children have handed their younger buddies the small bear at a ceremony.

The establishment of this social practice required some groundwork. The staff prepared the children through conversations, spent time on thinking through the buddy relationship, produced cards with the children's photos on, wrote a letter to the parents, and generally dedicated themselves to making the practice something special. Subsequently, however, the teachers found that much less was required to keep the relations at the centre of attention, since the children soon took the idea to heart, and now seek each other on their own.

"A great success, I believe, because they always have their buddy in mind. In some sense, I find this absolutely amazing. And this is one thing that we've worked on, and quite frankly, we no longer need to do a

lot, because they've been great, they really know how to help the others. I'm also deeply surprised how easy it is. We do nothing. They are just so good at taking care of the little ones."

The quote shows how the staff found the process to unfold largely on its own, once the buddy relations had been established. The older children took on responsibility for their younger peers, growing with the task, while the younger children enjoyed the attention from their older buddies. Two teachers narrate their experience:

"And from day 1, they've been great at it. I was taken aback to see how fast they remembered who was their younger buddy. And we always see them in the corridor, if someone is hurt or sad. Then an older child will say: 'Hey, Phillip, it's your little buddy who is crying', and then the answer is: 'oh, I'll be there right away', and consolation is promptly given. They also play much more across the age groups in the playground. So, they've really discovered the small kids, expressing lots of consideration for them."

"It has worked beyond all expectations. Credit to the older children, because they're great at being the small children's big buddies, and the small kids find it cool to have friends in the older children's class. They wave to them, when they pass by each other. And some kids are drawn into the games, and, well, all told, I'm absolutely astonished, actually. I never expected it to work as well as it really does."

Specifically, the staff find that the children are moving more across classes, and they have begun to greet children from other classes, and not just their 'own' buddy. In the playground, the educators also observe how the scheme has helped bridge the age divide. One teacher recounts her experience with a boy who was terribly keen to look after his little buddy on a day when he was sad.

"So, there was this example with one of my kids who so wanted to help his little friend, who had just had a really bad day, and was very, very sad. Being the older child, he kept coming around, watching as if to say 'isn't there something I can do?' He just circled around him, and so I said to him: 'Right now he's just feeling down, so now he just needs a little time, so try to come by in a short while.' And so he soon returned, suggesting to his little buddy: 'Don't you want to come with me to ride a bicycle?' At one stage, he also went to ask him something: 'Don't you want to play along here with us?' And when his little buddy didn't answer, he began to lift him into the air like this, physically encouraging him to join in. (Laughs). It was just so touching to see that, despite facing all that reluctance from the other, he refused to give up, he just kept fighting to cheer up his younger friend."

All told, the staff find the children's added attention to each other and the older children's care for the younger to be a major boon for the centre.

The social practice of older children befriending younger ones fits well into the structure and educational methodology of schools as well as preschools. It is not a novel concept, but is used in different versions to varying degrees in many institutions. Some of the other participant schools and preschools apply practices akin to that of 'older children befriending younger children', except to a lesser degree. In one preschool, the children are paired up as 'walking buddies' from different age groups, who always take each other by the hand during walks outside. And in one of the schools, all classes are twinned with another, occasionally carrying out joint activities.

Folder with tips to the parents

The material from Save the Children includes a short folder with five pieces of advice to parents about how to contribute to solidarity among the children. These are the five tips:

- Encourage your child to make playdates with all kinds of other children.

It is a good for your child to experience play with a vast variety of peers. At the same time, this ensures that all children get playtime with others.

- Do not talk badly about other children at the centre, or about their parents.

Negative comments about your child's preschool mates are easily translated into dislike of certain peers. Positive attitudes usually produce a good response.

- Implement a social birthday policy.

It hurts the child left out, if invitations are reserved for those selected. Invite all girls, all boys, or the entire class. This rule is found by most to be fair. The parent-teacher meetings may be used to agree on shared birthday invitation rules.

- Encourage your child to defend those unable to defend themselves.

Children who feel pushed into a tight corner by their peers, need a helping hand from a fellow child. Children who are good at helping, consoling and defending others 'mature' on the inside.

- Be open and positive when other parents talk about their child's problems.

It is difficult to stand up at a parent-teacher meeting to tell everyone that one's child is lonely and needs friendship and playtime with others. It helps if the other parents are positive and listening.

All preschools have handed out the folder with the above advice to parents, and at one centre and one school, the tips are published one at a time in newsletters to the parents. The teachers generally find the parental folder to be a fine tool. One, however, is of the opinion that the sentences are too long, and the formulations unnecessarily complicated. This person stresses the importance of the folder not addressing mainly the academic types.

The staff members have not received that many reactions from the parents, but whatever feedback they *have* received has been positive. The limited response must be ascribed to the fact that the folder has often just be handed out without foregoing introduction or debate. One exception is Humlebien Preschool Centre, where the folder was presented at a parent-teacher meeting by a couple of parents. They had enrolled two siblings at the centre, and so they had already seen what Free of Bullying can do for a group of children. They passed on these experiences, and talked, for instance, about how the parents' encouragement to widen the circle of playmates had contributed to creating a more cohesive group of children with fewer conflicts. The other parents were highly attentive, and some fruitful discussions arose.

The children are supported in drawing the line for themselves and others

The nature group at Vonsild Preschool Centre works on teaching the children to know and uphold their own boundaries. They seek to present the children with challenges in nature, such as climbing a slope, while also encouraging them to sense where to draw their own line. The rationale is that one must know one's own boundaries in order to read and understand those of others. At Humlebien Preschool Centre, they also plan to work on this social practice.

Pixi books

Together with Carlsen Publishing House, Save the Children has produced four so-called 'pixie books' (tiny illustrated booklets) about teasing and exclusion. The participant institutions have received pixie books for all the children.

All three preschool centres use the pixie books regularly to read aloud, and have also let the children take them home. The children like the stories, and they identify with the issues raised. The

personnel observe that, while the younger children express sympathy with the figures, the older children are good at reflecting upon the plot. Reception-class teachers are generally sceptical about using pixie books at school, believing them to target a somewhat younger audience. However, the books have been used in a few of the reception classes, and here, the staff report that the children like the stories.

The teachers' only complaint about the pixie book is that its format is too small for reading aloud to a group of children. For such occasions, larger illustrations are preferable, so that all children can see. One reception-class teacher has even enlarged the books.

In addition, the pixie books hold potential as a link between institution and home. They give the parents an entry point to talk with their children about teasing and bullying, thus creating a bridge to the educational programme in the institutions. However, for this to work, the institutions need to pay attention to how they realise this potential. Apparently, the key is *how* the books are handed out. At one centre, the pixie books are linked to a major effort to involve the parents in the pedagogical thinking behind them.

“And then in the afternoon, as they [the parents] went home, they each got a book with them. And so, what we’d done in our diary [read by the parents] was to describe in great detail that we’d read it, and what we had done, so that the parent would get a – how to put it? – deeper insight into what it was all about, not just story-reading, but with a kind of dialogue going on about the story, well, at least the second time we read it. And we strongly recommended spending time during the holiday and the days ahead on reading it for the children. And that the first time it could very well be read out like a storybook, but then the second time around, perhaps they should go through it and kind of let the children say what it was that they saw in the pictures, turning it into their own words, rather than just a story being told. The overall response from the parents has been that everyone is very fond of it, and takes really good care of it. So it has certainly had some value.”

As the preschool teacher quoted explains, the centre went beyond letting the parents in on the educational work by suggesting that this could also continue at home. Thus, they created a joint project and a common framework of reference, which was welcomed by parents as well as children.

Stickers and postcards

Save the Children's 'Free from Bullying Suitcase' also contains a number of stickers and postcards with the same pictures as some of the conversation boards. There has been some doubt over how to use these. One preschool distributed the postcards reproducing the conversation boards after talking about them in order to enable the children to tell their parents about what was discussed at the children's meeting. Several parents have expressed their excitement about following what goes on in this manner. Some parents, however, ask about the exact questions written on the back of the conversation boards, but not on the postcards, since their children find it difficult to recount the talk occurring at the meetings. The teachers would like to obtain postcards of all the conversation boards. Some staff groups have talked about photocopying all conversation boards for the parents.

Internet forum of participants

At Save the Children's website (redbarnet.dk), a closed forum has been set up for participant institutions, offering a chance to exchange experiences of implementing Free of Bullying in the same fashion as an Internet blog. The forum consists of two entry points, namely the *logbook*, where institutions are invited to enter information about their activities once a fortnight, and the *pedagogical think-tank*, which is supposed to be more for professional exchanges. In practice,

however, this distinction seems to make little sense to the participants, since the contributions in both arenas are of the same types.

The forum is not used to the extent intended. Very few people have posted material on the site, and not many more have been visiting to read what others have contributed. This is so despite most interviewees being aware of the website's existence and seemingly finding it relevant, as they see an advantage in sharing knowledge. If the participants have been less than diligent users of the forum, it is either because they forget it in their day-to-day work, when other tasks are more pressing, or because it reflects a deliberate prioritisation of their scarce time. Several teachers perceive the forum as something 'additional' to their usual job. They express that it is not wholly legitimate to spend time on this during working hours, when the immediate educational tasks take precedence. Use of the Internet logbook is, for some interviewees, an activity that would have to take place in their spare time, which they are not keen on. Nevertheless, several teachers express regret that the forum of participants is used so little. One teacher, who *has* indeed posted material, sees the tool as an obvious opportunity both to pass on experiences and to share some of the written material produced by the institutions, for instance the letters to parents.

"I definitely think it's useful. But one must – well, I certainly must – organise things to get time to go and read it. Unfortunately, it's not like I suddenly get half an hour and think 'now I'll sit down and read it.' [...] So yes, I do find it useful, given that there are quite a lot of us working on this, it's really important to share the reflections made throughout with each other. Because, obviously, not the same things occur to all of us. So yes, it's very, very important. But I think that each adult has to – at least I have to – find a particular time, and then say 'this is when I do it'. Or perhaps I should just sometimes stop being so busy and say: 'before I start off, I must have had time to sit down and read it to see if someone else has had any interesting experiences.' Because it's not that anyone is asking me to hurry. It's one's own level of ambition sometimes, right?"

Role of the adult professional

The booklet for professionals "*Fri for Mobberi – Sådan gør vi*" [Free from Bullying: this is how we do it] suggests that the schools and preschools work systematically on the institutional culture and the professional role of the adult. This is about being conscious and reflective, not only concerning the teachers' relationships with the children, but also the interaction within the staff group. The institutions have only responded to this appeal to a limited extent. This probably stems from a lack of tradition of actively dealing with the personnel culture, particularly as regards the tone, rapport and cooperation within the staff group. Several interviewees mention that they get along well with their colleagues, and that their workplace is relatively small, which is why they do not see the need to address the institutional culture. It appears to be a widespread misunderstanding that this type of discussion only becomes relevant and required if/when problems arise.

In one preschool, however, they have briefly raised the topic, and several teachers see the project as a good opportunity to talk about their own workplace culture within the staff group. One teacher mentions the follow-up research project's questionnaire survey from the spring 2007, which showed how the personnel perceived the institutional culture. She sees a vast and exciting challenge in the responses, which she intends to take up and address.

In two preschools, the staff has held discussions about their relationships with the children. For instance, they have talked about how they receive children coming up to tell them about something they have seen other children do, and how the adults may seek to get more children to intervene

actively against teasing and unfairness³. Most conversations and reflections arise spontaneously as reactions to occurrences among the children, rather than as prescheduled staff seminars or the like.

Other tools used at schools and preschools

In the above, we have looked at how the preschools and schools visited have worked with the various tools that Save the Children has developed and described specifically for Free from Bullying. However, addressing issues such as wellbeing, relationships, care and inclusion among the children is hardly novel in the institutions. Accordingly, in all the educational establishments visited, the staff is dealing with the same issues in ways other than those suggested as part of Save the Children's programme. Some practices have been around in the institutions for years, while others have been added recently, and are partly inspired by Free from Bullying. As inspiration for other schools and preschools, some of these practices and tools are summed up below.

Feelings topic: Humlebien Preschool Centre has conducted a course about feelings over five weeks. Each week focused on a new feeling, which they worked on through conversation, theatre and creative pursuits, such as drawing.

System for playdates: Smilehullet Preschool Centre has developed a system where the parents put a plus or a minus next to their child's name on a blackboard to indicate whether he/she is allowed to visit someone to play after preschool hours. A plus means the parents have given their permission for the personnel to let the child follow a preschool mate home. This scheme facilitates the teachers' work, since they no longer have to phone the parents, if one child wants to follow another home, thus making it easier for them to support the children's friendships.

Relationship charts: Vonsild Preschool Centre is trying out relationship charts, which is a tool for internal staff use. It maps out each professional's relationships with the children. Each adult indicates with colours in the chart how good they perceive their particular relationship with each preschool child to be. Next to each other, the colour codes will show if some children are without good adult contact, and thus in need of a particular staff effort to ensure that they are seen and appreciated. They use specific materials to which the preschool teachers were previously introduced during a course under the auspices of the project 'Find the Resources' in Kolding Municipality.

Postcards to new pupils: At Hellerup School this year, the class 2 pupils sent postcards to the children about to start in reception class. Each pupil sent a postcard to one school starter. The schoolchildren took this task to heart, and the teachers observed the writing of some very touching letters about looking forward to getting to know the new schoolmates.

Role play/theatre: Both at Vonsild Parish School and Skjoldhøj School, theatre has been used as an entry point to address the issues of teasing and exclusion. At Skjoldhøj School, class 2 pupils played out conflicts outlined by the teacher. For instance, someone in the class refuses to invite someone else to his/her birthday, and then what happens? The children were divided into groups tasked with performing a small play and making up a happy ending to the conflict. Subsequently, the class talked about it. The teacher from Vonsild Parish School finds children to be more at ease discussing a fictitious event rather than a situation involving particular classmates.

³ The section 'Initial results' elaborates on this.

Theatre performed by the staff: At Humlebien Preschool Centre, the staff sometimes perform theatre for the children, who are truly enthusiastic about it. For instance, the adults play out a conflict, and the children subsequently comment on the action.

‘Play writing’: At Skjoldhøj School, the two reception classes work on ‘play writing’, which means that the children, based on a picture, ‘write’ a small story with whatever signs, numbers and letters they already know. Afterwards, they tell the story to the reception-class teacher, who writes it down ‘the adult way’. In connection with the project Free from Bullying, the reception-class teachers have used the conversation boards as the starting point for ‘play writing’, making the children ‘write’ about the conflicts depicted.

Memory game with all children’s faces and names: One of the reception classes at Skjoldhøj School has made a game with the children’s names on one side of a deck of cards, and their photos on the other. This flip-card game is put into a small suitcase, which the big teddy bear brings along when it visits the children’s families. The game helps pupils as well as parents to learn the names of all children, and may, at the same time, pave the way for a talk about the group of children.

Survey of wellbeing: Every year, Vonsild Parish School conducts an anonymous questionnaire survey of the pupils’ wellbeing at school. The researchers use a standard questionnaire downloaded from the website of the Danish Centre of Educational Environment (DCUM, www.dcum.dk). The results are aggregated at class as well as school level, and the survey is followed up by in-depth talks, in addition to being presented to the parents of each class for discussion.

Play patrols: Vonsild Parish School and Skjoldhøj School have organised ‘play patrols’, a small group of older pupils tasked with initiating play during recess, which must be open to all. Furthermore, members of a play patrol must report back to their contact teacher, if they observe children who seem to be feeling down. The play patrol can also be used to teach a class a series of collective games, if they find it difficult to get started playing together at school start. At Skjoldhøj School, they are also considering training the play patrols as conflict mediators.

Song-writing about teasing and bullying: Skjoldhøj After-School Centre has worked on a song-writing project, in which the children, along with the adults, have written songs about their experiences of teasing, bullying, etc. The song-writing was informed by a kind of children’s meeting, where the students related their experiences and feelings, while an adult wrote it all down. The after-school teacher finds that song-writing helps children put words to their thoughts and experiences, amounting to an almost therapeutic effect. The song project resulted in a CD with all the songs.

Red, yellow and green language: Hellerup School is working on the children’s tone using the concepts of ‘red, yellow and green language’. The colours refer to how statements make the recipient feel. Red language is what hurts and saddens, while green language makes happy. The children have taken to these terms, using them in their internal talks.

1-5: At Hellerup School, many lower school classes start the morning with a round of ‘1-5’, which means that the pupils take turns to ‘mark’ their own mood, possibly with a brief explanation. ‘1’ means that the child is feeling great, while ‘5’ expresses, for instance, strong sadness or anger. If the pupils want to, they may elaborate on their number with comments like: *“I’m one today, because I’m visiting Susanne to stay overnight, and we’re going to watch some movies.”* The teachers find

that it creates a good atmosphere to let the children say a couple of words about how they are doing, and usually good marks are given.

The hot chair: One of the classes at Skjoldhøj School uses the tool ‘the hot chair’. One by one, the pupils receive positive comments from classmates. The person thus being praised must finally choose the three things that made him or her happiest to hear.

Class rules: In several classes, the pupils, assisted by their teachers, have developed some class rules to safeguard everyone’s wellbeing.

Participants’ ideas for the development of new tools for school use

From the outset of Free from Bullying, the intention has been to continue to refine the tools and materials in response to the participant preschools’ and schools’ experiences of using them. While the preschool personnel were generally satisfied with Save the Children’s tools, and suggested no additions, the schoolteachers tended to come up with myriad thoughts on how to develop the tools and materials to bring them better in line with schoolchildren’s abilities, perceptions and interests, as well as with the general circumstances at the school concerned.

Several interviewees from the schools are concerned about how to give the materials greater educational relevance in order to incorporate them into the teaching programme. At Hellerup School, the staff has talked about how they would like some tools to lead to group work with subsequent presentation and discussion. Below are the ideas and wishes expressed by the interviewees employed at the schools. Several of the suggestions might also find use in a preschool context.

Teddy bears adapted to schoolchildren: As previously mentioned, the interviewees agree that the bears fail to strike a chord with school-aged children. One teacher, however, believes that fancy clothing could make them work better. A reception-class teacher suggests replacing the traditional teddy bear with minuscule versions to hang on the bag. In her class, it is popular to hang various trinkets on schoolbags.

Computer games/programs: Several interviewees find it an obvious idea to use interactive media to catch the attention of the schoolchildren, particularly of the boys. For instance, there could be a game in which the participant(s) influence a plot. One teacher proposes making such a game available on the Internet, thus providing access to the children at home, where they might play it with their parents.

Easy readers: One teacher would like to have easily-read books developed in conjunction with Free from Bullying for use in the lower school years.

Cooperation games: At Hellerup School, a group of staff has talked about how they would like to have some games that focus on cooperation in small groups. Thus, the children should perform an activity that can only succeed by working together, say, building a high tower of some specific material. The teachers concerned are considering devising such a game themselves, but had not made that much headway with their idea at the time of the interview.

Board games for children: Several interviewees mention board games as an obvious opportunity to work on the prevention of bullying in a fun way.

Board games for parents: Some staff members suggest galvanising the parents more in the prevention of bullying by means of a board game aimed at getting the parents together to discuss the issues involved. To some, bullying is difficult to talk about. Accordingly, a game could be a fine entry point to get the conversation off the ground.

Initial results

As can be seen, the institutions participating in Free from Bullying have gone to great lengths to test different tools for the prevention of bullying. A natural question is whether the work has borne fruit. Has it left its mark on pedagogical thinking and practice in the institutions? Is this also reflected in the children's interactions?

The empirical data collected by the follow-up research project indicate that some initial results have already begun to flow from the work. Several interviewed teachers list outcomes such as more reflective behaviour and greater attention to the pedagogical approach to the prevention of bullying, as well as the children's conduct becoming more caring and inclusive.

At the time when the professionals were interviewed about their job, those at the preschools had worked on Free from Bullying for almost a year, while those at the schools had only been practically involved for a couple of months. Consequently, it was primarily in the preschools where progress was observed by the staff. At the same time, clearly, the degree of change observed reflects how intensively the individual institutions concerned have worked on Free from Bullying.

Changes in pedagogical thinking and practice

Greater attention to the pedagogically-skilful handling of children's relationships is mentioned by the majority of interviewees as an important gain from taking part in Free from Bullying. They find that they have expanded their knowledge and awareness of what bullying is, and what active pedagogical approaches may serve to prevent it. Several teachers also feel that their participation in the project has led to highlighting the relationships internally among the children, thus improving their capacity to detect if all the children are feeling happy among their peers.

At one preschool centre, the staff has begun to talk more with the children about how they are doing, and how they feel about what their mates say and do. One preschool teacher recounts:

"I do believe that we've started to be more aware of the need to talk with the kids about what's nice and what's not so nice when the others say and do something, I do indeed."

In the preschool concerned, the staff members also encourage the children to come and tell the adults if they experience or observe something that they dislike. However, they feel that this has, in certain periods, been taken too far, as particular children can be very keen on giving the teachers accounts of what other children have done. This has given rise to some internal staff talks about 'snitching', though it has been agreed to see it in a positive light when the children react to what they perceive to be wrong. However, the teachers have now begun to call on the children to do something themselves in such situations. In another preschool, the personnel have worked

systematically to imbue the children with a sense of responsibility for conflict resolution, care and consolation:

“It’s a natural reaction. If someone cries, as an adult, one rushes to the scene and starts to offer consolation. And this is where we’re working on trying to stand our ground, thinking something along the lines of ‘let her just cry for 30 seconds more, until we’ve found a solution together.’ And there are usually other children around when someone starts crying, so instead of the adult homing in on that particular child, one may say to the others: ‘is there something you can do to help out?’ And this is when the consolation teddy bear may appear. Or we may suggest that they kind of caress each other’s back a little bit, and then they do that. So we basically try to withdraw a little, limiting our role to that of guidance and letting the children come up with the solutions themselves. [...] This makes it kind of the children’s responsibility to console each other, and not just the job of the grown-ups.”

As the quote illustrates, the staff group concerned is engaged in redefining their own role in situations where a child needs consolation. They wish to mobilise the children to a greater degree as the ones offering care and finding solutions to the conflicts. Similarly, the staff are making a more conscious effort to bring the children’s various competencies into play. They make a point of encouraging the children to help and seek help from each other, rather than always from the adults:

“I think we’ve become better at cultivating a spirit of community, that is, in the sense that it’s important that they learn something from each other. One thing is to be together all day long, quite another is to learn from each other. And I believe we’ve become better at focusing on things like: ‘go ask this other child what he can do’. I really think we’ve begun to pay greater attention to what one child can teach another.”

The quoted preschool assistant teacher finds that togetherness is boosted when the children discover that they can learn from each other, taking advantage of each other’s strengths or specific skills. She also observes that the children are happy and proud to be able to help others, whether it be doing up zips or showing them how to draw stars.

Another objective of Free from Bullying has been that individual institutions should work on the adult professional’s role regarding patterns of exclusion. As described in the section “Role of the adult professional”, this area has only been addressed to a limited extent. Accordingly, very few interviewees find that the project participation has influenced that staff’s *internal* relations. In one preschool, the staff group has held some rewarding discussions about the tone that they want to see prevail. Against this background, the staff affirm that they have become more alert to how both children and adults talk to each other, including how much scolding takes place routinely. They are thinking of feeding these professional discussions into the development of a wellness policy.

Changes in the children’s social life

At the preschool centres, staff members find that the children are slowly beginning to react to the greater pedagogical focus on inclusion, care and peaceful conflict resolution.

In Vonsild Preschool Centre, one teacher has noticed that the children have become better at inviting others into their play. For example, she has repeatedly experienced that, if a child’s participation is rejected by some, others will immediately offer to involve the child in their play instead. Furthermore, she has noticed a higher degree of playing relationships across gender and age than previously seen. Some staff members at Humlebien Preschool Centre make the same observation.

Another change described by several educators is that the children are more mindful of each other's wellbeing. In Vonsild Preschool Centre, a teacher tells how the children have begun to look at each other's faces in order to read how the others react and feel. The staff at Humlebien Preschool Centre have experienced the same. The effect among the children was found by one teacher to be plainly evident when she saw the older children giving massage to their younger peers, as the new preschool starters were presented with their teddy bears. As she put it:

"I found it deeply moving to be part of the massage scene. There they were, getting massaged by their big buddy, when the consolation bear was handed over. And I was so lucky to get the task of observing both small and big kids. I was mightily impressed by the older children's ability in terms of making sure, several times throughout the event, by looking at the little buddy's face to check if he was still enjoying it. And of their own accord, they were quite inquisitive, as if wondering: 'Does he think it's nice? Can you tell from the way he looks if he likes it? Does he look happy in the face?' And stuff like that. And nobody ever asked them to do that, one might say. As I've written in my reflections, frankly, I have to admit that I've never seen anything like it before. I've never to that extent experienced a whole group of children being so mindful and observant of each other. Clearly, this must be attributed to their participation in the project. They've worked so much on it that it has become – I believe – a natural reaction for them to give so much attention to another child. This competence is not the norm for a five- or six-year-old. At that age, one is still mostly preoccupied with oneself, whereas these kids, at least on that day, were demonstrating reserves of strength to just look at the other kid and make sure he or she was fine. I've no doubt that this has something to do with the project."

As the quote illustrates, to this educator, it was a new and touching insight that preschool children are capable of devoting their full attention to the wellbeing of another child. The same ability and energy to focus on others and their needs is recounted in this description of the rough-and-tumble play of a group of boys:

"They've become really good at talking to each other without us being asked to intervene. The mere fact that they now communicate! They also say things like: 'I've had enough of this'. We have some fighting games with the boys, and the other day, when I was supposed to watch it, I couldn't help thinking: 'Oh, this is going to end in tears'. It always does. (Laughs). It does! But no, in fact it did not, because whenever someone was pushed around a little too hard, he'd say: 'ouch, I don't want that!' One said: 'hey, I'm taking a break!' And the others would just listen to him! (In disbelief). They just let him have his break! When he was ready again, he came right back. I've never seen that before, right? It was supposed to go wrong, because they were playing rough-and-tumble, but not this time, because they're good at talking to each other, and they're good at listening to each other. (Laughs.) Really!"

The wonder and amazement shines through the description of the quoted assistant teacher. The boys being considerate to each other came as a pleasant surprise to this educator. Several staff members from a variety of institutions express that the children have become more caring to each other, more attentive to the possibility of helping each other, instead of leaving that to the adults. One teacher from Smilehullet Preschool Centre recounts an incident with two small boys:

"A small kid fell over when we went to the forest. And there he was flat on the ground. He didn't cry. He wasn't hurt, but he couldn't stand up without help, wearing a snowsuit and all that. He fell over three times, and the adults helped him to get on his feet, but the fourth time there was this four-year-old boy, who went to help him. And I said to him: 'Very good! How great that you could help him!' And he answered: 'Yes, because the other day we talked about how we should help the little ones.' Oh, that kind of stuff just makes you melt completely!"

This little episode made an impression on the preschool teacher by showing her that the children do indeed take something with them from the children's meetings.

At Humlebien Preschool Centre, they have – as previously mentioned – worked hard on making the children feel responsible for caring and consoling. One teacher describes how she is now seeing this effort bearing fruit:

"When someone is sad, it's noticeable how they just step in and help and comfort each other. It's very, very rare now that someone is alone and sad without some other children, completely of their own accord, coming to the rescue."

The children have become good at consoling, and at taking the initiative to do so, whereas it used to be considered more of an adult job. The attention and care for each other is also reflected in the way that some children have begun to tackle disputes and injustices in which they are not themselves directly involved. In two preschools centres, the personnel find that more children are gathering the courage to intervene, if they believe something to be unfair. In one centre, in particular, the older children have become better at defending each other and stepping in to confront unjust or unpleasant behaviour:

"So as I said, I think that the spectators are making their presence more felt. They are beginning to grasp that 'hey, I can actually do something about it. I don't have to just stare and take it.' They act when they believe something to be unfair to others. So I think the project has had many positive effects already."

The teacher quoted sees it as a highly positive trend that some children have begun to react to injustices committed against others. However, she still notices that this only applies to some of the children, while the rest lack the courage or the ability to speak up on behalf of others. Nevertheless, several staff members find that conflict resolution among the children has begun to improve. The children are increasingly taking it upon themselves to get the disputes settled.

"If conflicts arise, they've become good at sorting it out themselves first. Only if it's really serious do they come and fetch us. To me, there is no doubt that this stems from all those talks and meetings where they're allowed to take part in finding out what to do in this and that situation."

The same assistant teacher finds that the children's new competencies lead to a more agreeable atmosphere, not just for the children themselves, but also for her as a staff member:

"Of course, there are still conflicts, and there always will be. There are still some who become sad, and there are always some who hit each other. But they've just become so sensible, that is, they can see it themselves. 'Oh, well, that wasn't very clever.' So we now know that we can count on them to understand that what they do is wrong. And we can talk with them in a reasoned manner, and they can talk with each other in this way too. As a result, it's, well, easier to be at work. You stop going into telling-off mode, because you know that the children can handle conflict. In this way, as far as I'm concerned, I think it has become a lot easier."

Conflicts are resolved in a reasonable and relatively calm fashion, which enables the staff to expend less energy on disciplining. Thus, working on children's relationships may produce a positive impact, not just on the children's social life, but also on the staff's job satisfaction.

Conclusion

As described above, the participant schools and preschools have worked diligently and enthusiastically to test the tools and materials developed for Free from Bullying. The experiences have been mainly positive. The staff have found it exciting, meaningful and rewarding to use the tools, and the effort has also begun to bear fruit in terms of changed patterns of behaviour among the children. However, it has proved necessary to develop new tools that are more age-appropriate for schoolchildren. Save the Children has taken on this challenge, and is in the process of preparing a new set of materials expected to be ready by the start of the school year in August 2008.

Addressing the wellbeing and social conduct of the children as a whole is nothing novel for the institutions participating in the pilot project. Both for school and preschool teachers, this aspect is indeed an integral part of their professional identity. The innovative contribution of the project is to draw *more* attention to this dimension and to structure the endeavour by creating a framework and a space that makes the work more tangible and methodical. An already familiar theme has taken shape more clearly. One preschool teacher explains:

“As an adult, I don’t think I have begun to act differently. I like to think that I’ve always had an appreciative approach to the children. But I may have become more aware of... how to put it... I mean, I get to create more spaces where it’s more obvious what it is that we need to practise. [...] Before, for instance, we didn’t have children’s meetings, right? We didn’t have children’s massage. We didn’t have consolation teddy bears. Some more remedies have been added, all of which carry the message that we must take care of each other, give each other comfort, help each other, and so forth. Those tools were not around before. [...] And there are people who have thought through and put words to some of the things that we perhaps just went about doing before.”

Free from Bullying has helped articulate some aspects of the educational day-to-day context, which – using concrete tools, such as the social practices, among others – strengthens and supplements the pre-existing educational work in the institutions.

Taking an overall look at the social practices developed for Free from Bullying, it is noticeable that they vary so widely, especially in terms of how extensive or pervasive they are. It is possible to distinguish between three overall *types* of social practices:

- Social practices that are carried out on one or possibly several occasions – i.e. ‘events’ – such as a painting and drawing session.
- Social practices as defined activities that may be scheduled, for instance once a week, such as children’s meetings and massage.
- Social practices that pervade the whole educational practice, such as encouraging the children to step in when schoolmates are excluded or hurt in group interaction, or focusing on teaching the children about their own and other people’s boundaries.

Summing up the work with the tools, clearly, what has appealed most to the participants is the defined social practices, rather than the more abstract and pervasive sort. The three schools and three preschools visited have *all* chosen to carry out the massage programme as well as the children’s meetings, which are characterised precisely by their delimitation in time and space. Both a children’s meeting and a massage session can be completed in less than an hour, and are obvious ideas for weekly scheduling, possibly supervised by one particular educator, as is the case in virtually every setting. This structuring of the work is harder to pull off with those social practices

that are both more abstract and more pervasive, because they relate to values concerning relationships and social interaction.

Another common denominator of children's meetings and message sessions is that they are both meticulously described in the introductory booklet, and that they are both facilitated by various remedies from the suitcase. In general, the hands-on materials from the Free from Bullying Suitcase have drawn widespread attention, whereas the social practices characterised by cutting across the entire educational process and without attendant tangible tools have featured less prominently. This is presumably because the latter do not catch the eye in the same manner as a suitcase being opened. Instead, these practices require the personnel group to set aside time for thorough discussions and reflections on their pedagogical thinking and practice. This is undoubtedly more demanding, both in terms of time and human resources. However, the question is: can this part be dispensed with, if the aim is to work systematically towards the prevention of bullying? The results of the follow-up research into the Free from Bullying pilot project indicate that such pedagogical reflections are rewarding both in terms of professional awareness and day-to-day practice, which are indeed related in so many ways.

Pedagogical discussions have thus far generally featured minimally in the project work of participant schools and preschools. Whatever deliberations have taken place have primarily focused on the educational work with *the children*, and much less on the staff's *own* role in relation to exclusion and hurtful manners. This is presumably due to the more demanding and potentially more delicate nature of introspection into one's own and the colleagues' influence on patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Once again, however, this begs the question: would it not be beneficial to devote greater attention to this part? The concept of Free from Bullying suggests that this is an important part of preventing bullying, but it appears to be much less developed in the material than the project's other dimensions. Consequently, it is natural to refine and flesh out this aspect of the project, both in the conceptual development driven by Save the Children and in individual institutions making practical use of the material.

When working with pedagogical tools, it's always relevant to ask: which children are being targeted? Which senses, interests and skills do they concern? This entails, on the one hand, an encouragement to reflect on whether the social practices and established tools contribute to including all the children or if they – contrary to the intentions of the project – favour some children above others. As for general changes in educational practice in recent years, the tendency to appeal rather comprehensively to the children's verbalisation of their thoughts, actions, feelings etc. has proved to find its most natural response among children from better-off families and among children who are already linguistically proficient and possess particular types of competence (see, for instance, Bundgaard, Gilliam & Gulløv 2007⁴). In addition to the possibility of social lopsidedness, one may also reflect on whether the pedagogical 'codes', which the children are expected to live up to and conform their actions to, appeal equally to girls and boys, and to different groups of children, depending on their cultural background, age, etc. On the face of it, the recommended and described social practices appeal to a varied spectrum of senses and competence forms. But at the same time, the project suggests that individual institutions and staff groups should select a manageable and realistic number of social practices that seem to fit into the existing routines and pedagogical designs. This may give rise to a tendency to prioritise certain practice categories above others, without necessarily reflecting on the ways in which some of them include

⁴ Bundgaard, Helle; Gilliam, Laura; Gulløv Eva: "*Fra kompetencesyn til kompetencekrav* [From perceiving to demanding competencies], Dansk Pædagogisk Tidsskrift [Danish Pedagogical Journal], no. 1, 2007

and exclude particular (groups of) children. This is not something explicitly addressed in the material. Nor does it seem to have been discussed as a separate issue in any of the involved preschools or schools. Consequently, in addition to focusing more on this in the remaining part of the follow-up research project, the group of researchers can only urge that it be raised more manifestly in the deliberations of individual institutions and staff groups concerning the continued implementation of Free from Bullying.

Free from Bullying is a pilot project aimed at testing, assessing, adjusting and refining a series of pedagogical tools with a view to accumulating experiences of preventing bullying from an early age. At the time of issuing this report, the project is about half-way through, but the remaining period still leaves time to try out new tools, or simply to adjust those already selected. Accordingly, there is an obvious opportunity in individual schools and preschools to pause and take stock of the project work so far. Has the pedagogical work on the social practices achieved the status in the institution that you want it to have? Or does it take up too much or too little space? Is there something in the ways in which you address the social practices that needs to be adjusted? Do you have the courage to try out new social practices, or to prioritise pedagogical discussions? Hopefully, the above descriptions of some of the participant institutions' work on the social practices, along with our reflections on the materials and project activities, will provide inspiration for the efforts ahead to prevent bullying.

Parental involvement in the prevention of bullying

A significant approach of Free from Bullying, both in preschools and schools, is to address the role and participation of parents. The suitcase delivered contains, first and foremost, tools and social practices targeting the work at the institution, but as the foregoing chapter shows, the parents have been considered in the project design as well. This chapter presents the experiences of parental involvement in the institutions visited, the parents' and the staff's views in this regard, as well as the challenges and new prospects for developing this aspect of the project.

The six institutions visited by the research team have accumulated a variety of experiences of parental involvement in Free from Bullying. On a general note, it should be mentioned that the schools have relatively little concrete experience of involving parents in this project in particular, which is partly justified by the late start-up. Nonetheless, the schools have some ideas and views concerning the cooperation with parents, which are not necessarily related to Free from Bullying, but are undoubtedly relevant to stamping out bullying anyway, and which will also be addressed in this chapter. The overall conclusion is that parental involvement in the prevention of bullying has primarily been understood and exercised as a transfer of information from institutions to parents.

Consequently, the experiences recounted here revolve more around what the parents *know* about Free from Bullying, and to a somewhat lesser extent around tried or proposed *acts* of parental involvement. However, creating knowledge of the project among the parents is a precondition for their active participation, and may hence be perceived as the first step towards this goal.

The parents' knowledge of Free from Bullying

Written information

All six institutions have informed the children's parents about the project in writing, either by means of periodical newsletters or as an introduction to the project, for example upon school enrolment. A couple of schools use an intranet, where the parents can write to each other and the children's teachers. There is also a virtual blackboard, which informs about projects and events on the educational schedule. Other institutions give the children traditional letters to bring home to their parents. At one school, several interviewed parents refer to a letter from the school *management* (not from the class teacher or from the school as such), and they do indeed perceive the management's contribution and commitment to the project as decisive. The letter was circulated to the parents of new school starters, and was both about the school generally and about its participation in Free from Bullying.

To a greater degree than the schools, the preschools have close contact to the parents, which typically meet the staff when dropping off and picking up their child. This also means that information about the project generally, and about the daily/weekly activities, can be passed on orally, on a blackboard or in a diary, which records day by day what the children have done in the centre/class. Several places have dedicated a particular blackboard to Free from Bullying. It has also been seen that the staff display the conversation board most recently discussed, writing the minutes of the latest children's meeting next to it. However, the parents rarely react to these measures, says one preschool teacher:

"They have, of course, been informed in writing. Yes, they know that we're working on this, and they can see it on the blackboards of each class whenever we've done something. [...] But it's not like they ask: 'so did

the kids like it?’ [...] Well, they kind of go along with no news being good news. They are actually not very good at asking: ‘so, how did it go?’ I just think they find it alright. That’s how I perceive it, anyway.”

In their newsletters, some institutions have chosen to write, one at a time, the five tips from the folder for the parents, even if the parents have already received the folder itself. This is to remind the parents regularly of how they can play an active role in the prevention effort. The few parents responding to this have all welcomed the initiative.

However, the experience of having been informed in writing varies, depending on whom you ask. While some parents are aware that they have been sent letters from the school – whether or not they have read them – others affirm plainly that they have never received anything in writing, and that they know nothing about the project. This, however, applies only to the parents of children at school, where Free from Bullying had not been running for very long at the time of the interviews. The experience of not having been properly informed may also have to do with the constant stream of other printed material from the school. Furthermore, when there is no close personal contact to the teacher on a daily basis, the written information carries more weight in the combined flow of communication.

The institutions visited vary widely in the effort dedicated to explaining the ideas and thoughts behind Free from Bullying in the written material handed to the parents. Humlebien Preschool Centre circulated a letter, when older and younger children were paired up as buddies, taking the opportunity to set out the underlying philosophy, while also suggesting how the parents could act in relation to the event, for instance, that they could go together with their child to present themselves to the new buddy. Altogether, this institution sets great store by describing its pedagogical practice in writing to the parents. The parents express appreciation of this information, and some express that it is necessary in order to “keep them on their toes.” As can be seen from this quote from Humlebien Preschool Centre’s newsletter from the spring 2007, importance is attributed to involving the parents as much as possible.

“Once again it’s important to stress that you, as parents, have a central role in this project, and we can only succeed in preventing bullying with your active collaboration. This makes it important that you follow the work of the class and talk with the children about it at home.”

Humlebien Preschool Centre’s parents’ committee takes part in this effort, and at the parent-teacher meeting on 11 October, parental responsibility and involvement will be on the agenda, so that all of you get the opportunity to influence the project. We are very keen to get your feedback and listen to your good ideas.”

The newsletter also informs about the institution’s project work, i.e. what exactly is taking place, what the pedagogical thinking behind these activities is, and how the parents can actively and specifically contribute to supporting the endeavour. The staff at Humlebien also explain that, whenever they see any interesting and relevant articles, they make copies and circulate them to the parents.

Oral information and personal contact

All participant institutions have held parent-teacher meetings, explaining the project and sometimes talking about the prevention of bullying more generally. The typical approach at these events is that the staff pass on information to the parents about the project, possibly elaborating on the social practices that they have chosen to work on. In addition, the tips for parents are presented and

perhaps talked about. However, the parents' response varies widely. A majority have been attentive and positive, but few have taken an active part in discussions on the subject.

At Hellerup School, the widely used school intranet channels much of the communication and collaboration, both internally among the parents and between the school and the children's homes. In addition to this, the information about school activities is only provided at formally scheduled meetings.

At Skjoldhøj School, a parent-teacher meeting was held for the parents of all children about to start in reception class after the summer holiday. At this major gathering, Free from Bullying was introduced, and the parents had to massage each other according to the instructions of the tactile massage programme. This seems to have been a success, because it physically involved the parents, who still remember the event as amusing and constructive. In another institution, the parents learned about the massage when two preschool teachers demonstrated it on each other

Several parents express satisfaction with the presentations made by researchers from Roskilde University at some of the meetings. These occasions have made them more aware of new aspects of the issue of bullying, including their own role in preventing it. A couple of parents stress that it has opened their eyes to how those children that are not directly involved can make a major contribution, and how the parents' way of talking about others may also exert great influence.

Other information channels

In particular in the area of Vonsild in the town of Kolding, as well as in the vicinity of Skjoldhøj School in the town of Aarhus, the local press has been a channel through which the parents have felt updated about the project, obviously from a perspective that is entirely different from what they hear from their children's institutions. Watching, reading and hearing – in the papers and on television – about the project, in which their own children participate, has boosted their commitment and sense of ownership of the initiative. Some also comment that it was important and enjoyable to read how other municipalities had also joined in

An important information channel for a number of parents of schoolchildren has been the preschool, because their children have gone straight from one of the preschools taking part in the pilot project to the school nearby. This direct connection between school and preschool seems to have been favourable for the parents' knowledge and sense of ownership of Free from Bullying.

The last information channel to be mentioned is the children themselves. However, what children tell their parents at home varies widely. While some are used to expanding on what they do at school, others are completely tight-lipped – of their own accord. In this regard, it is up to the parents to probe more deeply, which obviously requires some knowledge of what to ask about. There is a tendency among many parents being interviewed to apologise for not being able to say more about the specifics of the project, which may stem partly from their children being somewhat uncommunicative. For instance, one mother says:

“We’re not exactly world champions in information in our home. Unless you really squeeze it out of her.”

Naturally, it may also be related to the parents' busy lives, where some things simply go in one ear and out the other. This is the impression one gets from the following quote from an interview with a father.

Interviewer: *“Has the school sent out some material about the project?”*

Father: *“Well, yes, they probably have, sometimes things come in. I think the school is generally quite good at distributing information, so I’d be very surprised if... But it’s not something I can really kind of...”*

Interviewer: *“Has she [your daughter] talked about how they’ve worked on certain things in class?”*

Father: *“Yes, she has.”*

Interviewer: *“What have they worked on then?”*

Father: *“But I’m one of those parents who don’t always hear what their kids say, so what it is specifically, well, I don’t know, I don’t recall.”*

Role of the parents’ committee

All the institutions have some form of parental committee, both at the level of the entire school/preschool and for each class (so-called contact parents). However, it is far from all these entities that have placed Free from Bullying on the agenda.

Nevertheless, the management of Humlebien Preschool Centre, in the Copenhagen suburb of Gentofte, has taken the initiative to convene a discussion within the parents’ committee about language. How do people talk to each other in a preschool centre? How does the language work to exclude or include? In continuation of these talks by the parents’ committee, it was suggested that the members should raise the issue at parent-teacher meetings for individual classes.

At Hellerup School, parental involvement in Free from Bullying has consisted in informing the parents at a board meeting. The rest of the parents have received letters, and have been invited to a meeting attended by Dorthe Rasmussen (former employee of Save the Children). At this school, the parents taking part in board work express both greater knowledge and ownership of the project than the other parents. One interviewed father with a seat on the school board explains that he has access to a great deal of information through this channel, and that he generally feels very up-to-date thanks to his position. He also finds that this makes him partly responsible for placing such issues on the agenda, and he has, for instance, contributed to preparing a meeting with an anti-bullying consultant at the school:

“I feel very well informed. Both as contact parent and as board member, you gain access to more information, and you hear things more times than others, perhaps being partly responsible for raising the issue. So I think this is fine. [...] I’ve even taken part in organising a meeting with a Mrs. Anti-Bullying.”

At another school, however, the opposite is expressed. Here, the parents on boards and committees are no more informed or committed than the other parents. This shows that the project has not been addressed at committee/board level in every setting.

Materials to involve the parents in Free from Bullying

The tools found in the Free from Bullying Suitcase are first and foremost intended for the work at the institution. The exception is the **parental folder** with tips on how the parents may help prevent bullying. As mentioned, this small leaflet has been handed out to parents in all institutions, albeit in different manners and on different occasions. The general view among the staff is that there should be an occasion (such as a parent-teacher meeting), where the folder is distributed. Some places have merely left it in the children’s classroom, but have noticed that the parents ignore it. Others have, as

mentioned above, chosen to publish one tip at a time in the periodical newsletters to parents in order to remind them.

In general, the parents have welcomed the advice, which also appears to have 'borne fruit' in most places. For example, the staff have noticed that invitations to play at home are now extended to a greater variety of peers than previously.

"A lot of parents come and ask: 'is there someone now that you think would feel good about being invited home to play with my child'? And: 'is there someone we can help to settle in?' [...] In this sense, they've been superb at kind of watching out and mustering the courage, and of course also feeling a little responsible for their own son or daughter contributing to others feeling good within the group of children."

Another material that is not necessarily *solely* for the work within the institutions is the **pixie books**. At one place, the children have been handed a book each to take home before the holiday. In the youngest group, the preschool teachers made a point of describing in the diary what kind of book it was, encouraging the parents to read it several times with their children, and also to dedicate time to talk about the issues raised in it. They have experienced a positive response from the parents about the children appreciating the book and taking good care of it, and about it being assiduously read. This indicates the great significance of *how* the various measures are introduced to the parents. When the pedagogical thinking behind a tool is shared with them, they seem to better understand the importance of their own role, and it also becomes easier for them to give feedback.

The massage programme is not, in principle, intended for the parents, but in a couple of institutions, parent-teacher meetings have been used to either let the parents massage each other, or to show them how it is performed. The fact that the parents have given and received tactile massage themselves, thus sensing one of the concrete tools on their own backs, makes it easier for them to remember what the project is about, and it may possibly have helped stir the parents' commitment. In addition, presumably the philosophy behind the massage ('the one you touch, you don't bully') also applies to the parents, with the intention of laying the groundwork for a positive parental community in the future classes.

Another tool from the suitcase, the **big teddy bear**, has also been used in some places to involve the parents. Several institutions have made it a 'visiting bear', who follows another child home every weekend. In one reception class in the town of Aarhus, the bear carries a suitcase with a memory card game, which the parents are encouraged to play with the children. The reception-class teacher explains:

"Yes, the big bear is taken home by a child every Friday. Look what we've got (she walks over to show a placard on the wall). These are the names of all the children. Then we have a small teddy bear here, which is placed next to the name of the child about to have the bear, to make sure they take turns, to enable them to know when it's their turn to take the bear home on Friday. The bear has a small suitcase, in which it's carried back and forth. Then the idea is that, come Monday morning, they tell us where they have been visiting. I've actually made a point of making the children tell us about who else is living with them. This also helps them get to know each other. So, how is it in Maya's home? And then they obviously tell us about what the bear has been up to, but also typically a lot about their family. And then the teddy bear actually brings a game with it, the deck of flip cards intended for the buddy bear and the family to play together. The cards show

pictures of children from this class. [...] And then the names of the children are written underneath, too, which surely makes for a winning hand, right? And it could well give the parents greater insights into who the other children in the class are. [...] Because very often, when they enter reception class, there are so many new classmates. Usually, if you are a boy starting at school, you first learn all the other boys' names, perhaps not those of the girls. (Shows the flip-card game). The object is to find two of the same. It's an opportunity to talk about this boy and that girl. So it brings a part of the school to the child's home, and a part of the child's home into the school."

The reception-class teacher also explains that she asks the children if they have actually played the game with the parents, and the response is always positive.

As the last tool from the suitcase to involve the parents, there are the **post cards showing the pictures from the conversation boards**. No particular use has been prescribed for the postcards, but it has occurred to one preschool centre to hand them to the parents after using the same picture at a children's meeting. This encourages the children to talk about their gathering at home, thus enabling the discussion to carry on within the family, which is indeed what has happened.

In this regard, several parents have given feedback to the centre, declaring their contentment with gaining insights into the day-to-day life of the children in this distinctive, illustrative fashion. Some parents have also expressed a wish to receive the specific questions written on the back of the conversation board to be able to inquire about what goes on in the pictures on the postcards. This has become relevant, because many children have had problems remembering what was discussed at the meetings in the centre.

Other measures and ideas for parental involvement

Thus far, we have set out which materials from Save the Children's suitcase have involved the parents. However, the schools and preschools already have a variety of other experiences of the parents' participation. This section describes a series of measures practised in all six institutions visited, and may thus be read as an experience archive or catalogue of ideas for others.

Playdates

It is hardly a novelty for parents or preschool teachers that children may visit each other's homes to play together, but for some parents, the educators' advice to invite a wider array of peers (i.e. not always the same 'best friends') has given rise to renewed reflection on this topic. In some preschool centres, telephone lists have been drawn up for the parents with this in mind, thus enabling them to call at weekends and at night as well to make appointments to play. Meanwhile, Smilehullet Preschool Centre has set up a large board where parents can add + or – next to their child's name to indicate whether he/she is allowed to go with others home to play on individual weekdays. This facilitates the work to organise the playdates for the centre's teachers and parents alike.

Learning all the children's names and greeting everyone

Humblebien Preschool Centre has focused on the parents actively learning the names of all their child's classmates. This came about when the personnel discussed the development of a wellness policy, which was also to encompass the role of parents. Here, it was stressed how important it is that a parent greets everyone, and not just the child's main teachers, friends and friends' parents. This serves to signal to the children that not just the closest friends are significant and valuable, but that everyone is worth devoting attention to.

Memory game

Based on the same idea that all the parents should know the names of all the children, one reception class at Skjoldhøj School has produced a flip-card memory game, with cards showing the pictures and names of all the children in the class. When the big teddy bear visits a child during a weekend, this game is found inside the bear's suitcase, and the parents are encouraged to play it with the children (as described above).

Postcards for school starters

At Hellerup School, as part of a scheme in which next year's class 3 children were to befriend next year's reception-class children, the older pupils sent postcards to their young 'buddies' prior to school start. Here, a teacher reveals how it went:

"Before the small children started here, our current class 3 pupils were assigned one buddy each, and then they received a postcard to send to their buddy, writing things like: 'Looking forward to seeing you. I tell you, it's a great school you're going to. I look forward to meeting you and getting to know you.' It almost brought you to tears to read it. And this was sent home to the future school starters with lots of other material, in addition to all the stuff on practical concerns."

This is an initiative that directly involves the parents, who will obviously read the postcard for their child, thus gaining knowledge of the school from a perspective that is different from that of the information material also circulated by the school.

'Old' parents inform 'new' parents

Humblebien Preschool Centre has discovered the value of letting parents inform other parents. It started off with the idea of letting the parents of children with some years at the centre welcome the parents of newcomers, but soon turned the spotlight on communication channels more generally. The preschool teachers have observed that the parents are more attentive, show greater interest and listen better when another parent tells them about something than when the centre staff is talking:

"And I do believe that, no matter how good the cooperation with the parents is, then there's some kind of barrier between being a preschool teacher and being a parent. When we talk, some will perceive it as, 'oh, there goes another one, wagging her finger', and for others it's just kind of something that goes in one ear and out the other. It may sound alright, but soon after it's forgotten, because it's onto something else. And here, I think it has a different effect if parents are allowed to discuss among themselves. They are also in the best position to decide: 'how much time can we devote to this?' They know what it's like to be on the other side, they know what the score is at home."

At one parent-teacher meeting, a mother with a child in the oldest and another in the youngest group of preschool children proved highly capable of conveying her experiences of the project to the parents of the youngest children. It worked well, and her contributions gave rise to a fruitful discussion. One preschool teacher elaborates:

"We are lucky to have a mother and father who also have a child in the older group, that is, they've been through what we do with the younger kids some years before. And I had told them that I'd be happy if they were the ones to present it [the folder with tips for the parents] rather than me, since I'm not a parent here. And they had already had lots of experience in this regard. So they went through the folder, and presented the ideas and the mishaps that had occurred to them throughout, that is, the mistakes that they made without realising it at the time. And they were quite frank and humble, I thought. It kind of made it okay that, of course, we're not perfect, sometimes we do things that haven't really been thought through, stuff like

‘shopping’ for friends, and this habit of arriving every morning, addressing the same child without even noticing the others.”

Contact parents

“The contact parents hold a short preliminary meeting with the teachers or preschool teachers before the parent-teacher meetings to find out if they have some concerns to pass on from other parents, even if the general rule is that parents should go directly to the teacher, if they think there is a particular problem with one or several children.”

This quote is from a parent who explains how the system of contacts parents works in connection with parent-teacher meetings. It seems to indicate that the parents are good at collaborating concerning the children’s wellbeing, both formally and informally. It shows, on the one hand, that the parents work together among themselves *outside* the school, and, on the other, that the *structure* enables constructive cooperation between the staff and the parents.

Conversations with individual parents

One reception-class teacher explains that, in the individual school-home conversations, she talks to the parents about how they may specifically support the class’s social life.

“I think that it [prevention of bullying] is up to both the school and the parents. One of the issues I discuss a lot during the home-school conversations, which is when I get to talk to one couple of parents at a time, is actually the social life in the class, what I think they could do, and what I think that we can do here at the school. Because sometimes parents just don’t think about their own responsibility. They don’t mean to do any harm, they just rarely think about it.”

The reception-class teacher is not talking specifically about parental involvement in Free from Bullying, but about the parents’ commitment to all the children’s wellbeing more generally, which is independent of, yet highly relevant to, Free from Bullying. When a class teacher addresses the class’s social life – i.e. the welfare of all the children – in conversations with parents of individual children, each parent couple is reminded that their own child’s happiness is set within a wider context, in which all the children count.

Events for parents

Most of the institutions, but especially the schools, have positive experiences of holding various events attended and sometimes even prepared by the parents. The youngest classes at Hellerup School have organised dinner groups of 5-6 children each, who take turns to eat at each other’s place. Thus, the parents get together as well, and typically – according to one enthusiastic father – end up talking until late in the evening, because they “had a real blast together”, as he puts it.

In addition, there are tales of class excursions with accommodation, which also include parents, there are traditional summer and Christmas parties, and one school has formed ‘mothers’ groups’, where, as the name indicates, only mothers meet up to talk about the children’s wellbeing in the class, among other topics. In general, the parents appreciate such events and initiatives, and several interviewees express interest in being in charge of future initiatives, thus continuing to develop a good atmosphere among the parents, without necessarily making the school responsible for the organisation.

The significance of good parent-teacher cooperation

By all accounts, the way in which the parents in a class or preschool centre function together socially greatly influences the effort to prevent bullying. The numerous interviews with parents and staff show that the social atmosphere among the parents is attributed great significance for the children's frame of mind.

One parent being interviewed gives the example of a group of girls in a class, which was plagued by intrigues and harmful patterns of exclusion. After a while, the problem was raised by the parents of these children. The ensuing debate clearly illustrated that the self-same pattern was being played out among the girls' mothers. This point is echoed by a student-behaviour, child-welfare and special-needs counsellor (attached to many schools in Denmark, where the position is known as 'AKT counsellor'), who has longstanding experience of improving the social life of school classes. A father recounts how a boy displaying physically rough conduct managed to split the parents of the entire class into two camps, who argued for a long time about whether to sympathise with the boy or feeling sorry for the other children in the class. Thus, several cases are reported in which divisiveness and a poor atmosphere within a group of children is reflected in the parents' inability to get along. Conversely, the interviews with parents also bring up myriad examples of how the parental interaction works marvellously, and how this has rubbed off on the children's social life. There is widespread agreement that how the parents relate to each other in a class is important to the children's wellbeing. One father recalls how it was explained at the school:

"They told us why it's important that the parents, from the very beginning, get into some good routines and friendly relations with each other. We have this set-up of contact parents, who meet a couple of times a year, and then there is an occasion for all contact parents to meet, from all over the school."

As the quote shows, this school also has a set-up for parental cooperation that spans the individual classes. Thus, contact parents also gains insight into the quality of social life in other classes than their own child's.

The rationale behind parental cohesion is highlighted by many. For instance, it is much easier for the parents to cope with conflicts emerging between the children when they know each other and have a good rapport. Many say that it is easier to "*just call and hear what's up*", when the person at the other end is not a complete stranger. In addition, the sense of responsibility for other children's wellbeing is conceivably greater when there is a personal connection to them and their parents.

Barriers to genuine parental involvement: future challenges

From the numerous interviews with parents and staff at schools and preschools, a series of issues or challenges emerge for active parental involvement – through cooperation among equals – in the project Free from Bullying. These are examined below, divided into four topics, albeit overlapping or closely related.

The professional and the private: two separate spheres?

The parents' and the personnel's understanding of parental involvement is a vital part of the anti-bullying effort. Virtually all interviewees find it useful to bring the parents (more) into play, strengthening their commitment to the cause. In the following quote, a mother explains why she is keen on the parents joining in.

Mother: *“I think it’s great that this information is also circulated among the parents, it’s great that it’s published.”*

Interviewer: *“So you think the parents should be actively involved in the effort against bullying?”*

Mother *“I believe that, if we’re to raise awareness and stamp out this thing, the only way is to reflect on it, to talk about what it really is. So I think it’s good, yes, to a certain limit, of course, that we parents are involved in it. Without our support from behind, it’s unlikely to make much impact [...]. If it comes to the point where a child is being bullied, that you become aware that bullying is taking place at a school, and the school itself cannot cope with it reasonably well [...], then I clearly believe that the parents ought to get involved.”*

The mother quoted expresses the importance of parental involvement, but she also qualifies this view by saying that the parents should only enter the picture when the school is not up to the task. As researchers, we see such a statement as contradictory, but to some extent also characteristic of the parental commitment. It is a stance that pervades most interviews with parents, and poses a dilemma, a built-in conflict and a challenge for this project.

However, the interviews also show that the parents do accept a high degree of responsibility for bullying and its prevention. They see their primary area of intervention as within the sphere of family life, making sure that their children have been properly educated at home. Most parents express that it is incumbent on them to talk with their children about what goes on at school, how they are doing, if they are being teased, and how people can get along. The parents and the home may be contrasted with the institution and the other children, which is where their sense of responsibility often seems to end. This could be conceived as a kind of mental barrier to school-home collaboration. As long as the parents’ sense of responsibility and commitment is almost exclusively confined to the private sphere, it may be difficult to create genuine parental involvement in the institutions’ work. In other words, this project faces the challenge of moving the parental involvement more *into the school’s sphere*, and to get the sense of responsibility to focus more on the *community of children as a whole*, including the wellbeing of other people’s children.

Information and one-way communication versus discussion and genuine participation

The quote below, spoken by the mother of a schoolchild, is to some degree symptomatic of the effort to involve parents in relation to Free from Bullying.

“I’m doing this interview, because I’d like to get involved. I don’t think they have done so much to get us involved, but of course, it’s also our own responsibility as parents to say that we’d like to take part in this.”

Many parents – such as this mother – would like to get actively involved, but request more information and knowledge about the project, as well as more specific ideas and encouragement to join in. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, knowledge of the project can be conceived as a precondition for genuine parental involvement. Nevertheless, the overall picture emerging from the interviews is that the participation is widely perceived and practised – by parents as well as professionals – as only or primarily about *information*. Both the type and intensity of parental involvement is associated with the act of informing the parents. For example, many parents express a wish to be informed more at any time, even outside the scheduled meetings, while others affirm that they are happy for the information about the school’s activities being delivered only on these prescheduled occasions, and that they are not interested in getting more involved than that. The following quote shows how the view of the school as duty-bound to inform what it knows has become almost natural to parents:

“Well, of course, we can always just ask how it’s going, but as I told you, there have been two evening meetings here at the school, where the parents of the preschool and the school have been gathered. I didn’t go to the last one. But we could have another as follow-up to let the parents know more about it.”

Thus, to put it somewhat crudely, in practice, parental involvement boils down to *one-way communication* from the personnel – as holders of knowledge about theory and practice – to the parents, who feature as more or less passive recipients. While a few institutions express regret about this one-sided type of commitment, calling for more active participation from the parents in the interviews, others seem not to have considered the possibility that this could be any other way. In our opinion as researchers, this perception serves to inhibit genuine parental involvement.

“We raise it when it becomes relevant”

When we, the authors of this report, have inquired about practices regarding parent-teacher meetings, we have noticed that bullying (or related subjects) is not necessarily raised as a separate discussion at the general level. Instead, the interviews reveal that some perceive it as a subject to be raised only “if it becomes relevant”, i.e. if bullying or bullying-like behaviour occurs within the class or group of children. This approach may stem from the lack of tradition of parental discussion within this forum, from a large number of other subjects to be talked through, or from the educational staff finding it difficult to place it on the agenda. However, in our view, it would be a wise investment to address this topic in general terms before it may some day become concrete and personal.

From abstract conversation to specific action

However, parental involvement and commitment is not just a question of information versus discussion. Yes, discussions are important, and may be highly rewarding, but *in isolation*, they make little difference to day-to-day educational practice. They must also be translated into something tangible. Even where the parents do take part in discussions, it tends to remain at the overall abstract level, says one preschool teacher, who also expresses her wish for more proposals for specific action from the parents:

“Unfortunately, it may still have passed many parents by. They tend to forget it in their busy everyday lives, and this is where the great challenge is right now. To get them a little more involved. Because I also asked them what they’d like to do for it, and what kind of initiatives we could take to get them more involved. And they quite simply cannot answer that. It’s very difficult for them.”

“When we sit at those meetings, they’d like to discuss it, and they may say a lot of fine words, but this thing about getting it under the skin, that’s the tough part. Parents don’t know what they could do specifically to back the project, so they often keep it to those words.”

To get the project ‘under the skin’ refers to assuming a sense of ownership of the project. This is relevant, since the parents’ sense of ownership seems to influence the project’s effects and anchorage. The quote indicates that only when the ownership is solidly placed can the involvement and commitment begin in earnest (at an active level). The formulation that “they often keep it to those words” may also reflect the prevalence of certain impotence. The preschool teachers would like to pass on the initiative, not having to be always the active ones. They want to see the parents contribute with initiatives and measures, in which the parental role is not just self-interpreted at an abstract level. In our view as researchers, it is, however, necessary that the institutions create a ‘space’ that facilitates the parents’ active participation, enabling them to become more proactive and contributory.

The following quote from an interview illustrates that there is indeed a real parental wish to play a more clearly defined part in the prevention of bullying, but that this role is difficult to flesh out.

“I think it’s good that it’s presented to show us that you can make a difference as a parent. It’s fine that it’s not just something taking place on the children’s plane, but that we parents are also involved and sort of, in some way or another, can contribute something in relation to it.”

“Well, I don’t think I’m quite specifically or personally involved in it, yet still a little bit in the sense of what I’d like to pass on to my children, what I’d like them to take onboard, about how one should relate to other people. So in some way or another, yes, it’s terrific that it kind of becomes concrete with those five pieces of advice about it. That it becomes explicit how we parents may in fact also do something to help the kids get along.”

Between the lines, one may read a wish to see the institution define the scope for action that makes the parental role both comprehensible and tangible. In other words, it is up to the professionals to create the framework for both parties participating on equal terms. Developing this part of the project is perceived by us as a major challenge, not least for Save the Children’s efforts ahead to develop and refine the Free of Bullying material.

Organisation and ownership

In order to follow and understand the pilot project Free from Bullying, how it has been carried out, and how it is assessed by the various parties involved, this paper will take two approaches to looking at its making. We shall follow the project's evolution along a vertical as well as a horizontal axis.

The **vertical** axis traces, in this connection, the project's movement 'from the top down', i.e. from the project concept devised under the auspices of Save the Children, through the involvement of the three municipalities with the subsequent selection of participant preschools and schools, to the concrete management of the project's substance and objectives. Here, the guiding question is how the process of transformation and transmission has proceeded, and not least how it is perceived and assessed by the various (categories of) stakeholders in the overall project organisation.

In continuation of this, the **horizontal** axis focuses more specifically on how the pilot project has been implemented in the individual institution, examining more closely who seems to have been involved in what ways, ranging from the schools' and preschools' management teams, through the originally appointed coordinators, other graduate and non-graduate educational personnel, to parents and parents' committees.

Throughout the exposition, whether the project process be scanned vertically or horizontally, the various participants' sense of ownership will be construed as a key expression of the informants' assessment of the project's relevance to themselves, how they have taken its objectives onboard, and what is their own position in, and identification with, the project.

Free from Bullying: from concept through initiative to project design

There appears to be widespread agreement among all interviewees that the project, at its point of inception, can be said to belong to Save the Children. Some elaborate on this by indicating that the original concept was associated with the secretary-general of Save the Children Denmark (and well-known former politician), Mrs. Mimi Jakobsen, and with Crown Princess Mary. The combination of the princess's special interest in school projects against bullying in her country of origin, Australia, and Save the Children's wish to launch a project in Denmark within this field, laid the groundwork for an originally joint effort to conceive of an early intervention against bullying inspired by some of the Australian experiences.

This idea was transformed into an actual initiative through the establishment of a **steering group** for the project Free from Bullying. This entity was tasked with shaping and fleshing out a project design based on the original ideas. The steering group members were appointed by Save the Children, comprising, in addition to Mrs. Jakobsen and Crown Princess Mary, a series of Save the Children representatives, bullying specialists, educational researchers, businesspeople, communicators, municipal policy-makers, etc.

In the effort to turn the original ideas and intentions into a concrete, feasible pilot project, it was decided, at an early stage of the process, to involve three selected municipalities. Furthermore, already at this point, it was decided that, within each municipality, one school should participate

along with two day-care centres in its proximity, selecting the latter two, to the extent possible, for their ‘delivery’ of children to the school concerned.

The municipalities of Gentofte (within Greater Copenhagen), Kolding and Aarhus were chosen for representing a wide array of socio-geographical and demographic realities, as well as for their interest in taking part in the project.

Having identified the project participants, prepared the project description and produced the pedagogical material in the form of a suitcase, and after the official launch of the pilot project, the original steering group was dissolved. Instead, for the exchange between Save the Children, the municipalities and institutions involved, a **coordination group** was set up, which gradually took over the pilot project management. At the same time, a **presidium** was formed under the aegis of Save the Children, which – in addition to people from this organisation’s Danish chapter and Crown Princess Mary – was composed of representatives of the business and foundations communities. Since then, the presidium has served as the overarching body, dealing with the financial underpinnings of Free from Bullying as a Save the Children initiative, while also devoting its efforts to Save the Children’s ongoing and long-term strategy as regards its involvement in, and the future prospects of, Free from Bullying.

This paper will not go into details about the organisational restructuring of the management of Free from Bullying, but shall merely point out that, during the project’s inception phase, several institutions and some municipal civil servants went through some doubt as to who was in charge of the particular design and immediate start-up of the project. Since the original steering group had been closed down, and the newly-established presidium did not specifically address the pilot project’s management, it mainly fell to the – also recently formed – coordination group to take a stance on the pilot project’s organisation and implementation. However, unlike the original steering group, the coordination group was not endowed with an actual mandate for management decision, beyond coordinating the work. For a period, this seems to have given rise to uncertainty among several participants as to where and with whom the initiative and decision-making processes were situated. Thus, until the pilot project had made a real impact and taken on ‘a life of its own’ in the municipalities involved, the effort was seen to be shrouded in doubt over who was calling the shots regarding concrete measures and overall management. As the coordination group – over the course of some months – came to be identified as more than just a coordinating body, more clearly performing a management function in charge of continued project development, this vagueness seemed to be overcome.

In the effort to systematise and assess some of the experiences subsequently gained during the implementation of Free from Bullying in individual institutions in the three municipalities, it may be more appropriate, at the outset, to conceive of *three different types of implementation* associated with the three municipalities’ diverse approaches to handling their involvement in the project. The way in which the pilot project is established and embedded varies from one municipality to another, which partly hinges on how the municipal work with young people and children is organised and structured, i.e. the exact administrative unit in charge of it, the job descriptions of senior civil servants to which the project workers report, etc. We shall provide a brief and far from exhaustive outline attempting to describe the three different ways in which the project is embedded at the municipal level.

The first type can be categorised as ‘well-organised central management’. Here, the municipality has taken the project to heart with great commitment. The project Free from Bullying has become embedded in some of the organisational set-ups that were already in place within the municipality, while the local politicians and administrators concur in deeming the project to be of high priority and solidly rooted in the municipal management practice. There seems to be clarity regarding the division of responsibilities and channels of communication with a view to keeping up the municipal involvement in the project. Explicit agreements lay down how and under whose watch the ongoing contact to participant institutions is ensured. Here, the participant preschools and schools have been designated. From the viewpoint of the municipal administration, this has taken place against the background of some professional considerations and negotiations with the institutions concerned, although some representatives of the institutions express that they were offered no chance to reach their own conclusions as to the desirability of joining such a project at that particular point in time.

Interestingly, the assessment of whether it is opportune to enter a project such as Free from Bullying depends on the perspective from which it is viewed. The municipal administration and political level are notoriously positive, since the project’s contents and normative foundation are in keeping with existing municipal efforts towards enhancing the quality of a preventative and wellness-oriented approach to the work with young people and children. Furthermore, the project’s combined focus on the day-care centres and early school years is well-suited to a former restructuring of the municipal administration concerned aimed at bringing together the work with young people and children. Conversely, the institutions see the intensity of participation in various initiatives as an exhausting factor. They express concern over a certain ‘overheating’ as regards involvement in more projects. Thus, although the municipal centre conveys an experience of common interest and, to a certain degree, of joint setting of priorities, the institutions selected for participation do not fully share this appreciation.

The second type of implementation will be labelled as ‘driven by committed local activists’. This is the case of a municipality almost in the midst of restructuring the organisational set-up of its work with young people and children. Thus, when the project was first launched, there was some uncertainty at the administrative level as to how and with whom the project was to be anchored within the municipality. As the project began, both at the political and the administrative level it was less than evident who was carrying the baton, and not least how the various administrative areas were to be coordinated specifically in relation to Free from Bullying. Accordingly, in this municipality, it takes some time before the relevant parties to the project’s administration and implementation feel involved on a transparent foundation. Meanwhile, however, the participant institutions have committed themselves rather actively at the local level, taking their own initiatives as regards coordination and exchanges between preschool and school. Here, the institutions are also ‘designated’, but unlike the first municipality, where this was experienced as adding to the workload, in this case, it is rather seen and assumed as a constructive and fortunate ‘selection’. On the one hand, the involved institutions highlight some valuable and exciting experiences, which are perceived as a key side benefit of participating in the pilot project. On the other, especially in the beginning, there is some disappointment over the lack of active backing from the municipality.

The third type of implementation could be classified as ‘relying on professional mechanisms’. As in the first case, the pilot project ties in well with the municipality’s established policy. An organisational practice has evolved in the municipality, which takes charge of this undertaking as well. Some institutions are approached, which subsequently express having had the opportunity to accept or decline their participation in the project. As in the case of the first municipality, the

administrative level affirms that quite a clear understanding and practice were in place from the outset as to who was responsible for what areas, and how the ongoing coordination, exchange and decision-making processes were to proceed, both within the municipal administration and in its dealings with each school and preschool. Both the institutions and the administrative staff involved affirm that their cooperation has given rise to a positive experience. The administrative level is attributed a high degree of commitment, responsibility and initiative. This has contributed to a shared assessment that this is a project of priority and significance, and which counts on the practical backing of the municipality.

Ownership transformation

The above brief – and obviously crude and simplistic – characterisations of three rather dissimilar implementation processes do not purport to establish a value judgement about appropriate versus inappropriate ways of handling an educational development project. The point is merely to highlight that a project's fate does not hinge solely on the quality of the concept and the pedagogical intentions, but is also fundamentally shaped and determined by the pre-established arrangements in force within the municipal administration and individual institutions at the exact time when the processes are unleashed. Obviously, this will also bear on whether a project ends up making an actual impact or not. Interestingly, however, although the work in each municipality has clearly marched to the beat of different drums, given the particular circumstances of the municipalities and institutions, it has been expressed across the board that Free from Bullying as a pilot project has gradually taken root in the local administrations as well as in the schools and preschools.

If this is seen as reflecting how the ownership of the project is perceived among the various parties, i.e. municipalities and institutions, there is a strikingly uniform assessment of how it has evolved in a gradual process of change. Thus, everyone expresses that, initially, the ownership was that of Save the Children, but that it has now taken root in individual municipalities as well as schools and preschools. Another interesting aspect in this connection is that virtually all interviewees, regardless of their position in the municipal hierarchy, portray this not as the ownership moving from one place to another, but rather as it being 'distributed'. What this means is that Save the Children is no longer the *sole* owner, but shares this status with municipal politicians, municipal administrative staff *and* the participant preschools and schools. Rather than being about *transfer of ownership* from one actor to another, or from one level to another, one may talk about *the ownership being spread out or multiplied*, so that all parties involved currently express a sense of ownership of the pilot project and of the continued development of Free from Bullying. This seems to denote a remarkably positive process, in which participation and commitment have followed a steady upward trend.

The project's implementation in individual institutions

The introduction to this section mentioned that the other perspective on the project's implementation and anchorage moves along the so-called 'horizontal axis'. This is about how individual institutions have managed their project participation. In other words, how concrete ownership of the undertaking is perceived by each school and preschool. While the staff groups tend to share the view that their institution as such is a co-owner, this is not tantamount to every person within each preschool or school feeling a 'collective' ownership. Indeed, most interviewees are of the view that the originally designated/selected/volunteering coordinator remains the driving force behind the project's continued existence in the institution concerned. In general, the interviewees express common support for the project, and hence for those staff members who have

taken on particular responsibility for its implementation. Only to some extent does it seem that the sense of ownership has been spread to such a degree that the entire staff – or the relevant part – feel a corresponding co-responsibility.

In some institutions, this seems to stem from uneven distribution of information and knowledge about the project in the details required for participation on an equal footing. One source of this ‘monopolisation’ of knowledge by a few individuals in each institution is likely to be the way in which the instructor courses are organised, as these have indeed been attended by just a couple of staff members from each institution. Following that, there are clear indications of obstacles or challenges standing in the way of genuine sharing of information and knowledge within each preschool or school with a view to establishing a collective and active level of involvement. On the other hand, this does not seem to hinge *solely* on the dissemination of information, but just as much on the question of whether each institution succeeds in establishing a collective organisation of exchanges, discussions and planning of the ongoing work with Free from Bullying. As it appears, this is the case in the participant institutions to a limited degree only.

Organisation of the parental involvement

It is generally pointed out that the involvement of parents and the experience of parental ownership of the project is a weak link in the entire implementation chain. In this regard, no clear or systematic discrepancies show up between the three municipalities. Indeed, there is a striking resemblance in the interviewees’ formulations of this as a central problem, or in a positive sense as a key challenge on the road ahead. This concern about parental involvement is common to all three municipalities, and also appears to trouble the political, administrative and institutional level alike. As previously discussed, the various municipalities and institutions have previously gained their own particular experiences of concrete measures in this field, but more overall and systematic planning of the effort to involve parents still seems to be found wanting. As it appears, the issue features more as a point on the agenda than as something to be carried out.

Anchorage of Free from Bullying: a long-term perspective

Another theme that seems to pose a pressing challenge across the three municipalities, and at the level of both municipal administrations and educational institutions, is the clarification of the ways in which the pilot project and its fundamental principles are to take root in the long run. Some preliminary thoughts on the matter seem to be occurring at the political and administrative level of the municipalities. In general, there is a wish that some of the basic intentions of Free from Bullying may constitute a fruitful contribution to the municipalities’ future preschool and school policies. Three dimensions are consistently reflected upon in all three municipalities.

- 1) There is no hurry to take a stance until the pilot project has been completed, and there has been a chance to gather and systematise the pros and cons experienced in the work at the administrative as well as the institutional level.
- 2) There is generally a cautious approach in deciding the extent to which the fight against bullying should be the subject of a ‘bullying policy’ prescribed by the central municipal authority. It is considered preferable to present any useful experiences from the pilot project as inspiration to the other institutions in the municipality, rather than as particular impositions to work in specific ways according to one particular model.

- 3) There is talk of involving the participant institutions and their representatives as a sort of ‘ambassadors’ in any future municipal initiative to propagate the ideas to other local preschools and schools.

Cross-cutting considerations regarding the importance of organisational set-up and implementation modality

Finally, two issues must be raised and briefly dealt with in view of the systematisation of experiences as well as the organisation and implementation of Free from Bullying thus far.

Firstly, it is remarkable how all participant municipalities make a positive evaluation of the coordination and cooperation between the three. In the institutions, and not least in the municipal administrations, many highlight this as a particularly constructive element in this project. Several people also mention the imminent job-swap scheme between staff members of the three municipalities as an expression of an exceedingly positive and constructive cooperative spirit among the municipalities involved. Furthermore, the continuous gatherings, such as the so-called ‘relay meetings’ (taking turns to host the event) and one-day conferences across the municipalities are also praised as a great opportunity to exchange experiences, learn from each other, and get good ideas and inspiration for the ongoing project work. This is expressed by preschool and school teachers as well as by municipal administrative staff.

Secondly, it is interesting to note that not least the administrations in all three municipalities express general enthusiasm that this project – with its involvement of day-care centres as well as early school years – holds the potential to place the spotlight on the meaning of ‘transitions’, i.e. in the children’s institutional attendance and lives generally. Thus, the municipal civil servants in particular recognise the meaning of the processes, transfers, coordination and exchanges taking place between preschool and school, seeing them as important in the concrete fight against bullying. However, it is also highlighted by many that the focus on transitions is vital in order to enhance competencies in the work with young people and children in general.

Nevertheless, the researchers are under the impression that, although individual institutions have addressed this issue differently, they have all done so in few ways and to a *limited extent*. Furthermore, it is striking that this dimension has not been systematically dealt with in the programme and written material of Free from Bullying.

Conclusion

The intention of this 2nd report has been, as in the case of the 1st report, to paint a picture of how Free from Bullying is being implemented and developed on the ground in the three municipalities selected for participation in the pilot project. The empirical underpinnings of the report are the qualitative interviews conducted during our visits to three preschools and three schools in the course of the Danish autumn and winter 2007, in addition to interviews with representatives of the three participant municipalities and of Save the Children. During the same period, staff and parents from the three schools' lower classes filled in some questionnaires, whose data is processed and presented in the supplementary report entitled "*3rd report: Views of Bullying as an Everyday Phenomenon in Early School Years*".

The 1st report focused on the understanding of bullying among the various parties involved, and on how this subject was already being addressed in the institutions before the project commenced. The 2nd report has concentrated on the participants' perceptions and assessments of the initiatives brought about through the project Free from Bullying. Attention has also been paid to how the various groups have experienced their involvement and (co-)ownership.

The present report points to a series of current challenges for the project work ahead within three areas: 1) *tools and materials*, 2) *parental involvement*, and 3) *organisation and ownership*.

As for *tools and materials*, the authors see a special challenge in developing materials that are more age-sensitive for the younger schoolchildren and better suited to school realities overall. However, more generally, the institutions face the demanding task of developing their own concrete social practices as extension and supplement to the material in the suitcase. Furthermore, both preschools and schools need to discuss and clarify to what degree and in which ways Free from Bullying should be integrated into more general and thorough pedagogical considerations among the educational staff, so that it does not merely feature in terms of individual social practices that can be scheduled and are delimited in time and space.

In the area of *parental involvement*, the challenge in the context of preschools as well as schools is to enhance competencies to move away from the exclusive focus on *information* to the parents, looking more at how to create the conditions and specific ideas for ways of involving the parents as active team players in the project.

As regards *organisation and ownership*, it remains a challenge to continue to work on expanding and entrenching the commitment and ownership of all project participants. This aim should be pursued by means of exchange and coordination between the various parties taking part in the project at the municipal level, and not least by actively involving the individual institutions' entire relevant staff, thus collectivising not only knowledge but, just as importantly, also ownership of the project.

The last report, to be written up after the pilot project Free from Bullying is completed at the end of 2008, will focus on the participants' views of the project's influence on everyday life in the institutions, its impact in terms of changing bullying behaviour, and its contribution towards establishing an 'anti-bullying culture', i.e. on the project's anchorage in individual municipalities, preschools and schools. The empirical foundation for this last report will be compiled in the course of the boreal autumn 2008.

In addition to following the processes over time, the follow-up research project is also intended to take on a certain degree of action research. This implies, for instance, drawing on continuous feedback, exchanges and dialogues between the follow-up research and the educational development project. Accordingly, the research has not been conceived as a final evaluation of results, but rather as an inquiry seeking to make ongoing contributions to the professional standards and the definition of Free from Bullying's style and substance. Therefore, the authors hope that the insights gained and the issues raised in this report may serve to substantiate new reflections and discussions – among preschool and school teachers, politicians, civil servants and parents – on how to understand and prevent bullying.

Appendix 1: Methodology of the follow-up research project

In connection with Save the Children Denmark's pilot project 'Free from Bullying', a two-year follow-up research project is conducted under the direction of Mr. Jan Kampmann from Roskilde University's Centre for Child and Youth Research (CEBUF). The purpose of the follow-up research is to produce new and useful knowledge about the prevention of bullying and bullying-related behaviour in day-care centres and lower school classes. In the Danish context, Free from Bullying is the first major combined effort against bullying at such an early stage of childhood (3-8 years), which provides a unique opportunity to gain research-related insights into the prevention of bullying among those in this age group.

Objective and focus of the follow-up research

The follow-up research project is concerned with shedding light on the phenomenon of bullying in the age group 3-8 years old. In addition, it seeks to map out the implications of a concrete anti-bullying intervention for the pedagogical work in the institutions involved, the organisational changes that it brings, in what ways and to what extent the participant groups build up co-ownership of the initiative, and how the work at preschool level can be linked to that of the early school years. Thus, the overall theme of the research is to follow, document, analyse and assess the implementation of Save the Children's pilot project Free from Bullying in the participant preschools and schools.

In general, the follow-up research revolves around:

- Gaining greater research-based insights into the phenomenon of bullying, especially in relation to the age group of 3-8 year-olds, including the various parties' understanding and experience of bullying.
- Documenting and assessing the implementation of the educational development project Free from Bullying with special emphasis on the challenges and consequences regarding the professional staff's experience of competence requirements and organisational development.
- Describing and assessing the sense of co-ownership of the various categories of 'stakeholders' (Save the Children, municipal administrations, professionals in preschools and schools, parents and children).
- Contributing to an enriching exchange of ideas with the participant institutions, while providing analyses and knowledge that may be of general interest in the field of pedagogy.

The follow-up research draws on all the stakeholder groups, i.e. preschool children and pupils in the lower school classes, their teachers and parents, managers of preschools and schools, local politicians and civil servants, as well as Save the Children. The intention is to shed light on the parties' interests, perspectives and interpretations associated with Free from Bullying. Using these stakeholder analyses, the research sets out to expose how the various groups perceive and evaluate the process thus far, both in how they diverge and how they concur, including how this translates into challenges for the development work ahead.

As mentioned, the follow-up research project has been envisaged as a competence-building contributor to Free from Bullying. Consequently, it is relevant to involve the various stakeholders in continuous adjustment of the project's focus areas and interventions, so that the research corresponds to the challenges arising in the course of the project period. In this regard, it is inspired by the tradition of action research.

Action research

“AR [action research] is social research carried out by a team encompassing a professional action researcher and members of an organization or community seeking to improve their situation. AR promotes broad participation in the research process and supports action leading to a more just or satisfying situation for the stakeholders.” (Greenwood & Levin 1998:4)

As it appears from this definition, action research is about the professional researcher, in cooperation with the parties involved on the ground, defining the problem(s) to be investigated, generating knowledge about it, learning from the inquiry, applying social research techniques, and interpreting and acting upon the action results thus uncovered. Action research is based on the belief that all people are constantly collecting, organising and using complex knowledge in their everyday lives. This determines the modus operandi of an action research project, since it is not just the external researchers, but all the parties involved, who define the given problem to be investigated with a view to identifying solutions and bringing about change. As it is a research practice aimed at creating social change, it also amounts to a critique of conventional academic practice, which attempts to study social problems without solving them (Greenwood & Levin 1998).

An ideological philosophy – and an objective – of action research is to actively and directly contribute to bringing about social change, *while at the same time* creating knowledge (ibid: 3). Thus, action research seeks to democratise the research process by virtue of including local stakeholders. In recent years, it has also become more commonplace to talk about action research as interactionist, thus setting store by the inclusion of all participants in the research process through ongoing interactions between the stakeholders (Larsson 2006). In addition to defining the three main elements as research, action and participation, Nielsen, Nielsen and Olsén (1996) mention that action research entails, at any time, a learning process for the participants.

In the context of this study, an attempt has been made to help prevent the pilot project from turning into the mere implementation of a pre-defined pedagogical model, instead seeking to get the parties – not least the participant institutions – to make the undertaking their own, by developing their own approaches to the work with the children. Accordingly, the collection of empirical data has focused significantly on looking into which ways and to what extent the individual institutions created ‘their own project’, so to speak, within the overall framework. In this connection, another central subject of inquiry has been to what extent and in which ways the sense of ownership of the project has taken root and been propagated. It has been important to look not only at how the ownership has moved from Save the Children through the municipalities to the institutions, but also how and how much the ownership is experienced within each preschool and school by the parties involved, i.e. the institutional leaders and their deputies, graduate preschool and school teachers, educational assistants, parents and children.

The research project generally pays special attention to unearthing and examining the children’s own approach to bullying, their understanding of the phenomenon and their own ways of realising what can or should be done about it. Accordingly, a connecting thread throughout the construction of the empirical material is to assign a central role to the children as informants. To this effect, numerous and varied qualitative approaches have been deliberately tested to shed light on children’s

own perceptions and understandings of bullying. A later report by the follow-up research project will highlight the processing of this material and methodology.

Furthermore, a significant element in the configuration of the follow-up research project has been continuous feedback to the individual participant institutions and other parties. In particular, the exchanges with staff groups of preschools and schools have been an important part of the attempt to turn the research into something experienced as valuable by the institutions themselves in their ongoing project process. This importance attributed to continuous interaction between participants and researchers has been intended to strengthen the general sense of joint ownership of the project and to democratise the dialogue about intentions and assessments of the pilot project's progress. In addition, it has made us, as a group of researchers, carry our own role in the field of inquiry to its logical conclusion, namely that we cannot deny our own involvement and active team-player contribution to the pilot project's implementation. Instead of seeking to avoid it, or merely reflect on how we are reluctantly drawn into the project, we start from the positive premise that there is a certain interaction between practice and knowledge production, between the point of departure and the intended or unintended processes of change etc. This does not imply that we as researchers have a pre-defined idea of what bullying is, of its causes and effects, or of what pedagogical interventions ought to be deployed in the effort to prevent and combat bullying as an everyday phenomenon in the participant preschools and schools. It rather means that we attempt to join in actively as fellow players with inputs that we are able to deliver precisely due to our special status, which does not consist of an alleged neutral contemplation of what goes on, but of a particularly privileged position within the project, offering us the chance to create knowledge across the various stakeholder groups. Nor does it entail that our knowledge contributions are more truthful than the perceptions of other stakeholders, but rather that they are different, since we can produce knowledge and forms of understanding that are based on and establish other perspectives and angles than what each category of stakeholders is capable of in isolation. A significant criterion in the assessment of these inputs is whether the follow-up research project creates knowledge that may contribute to the parties involved in the pilot project seeing, understanding and perhaps even acting in other ways than what would have been the case in the absence of the research.

Mosaic approach

The follow-up research project takes a mosaic approach in the sense that Free from Bullying's assumptions, development and ongoing anchorage are to be exposed, understood and analysed by means of a series of different theoretical approaches, and not least through the deployment of a variety of methods (see also Clark 2005). In particular, these are the qualitative interviews, but also documents such as business plans, annual class syllabus, newsletters and the like, informal observations, video-recorded self-observations in the institutions, and questionnaire surveys. Thus, the methodological approach makes deliberate use of multiplicity, a kind of expanded triangulation, which serves to collect empirical data across several dimensions.

The follow-up research is conducted over three rounds, each of which gives rise to a series of reports and instances of feedback to those involved in the pilot project. These three rounds make it possible to follow the development process through the recurring visits. The choice of three stems from an assessment of what is feasible and appropriate given the available time and resources.

The present appendix on methodology relates to the 2nd report, which is based on empirical data gathered during the second round. Thus having explained the research project's overall objective,

intentions and methodological design, the following part will turn to the methodological considerations underlying this 2nd report in particular.

The empirical material

The primary source of data substantiating the present report is the semi-structured interviews. They offer the opportunity to inquire in depth about the informants' experiences, thoughts and understandings. In semi-structured interviews, a major part of the issues addressed are pre-determined by means of an interview guide, but the conversation remains open to issues that the informants might bring up (Kvale 1997; Bernhard 1995:209-210).

During the second round of the follow-up research project, 167 participants in Free from Bullying have been interviewed, including 12 staff members from three schools, 15 staff members from three preschools, 9 parents of children in reception class, 9 parents of children in class 2, 6 representatives of Save the Children, 3 representatives of each of the participant municipalities (including both local politicians and civil servants), 38 children attending preschool centres, 36 children in reception class, and 33 children in class 2. As mentioned, the interviews with children have only been used in this 2nd report to a highly limited extent, since separate reporting based on this material will be prepared at a later stage.

The interviewees from preschools and schools have been selected in order to represent a variety of staff groups and sections of each institution (school and preschool classes). The intention is to take a comprehensive look into how the project is carried out in the institutions, and how the work is experienced and assessed from different viewpoints. Parents were enlisted for interviews through an information letter circulated via the schools. Here, the parents were asked to give their name and phone number to the class teacher, if they agreed to be interviewed. Many parents volunteered, and we thus had to perform a random selection. Since many more women than men stepped forward, women are slightly overrepresented in the interview material. Moreover, the interviewed parents must be assumed to be more engaged in their child's school life than the average. However, they were never intended to constitute a representative cross-section of all parents, since the interviews with parents were mainly aimed at producing examples of elaborations and enlargements upon issues that had already been addressed, for instance in the answers to questionnaires distributed to all parents of children in reception class and class 2 at the participant schools.

The interviews with staff members from preschools and schools, as well as with representatives of Save the Children and the municipalities, were carried out at the interviewees' workplaces to make it easy for them to take part. The parents were interviewed at the schools, typically when they came to drop off or pick up their child. Two parents were interviewed in their homes, since this was more convenient for them. To the extent possible, the interviews were completed without the presence of any third parties to give the interviewees greater opportunity to speak freely.

With the children, three interview techniques were employed. As mentioned, a separate objective of the follow-up research project is to create and test experiences of interviewing children about subjects such as teasing and bullying. One approach was to elicit answers using photos (see for example Rasmussen 2008) that had been taken by the children themselves in places where they had experienced or witnessed teasing. Similarly, we also conducted a series of interviews based on the children's own drawings (see for example Nissen 1988). Finally, we tried out an interview technique in which we followed the children in and around their institutions, while they told as

about specific places and experiences of teasing. These interviews set out to capture the children's own understandings and views of teasing and bullying. Accordingly, this part of the follow-up research project is set within the research tradition that works on establishing a so-called 'children's perspective' (Kampmann 1998).

With the permission of the informants, all interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

For the interviews with children and staff, the group of researchers was present in each institution for two to three days. The visits were not used to perform systematic observations. Instead we sought to get a sense of the day-to-day life, the organisation and culture of the various settings. These findings served to improve the interviews with the personnel and children, but do not amount to independent analytical material.

Analysis

The analytical processing of the collected empirical data started off by reading widely in order to get an overview of the vast interview material and to identify patterns (Ehn & Löfgren 1982: 95-122). Furthermore, the material was systematised at various levels of categorisation by means of domain analyses and taxonomic analysis (Spradley 1980: 85-99, 112-121). The subsequent reports have sought to summarise the findings, setting store by presenting both overall trends and specific details, both common denominators and discrepancies.

The entire group of researchers has been involved in the analytical as well as in the writing process, and we have discussed our analyses and texts at every stage. To some extent, the analyses have also taken shape through continuous exchanges with Save the Children and feedback from the participant institutions.

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