

6th report

**Perspectives on bullying and experiences of
'Free from Bullying'**

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Introduction

As the title indicates, this is the 6th report on experiences gained during the pilot project 'Free from Bullying' (Danish: *Fri for Mobberi*), an anti-bullying initiative developed by Save the Children Denmark and the Mary Foundation. The study resulting in the present report has been designed as a follow-up research project financed by Save the Children in cooperation with the Mary Foundation, as well as by 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). For more in-depth description of the pilot project and the experiences thus far, we refer to the previous follow-up research reports, which can be downloaded from the website of Save the Children Denmark at www.redbarnet.dk/Default.aspx?ID=8514.

The present report focuses on the various parties' perceptions of the pilot project's impact on everyday life in participant preschools, schools and after-school centres, including changes regarding bullying behaviour and the establishment of an anti-bullying culture. The paper is based on interviews with 38 class 3 pupils from the three participant schools, with contact parents of pupils in class 1 and reception class ('class zero' in Danish parlance. i.e. prior to class 1), as well as with teachers and management of preschools, after-school centres and early school years from institutions involved in Free from Bullying. In addition, one section is based on interviews with representatives of the participant municipalities of Kolding, Aarhus and Gentofte.

The report is primarily targeted at those taking part in Free from Bullying, as it conveys their views and experiences of involvement in the pilot project. However, it may also draw the attention of other professionals dedicated to this field of inquiry. The initial and longest chapter of the paper – covering children's viewpoints – addresses experiences and perceptions of teasing and bullying as a phenomenon more generally, rather than being specifically centred on participation in the pilot project, which may make this chapter of particular interest from a wider perspective. Furthermore, we hope that the report will contribute to fruitful discussions about the prevention of bullying, both at the municipal level and within educational institutions.

We hope you enjoy reading it.

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Children's views of teasing and bullying – perspectives from class 3

Based on insights gained from previous rounds of empirical data collection, we have once again conducted a series of interviews with children. Accordingly, this chapter will present and analyse the material produced through conversations with children from class 3. As in previous interviews with children in the context of the follow-up research project¹, this time we have also been interested in getting the children to make statements about what they understand by 'teasing' (*drilleri*) and 'bullying' (*mobning*). In addition, we have attempted to penetrate slightly deeper into not only what the children understand by teasing, but also what their own experiences are in this regard, as well as the various ways in which they comprehend the effects that teasing may have on those subjected to it.

Compared to the previous interviews, which involved children from class 2 and below, it has been remarkable how children in class 3 are capable of formulating much more full-fledged reflections, not only on what teasing and bullying is and the effect it has had on them, but also on how it affects other children, what its root cause is, etc. Against this background, the present chapter will get somewhat deeper under the skin of the various ways in which children experience teasing and bullying as a multi-faceted and context-bound phenomenon.

Opinions about teasing and intentionality

In previous interviews with children from preschool to class 2 about their understandings of what teasing and bullying is, we discovered that a significant aspect is the *intentionality* behind an act. We found that intentionality was not necessarily seen as decisive for whether a given behaviour was perceived as teasing, just as several children would elaborate on their narration of experiences using an expression akin to 'by accident', 'unwittingly' or 'without wanting to' (the prepositional verb '*komme til*' used in Danish to indicate a lack of intention or a failure to think through the consequences in advance). This inspired us to delve deeper into the issue of intentionality by inquiring more directly about it. Consequently, in this third round of empirical data collection, when, as previously mentioned, it is the class 3 pupils' turn to be interviewed, we addressed the subject on the basis of three fictitious cases concerning children who feel teased, and other children who are accused of teasing, in incidents that could be perceived ambiguously. We asked the child interviewees if they thought this was a case of teasing; if they saw what the persons were accused of as deliberate acts; if they could put themselves in the persons' place; and if they could recognise any of it from their own lives. We also asked more general questions, such as whether it was possible to tease by accident, and the like. Using these cases, the interviews have given us a clear signal as to the attitudes and reflections that class 3 pupils bring to the issue of teasing and intentionality. At the same time, methodological advances along the way have taught us that a fictional story is significantly easier for children to relate to, and to build upon in order to add in their own experiences, compared to being directly asked about something in which they themselves are involved.

¹ The publications thus far resulting from this work are available at Save the Children Denmark's website (see www.redbarnet.dk/Default.aspx?ID=8514), which also has information in English about the pilot project 'Free from Bullying' and its materials at: www.redbarnet.dk/Default.aspx?ID=7566

When does teasing actually take place?

Was it teasing? Was it done on purpose? Was there any malice or was it 'just for fun'?

All class 3 pupils interviewed stress that it is not a case of teasing, when something is not done on purpose, but is merely a mishap. The children are rather fixated on the issue of *whose fault* it is, and they protest the injustice of somebody being blamed for something he/she has not done *on purpose*. Some go as far as to maintain that if a person is undeservedly accused of teasing or pushing somebody else deliberately, it is in fact the *accuser* who is guilty of teasing.

In the last of the three cases presented, the answers were less unequivocal than in the two foregoing. Here the question was whether 'Emma' was teased, when one day it occurred to her two girlfriends, who would usually accompany her to the after-school centre, that it would be fun to run away and hide from her. This was indeed a story which several children recognised from experience. In this case, opinion was highly mixed. The children holding that Emma was not teased emphasised that her friends only meant it *for fun*. They did not set out to be mean or nasty, but may possibly have thought that Emma herself would be amused. Accordingly, Emma was the one in the wrong, since she *misunderstood* the intention. When children stressed that it was just for fun, this may have stemmed from their very textual interpretation of the story. However, following subsequent reflections upon it, many nevertheless expressed sympathy with the offended girl's experience:

So I don't see it as teasing, just because you hide from someone, when it was done for fun. But actually, when Emma comes along, and they don't jump out saying "hey, we were just hiding from you", then I think perhaps it's teasing a bit, because it's not fun for Emma, when she can't find them at all. [...] In some way, it could also be teasing because it isn't much fun when others hide from you, and they don't say "gotcha" or "we hid from you so you couldn't find us, haha," like for fun, but apart from that I think perhaps that if they'd jumped out and said those things, then it wouldn't have been teasing. But it may be teasing a little bit when they just stay put (Wilma, 9 years).

As can be seen, it depends strongly on each situation if something can be classified as teasing, but Wilma advances to what seems to be the core issue:

Well, but we don't really know if the girls had a bad intention, but I think not. If they had one, then it would be teasing, I think. [...] But as it is, I don't think it's teasing, because there was no bad intention (Wilma 9 years).

To Wilma, it is about whether the children have a 'bad intention', i.e. whether the act is meant as teasing, if it, so to speak, has a minus sign in front of it. The children arguing that Emma *was* indeed teased also stressed the meanness of the two girls having another agenda than Emma, and they drew attention to the difficult experience of being excluded. Several interviewees compared the incidence to something that they had gone through themselves, such as one of the two boys quoted here:

Jonathan: *Well, it's not particularly nice to do that to Emma. It's not much fun for her, and stuff like that.*
Vitus: *I'd begin to feel sad too because someone runs away. I know two who once did.*

Similarly, several children associated the case with their own experiences, which naturally shaped their opinions on the issue in general. In the interviews with Mille and Maja, it transcends that both girls felt highly insecure about being shut out, as they cannot know if others talk behind their back:

Maja: *I won't completely believe they wanted to tease her. I think it was more like... for fun. That is, I don't think they meant to make Emma, like, really sad.*

Mille: *But I can understand why she did [become sad].*

Maja: *Yeah.*

Mille: *Because, if they were hiding, you may feel a bit like being shut out, or something like that.*

Maja: *Or if perhaps they wanted to talk bad stuff about her or something.*

Mille: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *Yes? Okay. Have you ever tried something like that before, or what?*

Maja: *I've tried someone hiding from me, but then sometimes I know it's just for fun, but other times it makes me think that "what if they talk behind my back?" even if they are my good friends, or "what if they just do it for fun?"*

Clearly, the issue of intentionality is somewhat more complex than it appears, and more than what was revealed by the children's *immediate* responses to our case. We sought to home in on this complexity.

The complexity of intentionality

Although the issue of when an act qualifies as teasing is highly complicated, it is nevertheless something about which children must regularly make judgments when navigating the social landscape. In the following excerpt of an interview with two girls, we seek to shed light on how the case can be perceived, and the interviewees' statements mostly testify to the difficulty of explaining it.

Interviewer: *So when is it teasing? Is it when it's felt as teasing, or is it when it's meant as teasing?*

Maja: *Er...*

Mille: *I think it's when you feel it inside yourself.*

Maja: *Yeah.*

Mille: *Then it becomes teasing.*

Maja: *Then you think yourself that you're teasing.*

Mille: *Mmm (assenting). But you're not.*

Interviewer: *Then you think the other is teasing?*

Mille: *But you don't. No.*

Interviewer: *But the other doesn't?*

Mille: *Mm-m (disagreeing).*

Interviewer: *Okay. So it depends on the one who is feeling it?*

Mille: *Yes.*

Maja: *Yes.*

It is clear from the rest of the interview with these girls that intentionality is a concern on which they dwell and reflect intensely. Maja relates, for instance, an episode in which she feared that someone would perceive her behaviour as an accusation of teasing, even when it was not. She was worried that her reaction was not attuned to the noble intentions of the other. What happened is that Maja had a toy, which another girl from her class was allowed to play with. Then it was broken, which made Maja cry, even if she was not in fact pointing the finger at the other girl for destroying it on purpose. She was just sad about losing her toy, but never intended to imply that it was the other girl's fault. Interestingly, Maja is deeply anxious about the other girl perceiving her as apportioning blame, i.e. for having bothered or teased Maja on purpose, and about this being seen as her *reason* for crying. Maja explains it like this:

Maja: *Ellen burst the fluffy ball by accident. [...] And then I didn't know if I should feel sad about it or not. But then, without wanting to be sad, I just did. But I didn't mean to. And then Ellen, she just kept... then she wanted to buy a [new] fluffy ball, because she had a bad conscience about it. But...*

Mille: *That's kind of a guilty feeling.*

Maja: *Yeah.*

Mille: *But it was already broken.*

[...]

Interviewer: *So perhaps she felt it was her fault?*

Maja: *Yes. But then I've told her several times that it's sweet of her that she wants to give me a new fluffy ball, but that she... it wasn't my intention to become so sad about it.*

What seems to be at stake here is the issue of accusing others of something of which they are innocent. In this case, Maja regretted that her body language had given the impression of blaming somebody unjustly. This is but one of many examples showing that children are concerned with treating each other fairly. Another girl, called Andrea, relates an episode in which she was accused of teasing, but genuinely had no clue that she had caused another girl to become sad. The problem was that Andrea had brought her new mobile phone outside at breaktime, making all the other girls crowd together around her. Karla also joined in, but suddenly she was very upset with Andrea, accusing her of teasing. Andrea only learned the facts of the case afterwards.

Andrea: *I said I didn't do it [took the mobile out at breaktime] to tease her at all. I didn't even know they had made that agreement, the other girls.*

Interviewer: *What agreement was that?*

Andrea: *They had agreed to play with Karla. But then they played with me, because I had that mobile phone, and then she went completely, like...*

As it is further explained in the interview, Karla is *sad rather often, since there aren't many who play with her. And that's why she gets really happy when someone does play with her. But then when they walk away and play with someone else, she gets a little sad.* On the basis of this and other statements, it appears that those children who are often without playmates, and hence generally feel vulnerable and excluded, are typically those who accuse other children of teasing. Once a child is vulnerable – or *feels* so – offence is easily taken. In other words, anything can be experienced as hurtful when one's position in the group of children is fragile or uncertain. And this carries the risk of one's position among the others being further undermined. We see many examples of this in our empirical data.

“But it was just for fun”

The children generally do not appear to have difficulties assessing if teasing is for fun or with serious intent. In one class 3 in particular, the children's clear-cut definition is that if you say 'stop', and the other then stops, you know it was only meant for fun. But if the other carries on, the intent is obviously serious. This unequivocal approach to when something is acceptable and unacceptable to the children has also caught the attention of some parents. For instance, a father finds that the children have become good at objecting, both on behalf of themselves and others. This can be seen as a direct effect of participation in Free from Bullying, whose materials feature this ability as a key issue of pedagogy and as a kind of core value.

Moreover, the children are mostly capable of decoding each other's attitudes and intentions from body language and mimicking, for instance, noting if nasty words are said with or without a grin. In class 3, many girls and boys entertain themselves by trading coarse insults on the common understanding that it is just for fun. This is explained by Wilma: *Well, to make them hear that it's just for fun that you're saying it*, as well as by Noah: *Because if you shout it, it's in a mean way. Then you mean it. But when you say it like, not shouting, when you don't shout, then you know it's just for fun and all that.*

To be sure that no malice is intended, it seems that a kind of established consensus needs to prevail in the specific group of children concerned, making it acceptable to say and do certain things. This can be about the way in which something is expressed, who can get away with saying what and to whom, and what words count as ‘fun’. For instance, Miriam says: *Sometimes we call each other ‘stupid’ and stuff like that. We think that’s funny.* Even words like ‘whore’ and ‘arsehole’ can, in certain contexts, be used for fun, the children explain.

According to the children, another way of telling if something is for fun is to know the person well. In the words of Eigil: *It’s often Viola who does it, but I know it’s just for fun, because I’ve known her ever since she was born.* On other occasions, however, doubts may arise regarding the intention, as explained by Luna here:

Yeah, because sometimes you may say something for fun, and then the person you’ve said it to can become sad, because you haven’t said it with a smile on your face, or you’ve stood there and... looked annoyed (Luna, 9 years).

Naturally, these are the sort of cases in which a simple incident can escalate into a minor or major conflict between the children.

However, the concept of ‘fun’ is also used more retrospectively in the sense of children trying to get away with having said or done something by subsequently rationalising it as ‘just for fun’. In some instances, this can be construed as an attempt to be conciliatory, albeit without explicitly owning up to having said or done anything wrong or hurtful. The choice of words rather reverses blame for the conflict, as the other is accused of failing to realise that the act was not meant in the way it was perceived. In other words, it is not oneself but the other who is to blame for a conflict, quarrel or fight. There is no way of telling whether something really *was* for fun, or was only retrospectively *described* as such, but this is clearly an issue of major concern to the children. Making it work calls for some negotiating flair and sensitivity. Failing that, it causes many misunderstandings.

Finally, it must be mentioned that saying “it was just for fun” can also carry a meaning akin to: “Sorry, I really didn’t mean it”.

Misunderstandings

The explanation that “we misunderstood each other” is used by many children, and seems to be seen as a somewhat acceptable manner of ending or dissolving a conflict. As Lotte puts it in the quote below, however, it can also appear to be the adults who reach this conclusion on the children’s behalf:

Lotte: Then you kind of find out that you’ve misunderstood each other.

Interviewer: How do you find that out?

Lotte: Because the grown-ups listen to what has happened, and get each person’s explanation, and then they say we’ve probably just misunderstood each other.

Interviewer: Yeah, and is that a good way of walking away from there, you think?

Lotte: In a way yes, in a way no...

There are clear indications that the children have assimilated this form of conflict management. In particular, many of the girls declare that they can end a conflict by acknowledging that a ‘misunderstanding’ has taken place. However, this solution model is not always acceptable, as it can also be misused. This is the case when someone repeatedly explains (or justifies) offensive behaviour in this manner, which occurs in a few stories in the empirical data.

As demonstrated above, intentionality plays a significant role in children's way of relating to teasing. However, even when something is classified as being 'just for fun', it is important to notice that such incidences can still hurt somebody. The feeling of being teased or excluded does not necessarily vanish by having the episode explained in a more or less innocent or rationalised manner. The children's narrations show, on the one hand, that they are good at reflecting on their own experiences, but also that certain occurrences, notwithstanding subsequent rationalisations, leave deep wounds on the inside, where they can sometimes be felt for a long time.

Teasing as something unpleasant and intense

Using examples, we have interviewed the children about who teases, how they tease, and what it feels like to be teased. We have received many types of stories from the children, ranging from innocent and good-natured teasing, through fierce but singular incidents, to phenomena that can be characterised as outright bullying, among other reasons because they reflect an experience of being continuously subjected to teasing, exclusion and the like. While the above has dealt with the children's accounts of what was for fun, this section will focus on the kind of teasing perceived by the children as unpleasant, in some cases even as vicious and severe. However, we also differentiate between one-off incidents and more continuous processes. Clearly, the children are capable – at least at a rational and verbalised level – of distinguishing between banter, which is amusing in principle, and situations involving something more serious and disagreeable.

Many children relate that the worst type of teasing is when they *could not help* what they were teased about. This is the case of Amalie, who was mocked for her herpes, or of Silje, who was taunted for one side of her mouth being swollen after receiving anaesthesia for an operation. Regardless of whether the teasing is repeated or a one-off incident, these situations – in which a child feels vulnerable and somebody from the class 'takes advantage' of this – are clearly etched into the memory of the individual child.

Unhappy about going to school

On the whole, there are, fortunately, relatively few stories indicative of children being generally unhappy about going to school, and about outright bullying taking place. Nevertheless, as mentioned, there are a couple of examples of this. Even if this state of affairs does not represent a majority of pupils in the three classes surveyed, there is no doubt that it is emotionally intense for the children affected.

In two of the three classes, some girls feel particularly vulnerable. The fact that we notice the girls more in this regard stems, among other reasons, from their internal social games featuring prominently in the interviews, and presumably also in the school classes. Specific teasing involves exclusion from play within the group of girls, being called names, and being sneered at. In one class in particular, it transpires that a particular girls feels vulnerable, and hence perceives daily school life as difficult, at times outright unpleasant. This impression is not just conveyed by the girl herself, but is indeed formed – perhaps even first and foremost – through interviews with her classmates. This shows that, when someone is feeling down, the majority in a class are usually aware of it. The children talk about this with everything from compassion and sympathy to indifference, irritation and mistrust.

In this class, another girl seems to be taking the lead in the exclusion. Hella is clearly deeply unhappy about going to school, saying, for instance: *Because I always get annoyed. And they make me very sad every day. So I don't really like going to school.* Here Katja, another classmate, tells what is at stake from her perspective:

Katja: *It is almost only her. She gets sad every single day, because she's teased, mostly by Amalie.*

Interviewer: *How come it's Hella who is teased?*

Katja: *I don't know. Amalie just doesn't want to play with her that much?*

Interviewer: *Amalie won't play with Hella?*

Katja: *That's right.*

Interviewer: *How about the other girls?*

Katja: *We play with her sometimes. In fact, sometimes I'm the one who isn't allowed to play, that annoys me a bit, but then I just keep myself to myself.*

Interviewer: *How is Hella teased?*

Katja: *Sometimes she's teased by nobody wanting to play with her, just saying "get lost". Sometimes they say nasty stuff to her to make her very sad. She gets sad really quickly.*

As can be seen, Hella is repeatedly teased, not only by one particular girl who is after her a lot, but also by other children who fully realise that she becomes dejected, and who feel a degree of compassion with her. In addition to Katja's version above, Hella also speaks out in an interview with a female friend about the situation in the group of girls, and about her frequent sadness. Some excerpts of this conversation paint a picture of how day-to-day life is (also) experienced when feeling vulnerable and persecuted.

Hella: *And they tease me. [...] They sit there and badmouth me. [...] Yeah, and then they say stuff to the whole class, and they start to upset me and take all my things.*

Hella: *Yes, she [Amalie] certainly knows how to annoy me.*

Interviewer: *But can you say anything about how girls tease in general? Do you understand what I mean by that?*

Hella: *Yeah, if they start to make faces and just annoy you a lot.*

Interviewer: *How do girls annoy each other?*

Hella: *By shouting and yelling and shutting you out. That's what they do to me at least.*

Hella: *Yeah, I've experienced that [being excluded] ever since reception class.*

Interviewer: *Is it the boys, then, or the girls who mostly do that to you?*

Hella: *The girls.*

Suleima: *There's only one who is in charge of it.*

Hella: *That's Amalie. I hate her.*

Hella: *But there was one time as well when the whole class beat me with big sticks.*

Interviewer: *Big sticks?*

Hella: *I just burst out laughing [...] then I got upset, then they began not to... so I just went looking for something inside the forest. I just walked away. I didn't want to go to school anymore. I was really sad. They'd hit me in so many places.*

Interviewer: *Didn't the grown-ups help you?*

Hella: *Not really, they just gave them a telling off, and after that they didn't care at all. And then the whole class began to tell everyone in the whole [...] house. And then nearly everyone started to tease me about it [...] saying this thing about the sticks. [...] And they still say that.*

When Hella is asked to talk about what characterises girls' and boys' ways of teasing, respectively, her explanations become very concrete and concentrate almost exclusively on what she has gone through herself. This could be due to those experiences being very close to her, dominating her life too much for her to be able to look beyond her own situation and take a more general perspective.

In the other class, it is Karla who feels singled out for teasing. She talks about what it can be like to be at school:

Interviewer: *Well then, are you sad even when you get home from school?*

Karla: *Yeah, at least when I've been teased, I am. Then I'd rather not cry in cla... at school, because the boys will just say I'm a crybaby. [...] Then I say they tease me, and then they just say they didn't at all. And then we don't really get to talk about it.*

The quote reveals that Karla would like the teachers to address the teasing through conversation, but that this may fail to happen, because the boys protest their innocence. Karla's view of reality also testifies to her feelings that the teachers sometimes only listen to the others, since it is their agenda rather than hers which prevails. Karla also tells us that she is sometimes so dejected that she does not like to talk about it with her parents after coming home. Here two other girls offer their perspective on why Karla feels vulnerable and teased:

Annabella: *I know there are some who don't know Karla gets sad, that's when somebody, without thinking about it, calls her [nickname] and [nickname], because her name is [her surname], then somebody calls her [nickname] or Karla [nickname], and she doesn't like that. And then there are some who think that "well, never mind, because Karla can't express it when she gets sad", and that's right, then she just walks away, and then later she gets sad.*

Interviewer: *Okay, so people know Karla finds it hard to express it when she gets sad, is that what you're saying?*

Annabella: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *How come they know it?*

Annabella: *Well, it's something we've found out, because when she's teased, she just walks away, and then when you meet her later, she sits there feeling sad. And then you ask her why, but it isn't a long time ago, and then she says... and then you understand that it's because she finds it difficult to express her feelings, I mean, when she's feeling them.*

Betty: *Yeah, she cries as well, and sometimes she gets quite sad if, say, you get into a row with her, then she gets kind of quite sad and walks away, but then we try to run after her to comfort her, but she just keeps running.*

It is clear that the other children – even in the above interview with the girl that Karla falls out with continuously – are acutely aware that Karla faces a problem. They mull over what it might be, and they make a real effort to ponder how it could be handled. The children's plentiful and relatively deep reflections on social structures and relational patterns (particularly in the groups of girls) are pervasive in the empirical data. However, the example at hand also shows that this apparently very reasonable insight does not necessarily stop the same children from continuing their teasing.

One-off unpleasant experiences

In addition to the above examples of bullying in terms of teasing and exclusion over a prolonged period, several children recount one-off experiences of getting sad or scared. In one class 3, virtually all interviewees narrate a particular episode when a girl was subjected to something so unpleasant that it seems to have become part of the class's history. One aggravating factor in the distress was that a crowd of children banded together to pin her down, and that she was unable to raise objections. Some children relate that she laughed as she was tickled, which some used as an 'excuse' to carry on. The incident was experienced as something completely out of the ordinary, and both the girl herself and the other children convey the fear and anguish that it involved. There is no doubt that this was perceived as a fierce attack, which may be remembered – and felt – for a long time. However, there is no indication that this incident formed part of any general persecution of the child concerned.

Another example illustrating how one-off episodes can take centre stage in children's perception of teasing is provided by a boy who recounts a situation of four boys ranked 'against' him:

Interviewer: *Okay. Have you ever felt you were being teased yourself?*

Anders: *Mmm, yes.*

Interviewer: *Yes?*

Anders: *Not last year, but the year before that.*

Interviewer: *Yeah, what happened?*

Anders: *I just felt that four other boys were against me.*

Interviewer: *Okay, like again and again, several days, or just once?*

Anders: *Just one particular day.*

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Anders: *That the whole world had turned against me.*

Interviewer: *Doesn't sound very nice. What happened?*

Anders: *I was kicked, then I kicked back, and then I was just kicked even harder again, because it was four against one.*

Many examples of 'unpleasant experiences' narrated by the interviewees involve children from other classes (frequently older pupils), which is found to make the situations harder to act upon. It can be difficult both for classmates, who might be too afraid to intervene, and for teachers, who cannot address all children in dispute in the classroom (where some of them do not belong), in the same manner as when a conflict arises internally in the class.

To tease and to be teased: about shifting positions

The interviews with children provide abundant stories about who teases whom. However, the roles are rarely stable over time. Even if some individuals feel singled out or outright bullied – in terms of the experience being prolonged over time – we also see the pattern being turned around, i.e. children who go from one position to another. A couple of children thus talk about how they used to be teased a lot, but that they now tease others quite often. Accordingly, having been teased before does not necessarily lead to reflections on how unpleasant it is; at least it does not always result in consequent action by abstaining from inflicting the same treatment on others. One example comes from an interview with two boys. First, one of them recounts how he used to be teased intensely at his former school:

Niclas: *I was teased and bullied a lot over there [...] by a couple of boys. I had no friends to support me or help me or play with me. I didn't have that down there, and I was so fed up with having no friends, and to just be bullied and bullied.*

Noah: *Yeah, you had Sigurd as a friend.*

Niclas: *No, I had no friends.*

Interviewer: *So how were you at that time?*

Niclas: *I felt really bad, so I changed school, and then I came here. [...] Now I've got some friends, who support me and stuff. They help me get through things. [...] But down at [the other school], I had no friends, so there was no-one to play with. I had to be all alone and play with a ball.*

Being teased made such a deep impression on Niclas that he changed his school. At the new school, where he is being interviewed, he is fortunate to have friends and is no longer unhappy about going to school. However, many of the other children characterise him as a nasty teaser, mainly in a bothersome and mean fashion. Indeed, later on in the interview Niclas recounts quite unashamedly how he is now taking part in teasing others, though at the same time he is eager to explain away or trivialise his own role as troublemaker.

What this illustrates is first and foremost that the casting of roles in terms of teaser and teased is rarely permanent. Furthermore, it shows that adult assistance can be required in order for a child in class 3 to translate former unpleasant experiences into empathy for others in later teasing situations.

Allies in teasing: ‘gang war’ in class 3

Another issue surfacing in the interviews with class 3 pupils is a tendency for a clash between two or more children to evolve into a conflict at class level, in which the hostile parties recruit support groups and forge alliances. In one of the three schools, this particularly pitches parallel year classes against each other. A characteristic of such mass conflicts is that it suddenly becomes wholly legitimate to be against others. This is because internal group dynamics make for common cause against the other group, and hence a community is formed around being ‘against’. This is shown, for instance, in this interview with two girls:

Mille: There are many in our class, when they get angry, then, then... or when they get hit or kicked or something, then they gather a whole gang to go against the one who's hit or kicked.

Interviewer: Okay. Does that apply to girls as well as boys?

Mille: Yes.

Maja: Yes.

Interviewer: Really? It can't be very nice to be the one who then...

Mille (interrupts): No, but he brings some people together too.

Maja: Yeah.

Interviewer: Aha, so each one of you has got like ... your own... group?

Mille: Our own team. Yeah.

[...]

Maja: It's because sometimes some people from our class get into a row with someone from our parallel year class.

The account of these girls seems to revolve especially around the boys' clashes with the parallel year class and around getting into fights, but it can also occur among the girls, they add. Later in the interview, they recount an episode of two girls falling out, each recruiting as many as 10 others as ‘supporters’. They explain that such quarrels or conflicts often stem from misunderstandings about intentionality.

If someone, say, does something to the other by accident, then perhaps the other does something on purpose against the first, because she believes the first thing was on purpose. And in this way, they end up quarrelling and fighting (Mille, 9 years).

In light of the above issues and examples, we may, on a preliminary basis, highlight some overall tendencies:

- 1) The children generally have a rather sophisticated insight into teasing as a phenomenon, both in terms of determining when something counts as teasing and knowing about the various ways in which teasing can occur.
- 2) A significant aspect of the children's assessment of the nature and severity of teasing is the extent to which it is an intentional act. This is illustrated, for instance, in their widespread distinction between teasing for fun and with serious intent.
- 3) The significance of intentionality perceived by the children is linked to the importance that they attribute to other children as well as adults judging and reacting to teasing with fairness.
- 4) The children express that they are capable – to a certain degree – of solving or dissolving conflicts by means of various linguistic tools, including some borrowed from the pilot project Free from Bullying.

- 5) Rational reflections upon and experience-based insights into teasing and bullying do not automatically and *per se* stop children from teasing others, i.e. it takes more than knowledge and experience to produce such behaviour informed by empathy.
- 6) In several and widely differing cases, the children make it clear that the emotional consequences of teasing can be rather intense and long-lasting.

Girls and boys: gender perspectives on teasing

This section will look more specifically into the significance of gender in children's teasing. This is an issue which has interested us throughout the follow-up research into the children's perspective. The field of inquiry concerns the role of gender in the various ways in which teasing is performed, as well as in how children perceive and talk about teasing as a phenomenon. Although major parts of the empirical data do not manifest any pronounced or systematic gender-based differences, the children themselves are nevertheless inclined, in certain contexts, to attribute substantial significance to gender. We cannot ascertain with our data whether differences talked up by the children in their replies really reflect dissimilar teasing behaviour of girls and boys, but there is no doubt that the gender factor looms large in the children's own understandings of teasing.

How girls and boys tease

One of our questions is whether girls and boys tease differently, and if so, how. The children's answers are clear: there is definitely a pronounced gender-based difference. The overall picture painted by every single interviewee is that boys hit, kick and fight physically, in addition to using particularly crude nicknames and foul language, whereas girls exclude each other, quarrel, slander and generally play out their conflicts through social relations, i.e. intrigues.

Andrea explains: *You know, girls, when they want to tease someone, they don't hit, you know, they use nastier words than boys do.*

Andrea's frequent insertion of 'you know' (our translation of the short Danish adverb: *jo*) shows that she considers her own account – i.e. the difference between boys' and girls' ways of teasing – to be a matter of course. Her wording signals an expectation that the person being addressed also perceives this as a well-known, perhaps even a natural, phenomenon. Thus, gender stereotypes seem to be fairly integrated into the children's views of teasing behaviour and social conflicts in class 3.

Although the overall picture is that girls are verbal and boys are physical in their modes of expression, there is also a clear tendency for boys to speak insultingly to each other and to the girls. However, the difference consists in boys using *tougher* and *ruder* words. Noah and Niclas relate how "shut up" can escalate into "shut up yourself", "fuck your mother", and so forth. They explain that, when boys quarrel, they typically end up in a fight.

But even if the boys use nasty swearwords, this does not necessarily lend more punch to their verbal attacks. The girls' expressions can seem ever so 'innocent', such as "my goodness, how annoying you are", which may hurt more effectively than the foulest language.

What transpired clearly from the numerous interviews with children during this third round of empirical data collection is that both boys and girls are wholly familiar with the conflicts being played out among the opposite sex. In particular, many boys appear to have a special understanding of ‘how girls tease’. Thus, Vitus explains that they *quarrel like crazy*, and elaborates:

They quarrel about all kinds of things. If there is a rule... well, there are different ways for boys and girls to fight in. Because girls just discuss like crazy. They take forever to discuss the rules and all that kind of stuff for all the games. And boys, they can just... they just sort it out in some way or another (Vitus, 9 years).

This quote seems to capture the children’s stereotypical view of how girls and boys, respectively, manage conflicts. At the same time, it illustrates how boys observe girls’ clashes from the sideline. Indeed, examples of this abound in the empirical data.

Do girls and boys react differently to being teased?

The perception of boys’ and girls’ different ways of teasing is one thing, quite another is how they *react* to being teased. The children’s response to this is that boys typically become upset, annoyed and perhaps lash out. Martin, for instance, finds that they just *keep on fighting*, whereas girls get more sullen (insulted) and sad. A gender stereotypical picture is also painted in this context. There is no doubt that girls cry more often than boys. However, this also seems to depend partly on the culture of the individual class. In general, it appears that girls react in a more introverted fashion, while boys tend to be described as more extroverted. Moreover, most children find that girls are quicker to call in adult assistance, while the boys are keener to fix it themselves.

Some children – girls as well as boys – just choose to walk away, and perhaps find someone else to play with, which is, of course, another way of responding to feeling hurt or let down.

When asked about how boys and girls, respectively, react to being teased, the children have occasionally ended up describing how discord is overcome. On this matter, Noah and Niclas, among others, explain that boys usually settle their scores quickly, in contrast to girls’ prolonged controversies.

Niclas: *Yeah, and we sometimes hit each other as well, and then we just walk away from each other and begin to play alone. And afterwards, when we’ve forgotten everything about all that, we start to play together again.*

Niclas: *We mostly fight after we’ve quarrelled. But after the fighting, then the next day we’ve completely forgotten what it was about, then we come up to the other and we’re friends again.*

Noah: *When we go into the classroom, we forget that we were fighting.*

Eigil explains that boys typically choose to just walk away and find others to play with, which also substantiates the prevalent notion that boys’ conflicts are easier to solve, that boys are better at ‘moving on’.

Andrea and Marie-Louise phrase it this way: *Boys are just like... they say a few things, and then it’s over again.* On the other hand, Andrea also finds that girls are rather good at making up, and Marie-Louise affirms that girls just apologise to each other: *and say “do you want to play?” and then we’re just good friends again.* This explanation may seem somewhat simplistic, but other children raise similar points. For example, Laura – backed by Eigil – declares that girls are better at solving conflicts than boys. This may seem paradoxical in view of the above (in addition to possibly

reflecting particular local conditions). However, the characterisation should probably be interpreted in the sense that girls are better at talking about it, using conversation to unravel the problems. This may be what the children have in mind, as they do not associate true conflict resolution with walking away, playing with somebody else or just forgetting all about it. Nevertheless, these methods often work well for the boys.

Role of hierarchical relations in girls' teasing

At one of the schools, the children talk about a type of discord that is specific to the girls. One girl calls it "girly tittle-tattle" (Danish: *pigefnidder*). The crux of the matter is that some dominant girls in the group set the agenda for what should be played and who is allowed in, while others feel excluded from collective games.

Below Hella talks about how the girls in her class have tried to shut her out. It began in reception class, and it still occurs. There are indications that this is primarily a problem in the group of girls, but the boys are also 'in on it' at times. Hella is clearly not very fond of going to school (as discussed in a previous section). The interviews show that she – and most others in her class – find that there is a strong or dominant girl who controls the group of girls, and who takes the lead in teasing and excluding. Here Florian presents his version:

Then she takes some people in, and the others she doesn't want to play with, she keeps out. [...] They say there's no more room for anyone else. [...] First, there are some who aren't allowed, then some others come along and ask, and then sometimes they're let in (Florian, 9 years).

Although the boys do not form part of the girls' conflicts, they have a fairly good insight into what is at stake, probably because they often have to witness quarrels and/or are present in class when the girls' problems are addressed with a teacher. The latter clearly irritates them, as it wastes lesson time on concerns that they find irrelevant to themselves. But it certainly enables them to hold views about the girls' controversies in the interviews:

Niclas: The girls tease in the sense that if, say, someone isn't allowed to play a game, then she walks over and fetches someone and says: "Look how mean that one is. I'm not allowed to play. Look how mean she is!" And then they arrive and also start to say. "Hey, why are you so mean? Why can't she play?" And then suddenly all of them start quarrelling. This is what she does, what's her name? Lotte! I think.

The boys also state (like the girls) that it is almost always Amalie who teases the other girls:

Noah: But it's always her who, like, comes up with the games too. And then they want to join in, but she says no to some of them. And that's unfair to those who can't play, when the others are allowed in.

The girls' conflicts seem somewhat incomprehensible to Noah and Niclas, who are puzzled as to what is actually the bone of contention:

Niclas: They quarrel.

Noah: They just quarrel. They just talk about each other, and then they start to cry.

Interviewer: They talk about each other, and then they start to cry?

Niclas: Then they start to cry, even if they haven't been told anything yet.

Noah: They just talk, and then they begin to cry. It happens very quickly.

Niclas: They say something about one, and then they say something about another, and then after five words, they really start to cry.

Interviewer: It sounds like you find it a little funny that they begin to cry, is that so? That they begin to cry so fast. Isn't

it funny?

Niclas: *Nah, because when they do, we miss a big part of the lesson. Sometimes we miss an entire lesson...*

Noah (interrupts): *And it's quite annoying to listen to others crying. Because I'm not as bad as people believe. Or don't believe.*

Noah and Niclas explain that Amalie in particular makes Hella cry by talking very rudely: *She might even say: "You're so ugly, what a cow", and stuff like that.*

At one stage, Eigil says he always finds the girls to be quarrelling the most, and Wilma agrees with him. Part of her explanation is:

It's probably because there are some girls who tend to, like, they can't stand it when others fall out, and then they end up meddling, or they can't stand others deciding something else, or like, if someone has something special that makes them end up quarrelling a lot. [...] But it might also be because there are many girls from our class who want to have their way (Wilma, 9 years).

And what happens is that:

...you walk away upset if you can't have your way, and then the whole game is broken up. And you have to find others to play with, because one or the other has got upset and then... It's not exactly teasing, but it's also not much fun for the others, if one gets to decide everything (Wilma, 9 years).

Although the girls clash more frequently than boys, they also give greater priority to solving the conflicts, when they arise: *But it might be the girls who most want to sort it out. [...] Yeah, the boys, they can't be bothered to have it sorted out, Wilma says. The boys prefer to ignore the controversy and move on. According to Wilma, this could stem from the boys' fear of having done something wrong, and thus of bringing condemnation upon themselves.*

Luna talks about intrigues that occur mainly between four girls in her class, including herself, making her sound rather aware of her own role in the problem. By and large, it is about exclusion from play and about who plays with whom, since two of the four are patently the most popular, and sometimes want to play together without the other two. The parents have been involved in handling these tensions, and indeed the situation has improved slightly in class 3, as all four girls now organise video evenings and other get-togethers. However, they still face difficulties sometimes, and it is mostly at school where it comes to a head.

However, while the girls' supposedly special ways of entering into teasing and conflict is categorised in several contexts as 'girly tittle-tattle' (*pigefnidder*, undoubtedly an expression the children have heard used by the adults), it is striking that the boys' handling of teasing and discord is not labelled in the same fashion. Their patterns of conflict seem to be perceived as so natural, common or easy to understand that there is nothing to wonder about it, and no reason to establish a distance to it, e.g. by making up a disparaging definition that might be rendered in English as 'girly tittle-tattle'. Certainly, even if the Danish word '*pigefnidder*' is spoken without any derogatory intention, it sets a highly negative and largely trivialising tone. It could be very interesting to trace where the children know this concept from!

Breaking down stereotypes

In the above, we have chiefly focused on the most common ways in which girls and boys act in connection with teasing. However, there are also exceptions to the gender-stereotypical norm

verbalised by the children. Thus, there are several cases of girls getting into fistfights or retaliating physically. This might be simply because the situations demand the use of violence, as the adversary cannot be handled by verbal means. Two girls talk about this:

Isabella: *Well, in the case of Wilhelm, you often end up hitting or kicking him without wanting to [...]*

Astrid: *Yeah, because he kicks really hard.*

There are also particular girls, who simply have an unusually aggressive conduct. Vitus, for examples, says that *some [girls] get into fights the way boys do*. Since the children generally agree that girls do not commonly come to blows physically, it is highlighted as something special and deviant when a girl reacts violently in conflict situations. Eigil and Wilma talk about a girl from their class who has this behaviour. From the manner in which she is described, she seems to be somewhat marginalised by the other children, who negotiate a consensus view of what she is like. Apparently, some 'stories' are built around her, which may possibly contribute to keeping her in the position of an outcast.

It is evident that divergence from gender-stereotypical conduct draws attention. In another class 3, two children speak about a particular girl who almost never cries. Shedding tears is otherwise a characteristic attributed to girls, and her toughness would hardly have been noticed if she had been a boy. She is portrayed as hardy and boyish, yet many boys also find her somewhat strange, among other reasons because she can be aggressive. However, as in the aforementioned examples, there are more aspects of her that differ from the norm, according to Ask (a boy) and Luna:

Ask: *Every times she coughs, some bogey comes out of her mouth, because she eats them.*

Interviewer: *Really? Is that so?*

Ask: *Yeah, she does like this and like this.*

Interviewer: *Okay, is this something you talk about?*

Luna: *Yes. So many of the boys, if they sit next to her, it's like they move to sit with another boy. [...] It's the same with [another girl] sometimes, but she's become a little bit more popular with the boys. A little bit.*

This quote shows how a girl deviating from typical femininity as regards teasing is also attributed other negative characteristics. It is, of course, impossible to know what came first, that is, if one causes the other. Is the origin of her outcast status her apparently 'unfeminine' reactions to teasing? Is it another type of divergent behaviour? Or is it a case of a group of children – a school class – with insufficient tolerance and the need for a scapegoat?

Teasing between genders

In the above, our focus has been on the kind of teasing that takes place internally among girls and boys, which indeed seems to be the spheres in which the bulk of conflicts, teasing and physical fights are played out. However, when teasing takes place *across* the gender divide, it is primarily boys teasing girls and not vice versa. In an interview, Jonathan and Vitus explain that girls mostly tease other girls, while boys *also* mostly tease girls. This springs from the following circumstances:

Jonathan: *We tease the girls the most because they get a bit more...*

Vitus: *They are easier to upset than... boys don't even get very quickly... not even after five minutes do they get upset. The girls take less than five minutes to get upset. The boys may well take a long time to get upset.*

Girls' tendency to be offended over nothing is an issue for the two boys, who also draw attention to a particular girl from the class who is not oversensitive like that. She is different, because she

comes from Ukraine, they say. According to the boys, this is why she is not the touchy and thin-skinned type like the others.

When it comes to teasing 'for fun', several children recount how the boys tease the girls, e.g. by arriving and *laying them down*, which plainly does not bother the girls. It seems these class 3 pupils have already taken to the game of playing up to the opposite sex and drawing positive attention by means of good-spirited banter. However, this state of affairs hinges closely on the environment (or children's group culture) in each class.

Consolation

Another aspect which, like the foregoing, sheds light on differences and similarities between girls and boys is the attitude to giving and receiving consolation. The interview material contains numerous descriptions indicating that girls and boys react differently when feeling sad.

The girls generally see themselves as better at providing comfort than the boys. Even when Maja recounts that boys often approach her to offer comfort, they do so very differently from the girls, as she explains:

Maja: *The boys, you know, just come up and ask what's wrong. The girls are quieter or [...] they sit down and sometimes play [...] that those who're sad are like small children, really cute and everything. Boys aren't exactly like that.*

Interviewer: *[...] You girls become kind of motherly?*

Maja: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *Is that in a good or bad way?*

Maja: *It's in a good way.*

Mille: *You can just say "stop", if you think it's annoying.*

Maja: *But sometimes I think they go a bit over the top...*

Mille (interrupts): *Yeah.*

Maja: *With this motherly stuff.*

Mille: *I usually just ask: "Should we rather leave you alone?", or something like that.*

Maja: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *Does anyone ever say "yes" to that?*

Mille: *Yeah, many do.*

Maja: *Yeah, sometimes you, you know, prefer to be left alone a bit, thinking about what happened.*

The interviewees generally concur that girls are caring, while boys are more likely to just run up to see what the conflict is about and who is in it, and then run away again, since they cannot see what they might do to help out. *The boys just stand there and watch!* The girls take it upon themselves to seek assistance from an adult, i.e. they assume the role of 'mediator', or they provide whatever support they can on their own. Here Isabella and Astrid account for their view of the difference between girls' and boys' consolation manners.

Isabella: *Boys just come up and do like this: "Oh, hi, hi, little girl".*

Astrid: *They say stuff like "sorry" and then walk away. The girls are more into giving comfort.*

Interviewer: *How do they give comfort?*

Isabella: *They say stuff. Say you've hurt yourself, then they take you along... the boys say "sorry" if they were the ones who pushed you, then they just say "sorry".*

Thus, the girls are unimpressed by the boys' consolation skills, as the boys seem to think that apologising is enough, after which they walk away, as the quote says. The perspective of some boys

is somewhat resigned, as in the case of Eigil.

Interviewer: *Are you one of those who stand and watch?*

Eigil: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *Is that because you don't know how to give comfort, or is it because you don't feel like it or what?*

Eigil: *No. I have... I don't know how to do it.*

Others express this resignation more in terms of indifference or disinclination to be caring, as when Noah recounts an experience of seeing a girl sitting down and crying intensely, but just walked by.

Well, yes, I was the one who saw almost everything. But then I just walked straight by. I didn't feel like being next to those who cry and all that (Noah, 9 years).

Whether the boys' 'inability' to provide comfort has anything to do with their gender is impossible to tell. However, on the face of it – given the girls' as well as the boys' narrations about consolation – the girls have, in certain contexts, 'monopolised' the role of comforting and helping others. This is particularly evident in an environment in which a group of girls act as a 'consolation patrol', as some girls mention in the interviews. They find that certain girls cannot get quickly enough to the rescue of the wounded, and that they in some ways bask in the role of the Good Samaritan.

There are, however, a few boys who indeed emphasise their own gender's conflict-solving capacities as the answer to how they can provide comfort. While the girls, according to these boys, do it by rubbing the person's back and talking soothingly, the boys may attempt to get the sad person to think of something else (e.g. by saying something funny) or to separate the hostile parties.

Interviewer: *So how do boys comfort then, if they don't pat the person's back.*

[...]

Jonathan: *I always try to get one person away from the other. I always take Lukas away, because he's not the one who gets the most upset, that's Thomas.*

Interviewer: *But Jonathan, what do you do to get them away from each other?*

Jonathan: *I grab hold of them. I try to stop Lukas from getting angry. And then I just play with him. [...] You just have to play with Lukas, that cheers him up again. That's what's good about Lukas. But not if he's really worked up.*

Another way of comforting a sad boy, according to the above quote, is to just start to play with him. Clearly girls and boys not only handle consolation very differently, but also *talk about it* in wholly separate ways, perhaps precisely because they do not understand the concept in the same manner. At the overall level, the children's statements about providing comfort once again conform to gender stereotypes.

Children's perspectives on the role of adults

Whether and how children involve adults (professionals as well as parents), when they or their classmates are being teased has been one of the focal points of Free from Bullying, and one that has been explored in greater depth in this round of research. The interviews have inquired into, for instance, whether telling teachers and parents about teasing makes a difference. The children offer multiple perspectives on this. While some would never share experiences of teasing with their mother or father, others see their parents as those who best understand them if they are feeling down.

How do children involve their parents and/or teachers?

In the interviews, several children distinguish between how they use their parents and their teachers, respectively, when feeling sad, just as their choice of whom to involve and when varies depending on the nature of the problem. As regards telling teachers or parents about teasing, certain factors seem to form a pattern among many children. For example, several stress that the decision turns on whether it is a case of serious teasing or not, just as it is important if they make up with the person teasing or being teased immediately after the teasing incidence. If they fail to settle their differences, or if it is a case of repeated teasing, more children will tell their parents about it. It is reasonable to assume that choices regarding involvement of parents or teachers are determined by the nature of teasing and by the extent to which the experience continues to stay with them beyond the breaktime where it took place. Below a girl explains how she discriminates between what she tells her parents and what she tells her teachers.

Interviewer: *Do you ever talk with your parents about the teasing that goes on at school?*

Andrea: *No, not much, when it's not about me.*

Interviewer: *When it's not about you?*

Andrea: *If, say, I'm getting teased, then I talk about it with my parents. But many times it's some of the others who talk to their parents, and then they call the parents of the others and say why and how it happened, when someone's feeling really sad, that is.*

Interviewer: *But if some of the others have been teased, and if it's not you, then you don't tell your parents about it?*

Andrea: *Yes, sometimes I do. Sometimes I just can't help telling them.*

Interviewer: *Do your parents ever ask about it?*

Andrea: *Yes. They also ask sometimes if I've got any homework to do. Sometimes I say no, but then it's because I've forgotten it (laughs).*

[...]

Interviewer: *Can you tell your parents some things and your teachers other things?*

Andrea: *Yes. If, say, something has happened to... say, I'm getting bullied a lot, then I talk about it with my mum in a different way, and then it's something else I say to the teacher. So it's not exactly the same things.*

Interviewer: *What would you say to your mother, and what would you say to the teachers?*

Andrea: *If I'd been bullied, then I'd tell the teacher who teased me, and that it was very annoying, and then we talk about that, but at home, I'd tell the whole story of how it happened.*

As reflected in the above quote, it is the nature of teasing that determines whether teachers or parents are involved. Another girl puts in the following way: *I think my mother would understand it. [...] She is better at understanding me than the teachers.* Accordingly, in addition to the nature of teasing, a crucial factor in the decision of whether to involve parents or teachers is the parents' closeness, i.e. their ability to comfort and understand (even take) their child's perspective.

Does it help when adults interfere?

Most children in class 3 think it helps to tell the adults if they are teased. While a clear majority children state that adults are very good at providing comfort if you fall and hurt yourself, or if a game of tag takes a nasty turn, it seems that those children who get teased a lot are more sceptical of the adults, and do not necessarily see them as a guarantee that the teasing will stop. For example, one girl, who is often excluded from the group of girls, here answers the question of whether she remembers an occasion when an adult did something that helped:

Girl: *We tried something before, it actually helped a bit, just a bit, but I'm still being shut out.*

Interviewer: *What was it that helped?*

Girl: *Just a short time ago, a week ago or something, well 3-4 weeks. [...] It didn't work very much, I think we just kept*

it up for a month or something, this thing about the maths teacher deciding who we should play with, and that it could only be two and two. [...] He found out we can't play many girls together, and then he made a list saying who we should play with every day. Then we had to find the one that we had to play with, and we weren't allowed to go to the others.

Interviewer: *Okay, how did that work out?*

Girl: *It was kind of good, just in a way, but then the girls ruined everything. You know, I thought it was good, because then I could join in the game with the girls. [...] But when it stopped, I wasn't allowed anymore.*

The example is from a group interview with two girls, one of whom here laments being excluded from play within the group of girls. Since the girls' conflicts in particular absorb much attention in this class, one teacher chose to regulate the play by pairing up the girls at breaktime. On the face of it, the teacher's intervention helped solve some of the problem in the group of girls, at least from the viewpoint of the girl being shut out. However, other girls from the same class express disapproval of the teacher's experiment. It annoys them not to be allowed to choose who they want to play with. This illustrates how the same intervention is perceived differently by those who take part in excluding and those who are excluded from collective play.

Do the adults treat girls and boys equally when dealing with conflicts and teasing?

However, adult interference does not always help. For example, two boys in a group interview are unimpressed with the adults and their way of managing conflicts. They mostly find themselves getting punished, and often for something they claim to be innocent of. One example narrated concerns a girl who was pinned down and tickled (this incidence is recounted by a great number of interviewed children as something nasty that oversteps their boundaries). The following quote testifies to how preposterous the boys found the note entered into their home-school book.

Noah: *So they wrote in our home-school book, and it was totally annoying that...*

Niclas (interrupts): *... they wrote in our home-school book. They lie!*

Noah: *That such a little girl, because... she also said something about getting scared by that [female] teacher, and not by us. So it's ridiculous that our home-school book is written in, because it wasn't our fault that she got scared.*

Niclas: *She just gets like that. She's always like that. She is, you know, if she sees... she is like, for example, if she gets bullied, she tells it to a grown-up, and says all kinds of nasty stuff, that's just kind of far out...*

Noah (interrupts): *... is a complete lie.*

Niclas: *And about really evil stuff that we've done, even if it's just a lie. So that we get a note in our home-school book. That's what she does.*

Interviewer: *But back then when you had tickled her and kept her head down in the sink, did you then think it was unfair that the teacher wrote in your home-school book?*

Noah: *Yeah, because I'd only tickled her, and nothing else, after that I went out to play. I think I must have tickled her for some 2-3 seconds, and then I left.*

The two boys believe that boys and girls are treated very differently by the adults on the occasion of conflicts. For example, they find that no action is taken when girls tease boys, but if it is the other way around, the boys are forced to take a home-school book message to their parents, they conclude. As can be seen, their general description is closely linked to their own personal experience. According to one of the boys, the bias springs from the adults knowing that boys *can do the most*, because they are stronger. This illustrates a phenomenon which is also addressed in the section on gender, namely that the nature and/or perception of teasing differ depending on whether it is performed by boys or girls. According to the boys in the above example, the teachers react more forcefully against the kind of teasing perpetrated by boys. There are also other examples indicating that the boys see the teachers as discriminating between the boys' and the girls' teasing. Their point is that, while the boys are quickly punished, they are fed up with so much class time

being dedicated to talking about teasing within the group of girls. For instance, one boy stresses that there is hardly any problem among the boys, whereas he reveals irritation over the frequency of conversation about the girls' problems:

Interviewer: *Okay. I would like to know if you ever talk about teasing in class.*

Noah: *Yeah, we do, we're doing it in there right now.*

Interviewer: *Is that what they're talking about in there? Shouldn't you be there then?*

Noah: *At least they were doing it just now, but it was more with the girls.*

Interviewer: *Okay, is it mostly with the girls when you talk about it in class?*

Noah: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *What do you boys do then?*

Noah: *We just shut our big mouths.*

Interviewer: *Okay, do you think about those things then?*

Noah: *Nah.*

Interviewer: *What, then, if the boys are in conflict with each other?*

Noah: *That almost never happens.*

Examples in this section are telling as to how involving an adult – here the teacher – can be viewed differently depending on the perspective. It is frowned upon both by the two boys who feel unfairly treated for their participation in teasing a girl, and by the boy quoted here above, who considers the 'girly tittle-tattle' to be irrelevant to the boys, since they are not involved in any trouble.

When is someone a 'snitch'?

In this section, we take a closer look at what the children categorise as 'snitching', i.e. when some of them disagree with the decision of others to involve an adult. But what does snitching actually mean? And what is the exact distinction between merely telling an adult and snitching? The following example narrated by Wilma may shed light on the issues pondered by children when faced with a choice between managing on their own and seeking adult assistance:

Wilma: *I have a bit of a bad habit, at times, of fetching a grown-up to solve matters, and my [female] friends are not keen on that, so every time I fetch a grown-up, and after the grown-up has gone away again, they get angry with me.*

Interviewer: *How come you fetch an adult?*

Wilma: *It's if we really fall out, and they just begin to quarrel and it gets loud, then I sometimes think that now it almost can't get any worse, so I better find an adult. And that's when I fetch one, but after the adult has gone, they get really upset with me.*

Interviewer: *How come they don't think an adult should be involved?*

Wilma: *They think they can sort it out themselves alright. But when I stand there and listen to everyone just yelling in each other's faces, I think they can't sort it out.*

Wilma talks about a typical kind of conflict faced by the children. She clearly finds a resolution to be beyond the capacity of the girls in dispute, but at the same time, she is aware of a risk of angering the others if she involves an adult. But why is this so? What is it within the group of children that makes adult involvement a poor solution? One reason why the children occasionally hesitate to fetch an adult is related to the reaction of the other children, if they think the conflict could have been solved without adult assistance. The unpopularity that might be associated with 'telling' an adult is expressed in the interview with Lotte:

At least I feel a bit like I'm snitching, and that many people would get angry with me and stuff like that, and that's not the best thing I know, people getting angry with me, I don't like that.

Accordingly, the fear of becoming unpopular often takes precedence over the urgency of solving a particular conflict. There is not, on the face of it, any example in the children's stories of severe situations that have not been told to an adult. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that reporting disagreements to adults can bring condemnation on children, whose social status within the group of children can be affected by being labelled as a 'snitch'.

Summing up on children's perspectives

To an even greater extent than during previous rounds of empirical data collection, when we interviewed younger children, it is striking how much the conversations with class 3 pupils bring forth about teasing. The informants have abundant examples of the phenomenon from their everyday life, and it is something that looms large both in their day-to-day relations and in their minds.

Furthermore, it is remarkable how well most of the children are capable of formulating rather reflective and advanced understandings, not just of what teasing and bullying is, but also very much how it affects them and their classmates to be subjected or to subject others to teasing. In this respect, the data also shows a refined ability to distinguish between various types of teasing and their differing effects, in addition to more general insights into, for instance, gender-specific manners of performing, perceiving and possibly resolving instances of teasing.

As regards resolution of, or intervention against, teasing, the children reveal that – although they appear capable of managing many problems on their own – they attribute major significance to adults getting actively involved in teasing and addressing its potential consequences for some of the children who suffer from it. However, at the same time, the adult must walk a tight rope. On the one hand, some children recount a recurrent experience of adults being unable to deal with the conflicts 'fairly', while others indirectly reproach the adults for failing to act and for not being sufficiently attentive to how intense the effects of teasing can be – not least when it verges on bullying – for children at the receiving end.

Finally, the data shows that, however advanced the formulative and reflective capacity of the children is as regards the nature of bullying and how to handle it, this does not imply that they refrain from teasing. The numerous examples of having teased, been teased or merely observed teasing indicate that this phenomenon does not play *less* of a role in day-to-day school life than prior to the pilot project Free from Bullying. Nevertheless, on a positive note, the children express that, to some extent, they have begun to pay greater attention to it, and they have assimilated a language and some tools to handle it more proficiently than previously.

Parents' experience of Free from Bullying

In this chapter, we explore what the parents of reception-class and class 1 pupils from participant schools say about Free from Bullying. Looking at the distribution of their views, the bulk of interviewed parents express that the project is a very good initiative, which they back. Only a few have a less positive, albeit not outright negative, attitude, primarily arguing that the problems raised by Free from Bullying are 'obvious' and were already being addressed before. A slightly larger group of parents manifest that they would like to receive more information about the project. The strength of this wish varies from one school to another, since the schools differ in the amount of energy expended on informing (or perhaps to be precise *involving*) the parents. Many also express the view that the project, with its focus on the social community's influence on teasing and bullying, has helped draw attention to the issue. Here a parent explains what this means:

But here I think it's being brought to everyone's notice, so it's really in the spotlight. I think this really makes you think about it when you see the other children in the morning, saying "good morning" to the kids and the other parents, and trying to be on good terms, because you know it's catching. Yeah, so in that way I think we've all focused on it.

How have parents been informed and involved?

Interviewed parents were all asked how they have been informed about Free from Bullying, and what they know about the way in which the project is run at their child's school. The vast majority of parents reply that they have learned about it at a teacher-parent meeting, at which the teacher has briefly introduced the Free from Bullying suitcase and the accompanying 'social practices'. Here a parent describes the teachers' briefing:

I don't think it was more extensive than letting us know there was some really good material, which they strongly encouraged us to read through. But there was no going through the project as such.

A few interviewed parents request more information about Free from Bullying. This is mainly the case at the schools and in those classes where the project has only been briefly presented at a teacher-parent meeting. Some interviewees link this to a general wish for the school to become better at involving the parents. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that the majority are, in principle, satisfied with the level of information, which is confirmed by the questionnaire survey addressing all parents of children in preschool and early school years (the results of this exercise are published in the 7th report of the follow-up research, see footnote 1).

A few parents recount how a teacher-parent meeting introduced them to some dilemmas (the dilemma cards for parents in the suitcase), the handling of which was subsequently discussed in groups. This procedure was highly praised by the interviewees:

And then after we'd all replied, and had discussed the matter in each group... I think we were four or five groups... we presented the conclusions in a plenary session, where some groups had input into some of the other groups' discussions, and stuff like that. And I actually thought that was brilliant. [...] It was exciting to hear the views of the other parents. You know, because we didn't know each other.

This and other positive feedback to discussions arising from using the dilemma cards indicate that this tool may contribute to meeting some parents' wish for more information and involvement.

However, the parents' knowledge is not confined to the information passed on by teachers. Crown Princess Mary's commitment to the project and visits to participant preschools and schools have undoubtedly also been crucial in drawing parents' attention to the pilot project, perhaps even in stimulating their involvement. In this quote, the actual bullying issue is linked to the participation of royalty:

Then the class teacher announced it. What it was about and stuff like that. And how important it was. And that Princess Mary has been involved and has visited the school to kind of speak a bit about it.

The tendency to attribute major significance to the royal visit is borne out by the questionnaire survey, where several respondents mention that this has raised their awareness of Free from Bullying. There is no doubt that royal 'stardust' creates an additional publicity that carries the project right into the families' living rooms. However, the excitement generated by the Crown Princess's involvement can be difficult to relate directly to any change in the children's conduct, let alone in parents' and teachers' management of the children's conflicts.

What do the children say at home?

As illustrated above, the parents gain knowledge of Free from Bullying through several channels. Through teacher-parent meetings, the media and other parents, the individual mothers and fathers form a picture of what the project is about. But what about the *children's* role as informants? What do *they* say at home, and what impressions to *they* pass on to their parents?

First and foremost, it is noticeable that the children are rarely the parents' chief source of information on the contents of Free from Bullying. According to the parents, not many children just launch into talking about project activities. An exception, however, is the tactile massage, which many children must have told their parents about, perhaps because it stands out from the daily routine as something special which the children enjoy and look forward to. Here a mother outlines what her daughter reports at home:

Mother: Yeah, she might tell us about it, when they've done some massage and stuff like that. I can tell from the way she says things where it comes from, right?

Interviewer: Okay. Do you know what specific activities are on the programme in her class right now?

Mother: No, not apart from the massage.

The parents' knowledge that the massage forms part of Free from Bullying may stem from the fact that it stands out noticeably from activities centred on inculcating social rules. In other words, the tactile massage features as something unique to Free from Bullying.

Many parents explain with a chuckle that they almost have to *extract* information out of their child. Parents of boys in particular have the notion that being uncommunicative is a characteristic of their child's gender. In fact, girls are also found to be reticent to chat about their day at school, only that their parents do not associate this with gender. Here a mother answers what her son has told her in relation to Free from Bullying:

Well, he might be a poor example overall, as he generally doesn't tell us very much about anything, so no, he hasn't [told us about it]. He's a boy, you know, that might have something to do with it (laughs).

Regardless of gender, it is important to parents to know what they should or could inquire about to learn about their child's day-to-day experiences at school. In this respect, some parents would like the teachers to make greater efforts to report on what has taken place at school on individual days or weeks. Here a mother points out the difficulty of getting information from her son, requesting more updates from the class teacher:

And then perhaps, I mean, since I have to ask Peter about everything, it would be nice to also get a little information about it from, say, the class teacher. About how it's going in the class, and what they're up to, that is, this thing about them perhaps massaging each other and what not.

Likewise, a father expresses a wish for more 'cues' from the teachers to enable him to strike up conversation with his child at home.

And then I think it would be a good idea if they could send us some material, just once in a while, which the parents could use with the children. [...] I mean, for example, that they think this and that is appropriate or inappropriate, or those kinds of questions. Along the lines of those little pieces of paper, you know. [...] A kind of cues or whatever. To give us something to work on.

These parents' widespread request for more information (both from their children in early school years and from the educational institutions) may also spring from the recent memory of their children attending preschool, where parents have been much more used to daily updates from teachers about everything ranging from activities, conflicts, play relations and lunchboxes to their child's mood. The parents may find it hard to get accustomed to the school context, whose information flow is different.

Incidentally, it is striking that most parents believe that their own effort is exclusively or mainly about talking to their children. This indicates that there are still highly-resistant mental divides between the perceived areas of responsibility of school and home.

Free from Bullying is obviously about more than the specific tools contained in the suitcase. It is also about paying greater attention to the social climate and to values such as tolerance, respect, care and courage. On this point, several parents report that their children have become more aware of social norms. Some, for instance, have overheard their child utter something along the lines of "Oh, then you're certainly not a good friend" or "mum, that's not very nice to say". This suggests that the children are assimilating the project, or at least its understandings, concepts and focus points. One parent explicitly attributes the good atmosphere prevailing in the group of children to the targeted interventions with this aim, which are carried out in the schools and the other educational institutions:

I'm aware there are limits, after all, we are talking about children aged six or seven, but there's a surprisingly good atmosphere and good manners in addressing each other. This goes for the small crisis situations too. You can tell they've been schooled to know that you can talk your way out of lots of things. Still, of course, at a basic level, they obviously can't conduct a lengthy discussion, but they can say stop without having to fall out. It's noticeable that they've learned this.

Nevertheless, in connection with this mainly positive feedback on the children's ways of playing and getting along, many parents mention that they cannot know if this would have been different if their child's class *had not* taken part in Free from Bullying. This is a premise which this follow-up research cannot, for good reasons, take into account.

Contact parents and councils of parents

In line with previous practice, this round of empirical data collection has only involved a small selection of parents, this time of the youngest children at the three participant schools. However, in contrast to former rounds, we have limited our interviews to contact parents or members of the council of parents pertaining to each class², hypothesising that these persons might play a special role in efforts to prevent bullying. However, on the face of it, most contact parents dismiss the idea that their position carries greater responsibility for bullying issues than that of other parents.

The members of one council of parents at Vonsild Parish School have discussed certain issues related to Free from Bullying as well as bullying prevention efforts in general. One case in point was the birthday invitation policy, as one boy would not take part in any such parties. The same forum has addressed how to handle the situation of a girl with a slightly aggressive behaviour and solitary tendencies. In addition, the council has discussed the importance of parents struggling with finances also being able to join in social events, calling for these to be affordable. Finally, the council has debated play culture, since some parents seem to have found it difficult to strike a balance between, on the one hand, respecting their child's wish to play and *not* play with particular classmates, and on the other, helping to create an inclusive atmosphere. The parent recounting the discussions finds that the council has become more sensitive to these issues due to participation in Free from Bullying. She says:

Yes. I do believe we've become more aware of it precisely because we are being bombarded a bit about bullying

Another parent from the same school clearly spells out his view of the parents' and their council's roles and responsibilities in bullying prevention:

Absolutely, I believe the council of parents should [have a special role in relation to a project like Free from Bullying]. The children are ours. I also think the school carries a certain responsibility, but then again, I wear another hat as well [by also being a schoolteacher], and I think in this country there is a little too much – how to put it? – politics in saying the school ought to fix this and that. I think it's time to pull the other way a bit. I think we as parents have the main responsibility. So I believe the council of parents should take on great responsibility. And that was one of the reasons why I joined it. [...] Yes, I think we in the council should make sure the parents get to talk a lot about this, about our children, tackling whatever problems might arise. We should be able to call each other if something happens, instead of throwing suspicion around straight away, or just buying our own child's version. I mean [...], there aren't just two sides to a story, right? There are as many sides as there are children involved. So I think we should work towards the group of parents putting our heads together whenever something's up. And that's also the signal we should send to our children. Yeah, "what did you do, what did you say?" That is, never take for granted that the conflict is caused by a single child. And this is where I think the council of parents has considerable responsibility for making it work.

Thus, this parent sees scope for parents taking on a more active role in efforts to prevent bullying. This is in line with those parents who stress the importance of knowing each other within the group of parents to facilitate conversation about potential conflicts.

At another school, the contact parents had not – at the time of the interview – begun to work on bullying prevention initiatives, but had a firm belief that contact parents should act as the link between the teachers of a class and the combined group of parents if/when conflicts arise among the children. In the words of one parent:

² Henceforth the concept of 'contact parent' will be used for all interviewed parents, whether they see themselves as such or as 'member of the council of parents'.

If you volunteer as a contact parent, it's because you're prepared to make an additional effort, so the answer is yes, that makes sense to me. My point is that, whenever something bullying-like or something else arises, that's when I expect a contact parent to somehow rise to the occasion a bit, and sort of take on the role, assume greater responsibility, so to speak. What I sense when I attend a contact-parent meeting with all the contact parents [from the entire school] is that this is how it works. That it's sort of them taking the initiative, or them being contacted by a parent whose child has had an unpleasant experience, and that they take the initiative to something being done about it, right?

As regards the parents' wish to know each other better, some see the contact parents and councils of parents at the class level as an opportunity to come together for events to boost the group spirit. One parent talks about this here:

And that's a possibility, the Free from Bullying project could suggest that the parents, the class council or whatever organise some events without participation from the school, because, I mean, the teachers don't have time for more events, so it should be done outside the school.

In short, at all schools there is a wish for the contact parents or the council of parents at class level to play an active role in enabling the parents to get to know each other better.

Social events

Free from Bullying focuses on fostering an atmosphere that is open and inclusive, and relations among parents impinge substantially on the social environment of a class. One way of stimulating togetherness among parents – used by most schools and other educational institutions – is to organise various social events. The primary aim is – as described by many parents – to get to know each other better, thus making it easier to get in touch with other parents if a problem arises. Here an interviewee points out the potential:

Well, that'd be something about making some social events where parents could talk more to each other. Because you can't really involve the parents like that unless they know each other a bit better. And I don't think we know each other that well in this class. Because that'd mean that, if something happens, the parents could talk about it.

Here another parent expresses a wish for socialising more within the group of parents:

In fact, one of the proposals that we've discussed is to organise an event for parents without our children, going out for dinner or to a café or something to get to know each other. Now we're organising a Christmas event, but I think when our kids are present, well, of course, we do talk, but obviously our attention is focused on them. [...] Yeah, I think that's true. Because, I should add, the parents I know from preschool are easier to approach and talk to.

As can be seen, the parents are so keen on getting to know each other well that they would even like to organise activities without their children present in order to have the adults' rather than the children's relations take centre stage.

At Hellerup School, certain traditions have been established regarding events for parents. This is built on positive experiences from other classes as regards the creation of social relations within the group of parents.

Parent: *Our first event is next Tuesday, with dinner and stuff. The party committee is behind this. Then there's a meal for parents without children, where you sort of get to know each other.*

Interviewer: *All parents from the entire class?*

Parent: *Yeah, it's the kind of thing where you get to know each other.*

Interviewer: *And it's also the parents themselves taking the initiative?*

Parent: *Well, it's the school that urges us to do it. You can't force people, of course, but fortunately some people are willing to do it.*

Accordingly, parents at all three schools generally agree that knowing each other has a preventative effect, and that social events for parents is the way to go. It may occasionally be difficult to get all parents to attend, either because some do not see the point of such events or because some cannot find the time. The exact explanation of this is not the point here. What matters is that a major proportion of the parents are aware that their internal relations impinge on the children's social life, and that this should be taken into account in efforts to create a bullying-free environment.

Materials for parents

As previously mentioned, some parents have praised the tools in the suitcase specifically targeted at parents, e.g. the dilemma cards and to some extent also the folder for parents with 'five tips' to combat bullying, which has been widely distributed.

When we inquired about these five pieces of advice, many parents found them to be 'obvious'. On the other hand, the same persons see no harm in being reminded about them: that one's child should be supported in making playdates with all kinds of other children from the class, that the child should be encouraged to assist and defend classmates, etc. Here a mother expresses how obvious the five tips are to her:

Well yes, I thought it was fine, but somehow it's also like any parent would react naturally. So it hasn't made much difference in my case. Because it's about stuff we talk about at home on a daily basis anyway, with or without the folder.

At the same time, a great deal of interviewed parents signal that at least one piece of advice has made them think more about certain matters to which they would not otherwise have attributed importance in connection with the prevention of bullying. In particular, the suggestion of introducing a shared birthday invitation policy is met with positive response. Even if they had always seen the point of this, they might not have considered it in relation to anti-bullying efforts.

As previously described, the dilemma cards designed for parents were used at the first teacher-parent meeting of a class at Vonsild Parish School. This seemed to fulfil the purpose of prompting discussion and getting a sense of other parents' views in various areas. Here a mother reports on a conversation about dilemmas:

For instance, in my group it was about how we'd handle birthday invitations and stuff like that, if someone hadn't been invited, and we got some good discussions going. [...] And then after we'd all replied, or had discussed the matter in each group... I think we were four or five groups... we presented the conclusions in a plenary session, where some provided input into some of the other groups' discussions, and stuff like that. And I actually thought that was brilliant. [...] It was exciting to hear the views of the other parents. You know, because we didn't know each other.

This mother thinks that an increase in parental involvement could, for example, take the shape of more dilemma cards being discussed, though she stresses that new dilemmas ought to be presented at each teacher-parent meeting or when the class moves up a year.

At one of the schools where the dilemma cards had *not* been in use, a father requested more tools to prevent bullying as well as to talk to his child about bullying. Indeed, the dilemma cards might have met his need, as he says:

Father: *Well, among other things, equipping parents with some sort of tools regarding what to ask their children about, and which – how to put it? – could be used to remind the children of thinking along those lines.*

Interviewer: *At home as well?*

Father: *Yes, at home as well.*

Interviewer: *So that you talk to your children about it.*

Father: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *So you mean a kind of suggestions as to how to handle it, that is, about what to ask the children? Okay, I see.*

Father: *And which could obviously be used in situations in the day-to-day as well, then we might have something to refer to and stuff like that.*

This comment resembles the wish for more ‘cues’ from the teacher expressed by another father, who was often in doubt over what to ask his children about at home.

It is questionable if the dilemma cards in the suitcase work in every situation, but it is conceivable that the writing of generalised dilemma cards could, in future, be incumbent on teachers or parents, if they experience or sense certain issues at stake within the group of children, subsequently debating these at a teacher-parent meeting. This would enable the group of parents to address the handling of conflicts, while providing some general – and at the same time recognisable – problems for discussion within the families.

Role and importance of parents in Free from Bullying

Taking a broad view of the various activities specifically targeting parents, as well as the ways in which the parents are generally involved in and informed about Free from Bullying, the overall opinion of the project is positive. However, if we zoom in on the challenges also mentioned by Save the Children and the Mary Foundation, as well as by implementing schools and preschools, the parents’ comments give rise to highlighting certain points.

The pilot project has attracted intense interest, including widespread media coverage of the Crown Princess’s involvement, visits by the follow-up research team to conduct interviews and distribute questionnaires, evaluation and feedback events, and not least the so-called ‘relay meetings’ (municipalities taking turns to host it) organised by Save the Children and the three participant municipalities. This massive attention has clearly given the nine institutions involved (six preschools and three schools) implementation conditions that are bound to be completely different from those that will apply in other educational establishments wishing to work with the suitcase in the future. As several parents also remark, the intense focus has helped carry the project into the living rooms in a very special manner, thus fostering interest in the entire field regarding teasing, bullying and particularly the preventative effort. Consequently, it is fair to pose the question: What will parental involvement look like once ‘the circus has left town’, or when the circus has never even been in town? How significant is the spotlight for the parents’ commitment and participation? We evidently cannot know this at present. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that only a continuous effort to address the issue and keep up close cooperation between teachers, parents and children can change the fact that some children are unhappy about going to school because they feel teased or bullied.

In this chapter about the parents’ knowledge and experience of Free from Bullying, we stress how the dilemma cards have been particularly appreciated. They seem to establish a space in which

parents' find it natural to take part and engage actively in the effort to prevent bullying, i.e. they are a tangible starting point for those schools and preschools which request greater parental involvement. As mentioned in the section on the dilemma cards, this 'game' has widened the scope for parents to join in. Another way of keeping parents engaged could be to ask *them* to design a new deck of cards, for instance for each teacher-parent meeting or new school year. In this way, the issues raised would also evolve with the children's age.

However, the role of the group of parents in bullying prevention need not be confined to teacher-parent meetings, but can just as well take place when parents pick up their children, when they meet in front of the school, and on other occasions when the talk turns to their children anyway. Clearly, the material has been designed for use in a school context, but we would also suggest that parents – in more informal settings – remember to share their own valuable experiences of how the group of children is doing. It does not always have to be a grand event. Indeed, day-to-day awareness of the issues may well be the most important element in preventing bullying.

The professionals' experience of taking part in Free from Bullying

The educational professionals working with Free from Bullying in the day-to-day are evidently important for the materials and project as a whole to take root in individual schools and preschools. Consequently, Save the Children, the Mary Foundation and the follow-up research team has dedicated considerable attention to how teachers, managers of various kinds, and staff at after-school centres have experienced participation in the pilot project. The interviews indicate that the vast majority among the various staff groups are pleased with the initiative. There are, however, certain reservations as well as more critical comments and reflections on how it has been organised.

Carried by interest and commitment

A central concern consistently addressed both by the pilot project and the follow-up research has been the extent to which Free from Bullying takes root in individual preschools and schools. Indeed, if the project is to be viable after the end of its pilot status, it is essential that staff as well as management take on ownership of the bullying prevention methods, for instance in terms of adhering to permanent routines, using a common language and integrating activities into the educational curriculum.

In the effort to pass on ownership of the pilot project, it has, in many places, been crucial to count on one or several persons who wish to act as a driving force in the push to create a bullying-free environment. 'Experts', 'activists' or 'torchbearers', they are sometimes called. Their presence in a school or preschool is undoubtedly a boon to the project. However, there is also a certain vulnerability associated with their prominence, at least when a single person ends up carrying responsibility for the project's success. One principal refers to the role and mission of this category of people here:

Well, the ownership consists in a commitment to working with it, but the ownership strategy also implies awareness that some people carry the main responsibility. So we might say that the persons forming part of the project today should also be responsible for its continuation. [...] So the people with this task must have energy. That's the point of 'activists' or 'torchbearers'. If they have to fire others up, the passion needs to burn in them first. What matters is who is going to carry the project forward, and we're very conscious about that, I believe.

The vulnerability and other problems associated with assigning individual responsibility for a collective undertaking, as addressed by the principal here, point to the duality of counting on a single person who drives the project forward, yet also, to an extent, makes the project dependent on his/her ability to 'spread the good message'. Even if the principal is very mindful of who is appointed for what task, there is no guarantee that the professional concerned is capable of 'firing up' the colleagues on her/his own, just as there is also a risk that the person loses interest or desire to act as the driving force. She/he might also go on maternity/paternity leave, get another job, or be away for some other reason. What happens then? Does the project fall apart?

The issue concerning individual responsibility is about the way in which each school or preschool organises project work. Success hinges on whether the management backs the coordinators ('activists' or 'torchbearers') in their work. Is time set aside at staff meetings to discuss the materials? Is the entire staff group (say, all teachers in early school years) aware of the materials?

And who is invited to listen to Save the Children talk about the suitcase? A specific problem regarding ownership is that schools tend to be much larger and more divided than preschools, which can make it harder to get a substantial percentage of staff to identify with the project. In the following quote, a teacher reflects on the differences between the various sections of staff as regards the intensity and time dedicated to the suitcase. The starting point was a session with a Save the Children representative:

Mainly reception-class and class 1 teachers [were present], i.e. those who're class teachers, right? And that was quite alright. Not least because there were some of us who'd taken part in it from the beginning or almost from the beginning, and there were others who'd just been thrown into it. So it was actually a very good meeting for us at the school, to start off and see where we are. [...] Because when people get that suitcase, they think: "Wow, okay, now we have to start using all these things." I mean, it seems so overwhelming.

In other words, the session with Save the Children helped the teachers to pause and reflect on how everyone – including those who did not join the project from the start – can be brought onboard. Indeed, the encounter with Save the Children's envoy has been widely appreciated by many of the adult professionals, because it puts a face to the materials, while whetting some teachers' appetite for getting on with using it.

Tangible tools, new competencies?

I think we're pleased we aren't just supposed to sit there and talk a lot of hot air, saying stuff like "you must be nice to one another, and how can you be nice to one another?" It's good to have some materials that have been thought through. That makes it kind of, I think, easier to get through. You're more likely to address the issue, because it's not that overwhelming when you've got these great materials (class 1 teacher).

What is special about Free from Bullying is that it goes beyond the fine words and 'anti-bullying action plans', which many schools have already drawn up, presenting very concrete materials, which are relatively easy to engage with and use in day-to-day school or preschool life, as well as with parents. Many interviewees mark out this aspect as the key strength of the project. When inquiring of the staff about what they have gained from Free from Bullying, a frequent response is that it has opened their eyes to new ways of handling routine issues, and that it has provoked reflection on habitual reactions. Accordingly, the materials and social practices introduced by the pilot project are assessed in relation to the professionals' existing practices as preschool or schoolteachers. The positive comments and feedback apply particularly to the tactile massage, 'Buddy Bear' and conversation boards, which seem to be the most widely used materials and, according to staff, the best tools to elicit a constructive response from the children. We shall examine all materials of the school suitcase in an appendix to this report, communicating the professionals' experiences and evaluations of individual practices (see p. 46 ff).

On the one hand, the staff groups provide positive feedback on many of the social practices. On the other, they frequently express the view that Free from Bullying is based on well-known intentions. However, the overall opinion is that participation in Free from Bullying has, all in all, 'pushed' the preventative effort against bullying higher up the adult professionals' list of concerns. They have simply become more attentive to whom is being teased and how, as well as to ways of preventing and handling conflicts. In the words of a preschool teacher:

Well, yes, taking on this project has clearly provoked a lot of thinking among all participants, and it has provided us with some tools to talk about these things.

Similarly, a reception-class teacher also states that Free from Bullying has been highly enriching, even if it does not necessarily, as previously discussed, amount to a ground-breaking innovation:

Yes, I've acquired more in-depth knowledge of bullying, absolutely. At those preliminary information sessions that were held. [...] I'm not exactly a novice reception-class teacher, well you could say I am, there are some who've done the job for 30 years and I'm only into my third year, but I do know that other initiatives have been taken before, and many say that this is a bit of the same in a new way. But I'm very, very pleased about it. I think it has been excellent, I really do.

The principal at the same school as this reception-class teacher also feels that the project has left her staff better equipped to deal with bullying prevention. In contrast to teachers on the ground, she has not played an active role in day-to-day work with the children, but conveys her second-hand impression of the pilot project's impact:

I can see from the statistics [survey results], for example, that our teachers feel very well equipped. In fact, those best equipped to address bullying are from Skjoldhøj School compared to all other schools [in the municipality]. It surprised me a little that they feel so ready. This is a job they really think they're up to. And in this I believe the suitcase has had a great impact, giving them some tangible tools.

Moreover, she senses that the project has influenced cooperation with parents, which she thinks the teachers take very seriously.

Other teachers mention how the project has produced noticeable outcomes as regards the children's patterns of behaviour or the parents' approach to the group of children. It clearly translates into enthusiasm when an adult professional suddenly feels that even the parents see the project is paying off.

The other day I overheard someone at a birthday party for children, it was actually a parent who has two children very close in age, and one is still at preschool and the other is in reception class with my daughter, and she said: "This Free from Bullying thing, it really works!" Because over at the preschool centre she could see that, when the children were asked to sit in a circle or something – and children tend to push and not be very nice sometimes – then they were good at sort of moving a bit and making room, I mean, they were so considerate. This mother really thought she could notice a difference in her children.

Several interviewees from the staff groups mention that Free from Bullying is built on well-known intentions. There are indeed a substantial number of people who see "nothing new" in the project, since they were already addressing the same issues prior to its launch. This is revealed in this quote:

I think the experience is a bit of déjà vu, that this is what we've always done. And it really looks like what our preschool teachers naturally use and do. So that's why I believe we actually go around doing much of the work suggested by the project, but without thinking "hey, you folks have come up with the greatest thing since sliced bread."

However, it must be mentioned that this interviewee is far from sceptical about the project in general, but has in fact been deeply committed to it. Here he is merely reflecting on his own and his colleagues' response to the notion that the materials represent an outright 'revolution'. The professionals – first and foremost in the schools – largely feel that they were already addressing teasing and bullying before being introduced to this pilot project. Furthermore, some interviewees remark that Free from Bullying is only one of many projects being implemented at their school. They find it proper to point out that it is not necessarily bigger or better than other initiatives. This reservation is perhaps most noticeable at one of the schools in particular.

Notwithstanding these statements, on the whole, we sense great enthusiasm and genuine commitment to Free from Bullying across all participant institutions. The sceptical and critical expressions among the staff are far from dominant in the overall picture. The general perception among the professionals is that they have acquired new competencies, or at least that they have gained a wider and more nuanced perspective on what bullying is, and how educational work can contribute to preventing it.

Changes among the children

Many staff members interviewed from both preschools and schools told us that they have observed changes in the groups of children as a result of the work with Free from Bullying. Thus, it is commonly experienced that the project, to a wide degree, has the intended effect. This has also been mentioned in the 3rd report. Nevertheless, it is difficult for us to say anything more specific or substantive on this. We simply cannot prove that children tease less and are generally more tolerant and caring than what would have been the case if they, their teachers and parents had not taken part in Free from Bullying. Although a few interviewees actually affirm that they experience less teasing and conflict among the children, it would be illusory to conclude that bullying and teasing as phenomena will be eradicated with this project.

What we can ascertain is that the educators generally find that the children have acquired a language and some concepts, which enable them to handle their conflicts in a different manner. This might well be viewed as an outcome of the intensified effort in this field. The adults' new conflict management competencies as well as the children's own enhanced focus on social norms will hopefully turn out to have a preventative effect regarding serious cases of bullying. However, as several interviewees mention, this requires the intervention to become an integral part of day-to-day educational work in preschools and schools, rather than just featuring as a 'project'. As they point out, a real difference – and perhaps a noticeable long-term impact – will only be made when the values and practices of Free from Bullying have become second nature to children and adults.

The staff's experience of cooperation with parents in Free from Bullying

As discussed in previous reports, parents and their commitment are central to children's social conventions. If parents are to contribute actively to creating a bullying-free children's culture, they need to be informed and involved. This can take place in countless ways. Free from Bullying includes some tangible tools to this effect. In addition, teachers have their 'usual ways' of involving parents, primarily by passing on information through newsletters and teacher-parent meetings.

Specifically, the adult professionals at the schools recount that they have told the parents about Free from Bullying at an introductory teacher-parent meeting. Actual involvement, however, does not appear to take place until concrete problems arise in the group of children. Thus, the parents are only truly called in for what could be termed 'fire extinguishing', while taking part to a lesser degree in the preventative effort.

This seems to remain the overall picture. Nevertheless, we do observe one advance as regards parental involvement. This is because the new school suitcase contains a tangible tool, a series of dilemma cards, which serve to elicit more active responses from parents, for instance at teacher-parent meetings. Some of the participant preschool teachers (and partly the schoolteachers) have

previously requested more attention from parents. In this regard, the dilemma cards are a concrete instrument to activate and involve parents in establishing social rules for the whole class (they have thus far only been produced for school parents). The cards can be conceived as a kind of catalyst for the activation of parents, who thus become engaged, for instance, in formulating a joint policy for birthday invitations or in addressing other current topics. Such a process may serve to commit the parents to including all children in the class, hence helping to prevent exclusion and bullying.

This as well as other contents of the suitcase are examined in an appendix to this report (see p.46 ff). The assessment shall not go into further detail here, except stating that the dilemma cards have been generally used and appreciated both by professional educators and parents.

However, this set of cards obviously cannot perform all functions. Moreover, it had not been tested in all places at the time of the interviews. Accordingly, we are still hearing from teachers that parents could be more active, and from parents that teachers could involve or inform more. When we have asked how this could take shape, however, we have generally ‘drawn a blank’ in the sense that both groups tend to be hard pressed to think of new ways of activating parents. The inclination to waver on this point is most pronounced at those schools that have only briefly informed parents about Free from Bullying at a teacher-parent meeting. Conversely, it is less marked where the dilemma cards have been in use. Here, both teachers and parents are clearly more upbeat about the scope for more prominent parental roles.

In this discussion of the staff’s experience of cooperation with parents in Free from Bullying, the concept of ‘staff’ covers a relatively broad group of professionals, i.e. teachers and the director from each preschool centre; the principal, teachers of early school years (including reception-class teachers) from each school; as well as the director and educators from each after-school centre. Above, we have paid much attention to presenting the perspectives of preschool and school personnel on parental involvement – in many aspects two very different outlooks – whereas the views of after-school-centre staff have featured less. Here a committed director of an after-school centre explains that both the notion of children having a role as spectators and the cooperation with parents, which are promoted by this pilot project, are novel to him in the context of an after-school centre. In his experience, parents are highly interested. For example, he says:

And I think we’ve come from parents thinking “no way, you can’t expect children who just stand and watch... that they should have the courage to intervene”. Well... that was too much to demand from kids, they thought. Whereas last time we talked to them, they’d realised that, in fact, yes you can indeed. No-one is suggesting that small children should solve the conflicts, right? But they might well, as a first step, stop hanging around and laughing about what’s going on. Perhaps say “cut it out” or something. Perhaps go and fetch an adult or... you know, do something. I think the parents have come around to this argument today. And this whole thing about helping out, that it’s possible for parents to bring home a wider range of playmates, for example, I think that’s working very well too.

In the same interview, this director points out that his after-school centre has a different relationship with parents than a schoolteacher commonly has, because the children are picked up at the centre, and this often enables staff members to enter into somewhat closer contact with parents. For example, he says that many parents hang around for a chat, which provides different opportunities for cooperation with parents in the context of after-school centres. This is a potential which has not (so far) been taken much into account in Free from Bullying.

Participation in the pilot project

In the follow-up research, we have been interested in examining how the educational staff have experienced the planning of the pilot project – from A to Z. For example, have teachers and management at schools and preschools felt adequately informed about the initiative? Have the various introductions and meetings been relevant? And so forth. Such questions elicit a wide variety of responses, firstly because people's needs differ, and secondly because there are many degrees of commitment, and hence variation in how much information each individual seeks out. Nevertheless, we have noticed a huge appreciation of Save the Children's introductory presentation of the suitcase, and of the aforementioned 'relay meetings' attended by representatives of Save the Children, the three municipalities, Roskilde University and coordinators in the various staff groups. On the whole, these events receive highly positive feedback. A few interviewees find that the project information flow has been faulty, which may be because these people have either not received the newsletter from Save the Children and the Mary Foundation or do not know if they have done so. One person thinks the newsletters have been too sporadic and hence confusing. Although most are satisfied with the level of information, there is a clear preference for the oral and personal channel of communication. This is precisely what has been delivered through the aforementioned events, which have also enabled two-way communication by letting the various staff groups have their say in terms of wishes, questions or comments on the materials, as well as through exchange of experiences across municipal and institutional boundaries.

One aspect about the 'relay meetings' that is particularly welcomed is precisely the chance to share experiences with other educational professionals also taking part in Free from Bullying, who have tried out the materials, experimented with parental involvement and performed organisational and educational work. Here a preschool manager assesses these events:

I have looked forward to those meetings every time, because they give such a huge boost somehow. It's also because you converse with people and get ideas and hear about it. This drives it forward every time, just like that, it kind of fires you up. I think it's great. So that has been really good.

However, notwithstanding this general satisfaction with the 'relay meetings' and with the recurrent visits from Save the Children and Roskilde University, the project's organisation and planning is not met exclusively with praise from the staff groups. Mixed in with the positive feedback, there is also a critical voice stressing that the pilot project (and perhaps the 'relay meetings' in particular) has taken on a somewhat extravagant nature. The following quote addresses this point, among others:

Yes, I think those networking events, where you meet with people from all over the country, have been really interesting and well planned. Well, perhaps a little too pompous, with kind of lots of gesticulation. I mean, it might have been better with something more hands-on workshop-like or... Well, it has been enjoyable and interesting enough. It has just been very much form, that is, posh places and perhaps not always the substance that the occasion might call for. But at the same time, I think it has been good for learning, there has been lots of exchange of experiences, and that has been great, especially in the beginning of the project. [...] Overall, I think it has been fine, I just sense – from my position in the school reality and as a public institution – that this thing about being a private organisation which also has to sell, I mean, everything that goes along with being part of this kind of initiative, well, there is something in that which provokes a bit of scepticism in me.

A couple of other staff members also express the perception that promoting the pilot project involves posturing by certain parties. While there is understanding that Save the Children and the Mary Foundation have a product to sell, a slight irritation can be detected over a degree of indirect

rivalry between the various parties. The presentation of the project as something out of the ordinary has also given rise to an impression that there are *some important interests at stake in this*, in the words of one school employee, who elaborates:

There has also been a kind of discussion between the municipal government, which would like to publicise its role, and Save the Children, which also wants to raise its profile, and then some unspoken tussle about who gets the most publicity out of taking part in this. And for Save the Children, this is a business too, I mean they have to sell this product to other schools. This is just an experiment, which will hopefully turn out successfully, so they can keep selling it in the wide world. And this does indeed make sense, when the product is good. It's just that to me the atmosphere has smacked of cockfighting at some of those meetings between the various municipalities, and then between the municipalities and Save the Children, but I mean that's the administrative level. I haven't got that impression at all at the level of staff and management. Here people have just been interested in the project.

As can be seen, the scepticism seems to concern mainly the administrative level. It finds expression in views regarding joint events, such as *those local-authority chief executives waste too much time and take up too much space*. This, according to the critics, has not only been somewhat tiring, but also displaced more practice-related inputs, whether it be talks delivered by 'experts' or processing of hands-on experiences from everyday life. One professional puts it this way:

I think too much time is spent on the management level. I mean, it would be more interesting to listen more to the specialists and to people with some experience.

As mentioned, the above critical points have been included here not because they dominate the interview data and represent the view of a majority of interviewees, but precisely because they express something *else*, and hence contribute to introducing some light and shade into an otherwise uniform picture. At the same time, it must be stressed that even the people behind these minor misgivings are *generally* supportive of the pilot project.

The special events convened by the pilot project have helped keep up the commitment of many people. They have made an impression and regularly revitalised the eagerness to work with the pilot project, many recount. In particular, the presence of Roskilde University and Save the Children is highlighted as important in this connection:

So I think it has been good to have you around, talking to the kids and stuff like that, so we can see the interest goes both ways. I think it's good that there has been stuff going on throughout. It has helped keep the spotlight on it.

The last comment refers directly to the additional focus on these participant institutions occasioned by their involvement in the pilot project. This manifestation is worth noticing because it touches a potential weak spot. What will happen the day when the institutions no longer have Roskilde University and Save the Children running around? Will Free from Bullying live on? This question was also raised in the interviews. The replies were almost unanimously encouraging, since there was a wish for the work thus far to continue, be systematised and possibly even expanded. The hope and intention among the vast majority was that the introduced routines and activities would henceforth become an integral part of everyday life. One interviewee, however, also mentioned that she envisaged dedicating more attention to the project in some periods than others. They might put it aside for a while, and then turn to it with even greater intensity later on, for instance by holding theme weeks or working on some of the social practices.

Participation in the official pilot project – as opposed to merely obtaining a suitcase and starting a Free from Bullying project independently at each school or preschool – has entailed a host of privileges. Some of them are reflected in the above quote. Another is the chance to have a say and

influence the design of the actual materials. In this regard, the teachers have expressed great satisfaction that their objections to the former suitcase from Save the Children and the Mary Foundation have been taken seriously, leading to the making of a new version particularly targeted at early school years.

It is even conceivable that the teachers' feeling of having been consulted and taken seriously has been decisive for their commitment to the project and keenness on using the material. As already mentioned, we shall elaborate on the teachers' experiences and assessments of the new suitcase in an appendix to this report.

Participation in the pilot project has also – by means of the constant attention secured by recurrent visits from Roskilde University and Save the Children – facilitated local ownership of Free from Bullying. This is seen as essential for the project to take root in individual institutions. However, if it turns out that this ownership springs precisely from the pilot-project participation, it will evidently be difficult to replicate it at schools which 'only' purchase the suitcase.

According to all interviewees, taking part in Free from Bullying has been inspiring and fruitful, but as we have pointed out, the level of enthusiasm varies from one institution to another, as well as from one person to another. And then it takes time and energy. This is especially so since the presentation of the initiative as something special gives rise to matching expectations of commitment and focus. The time dimension is the subject of several comments. In this quote, it is specifically about scheduling recurrent visits from Roskilde University:

But it's also a bit time-consuming for us (laughing) to take part in it. We may not have quite realised this before, but when the feedback came in, it was all worth our while. I mean, because then it's fun, and it also makes good sense to reflect on a practice in a context like this. I mean, it does make sense, it just takes a lot of time, but I just think we weren't quite aware from the outset that this would be so.

The time concern may first and foremost apply to everyday life, fitting myriad activities into a busy schedule. However, it is also raised in relation to the big picture, i.e. the duration of the pilot project as a whole. Precisely because it is demanding to take part, it cannot last. This is clarified in this quote:

No, but I'd say this is a two-year period, right? And then that's the maximum. We think it's fine now that this project is about to run out. Because we get this feeling that we've kind of taken from it what we can use, and we're very pleased about it, and it has been exciting to be a part of it. But now we're already on to lots of other stuff, so in that way it suits us.

But where does this leave Free from Bullying after the end of the pilot project? On the face of it, its activities have, after almost two years, become so integrated and incorporated into the respective educational institutions that the undertaking will live on 'by itself'. Most interviewed staff members expect to use the project materials in future – to a lesser or greater extent depending on their position at the preschool or school. A lot of people have already recommended it to others. In some municipalities (or local areas?), plans have been made for participant institutions to introduce the project and its materials to others. Such initiatives seem to be carried forward by individual professionals keen on sharing their newly-gained experiences, expanding cooperation between school and preschool in the process, since both levels are involved when the work features as a special local undertaking.

In addition to this, the wish to pass on one's positive experiences to other institutions is mostly observed among preschool employees. As will be noted in the 7th report (see footnote 1 in the present report), which is built on a questionnaire survey among professionals and parents from participant preschools and schools, it is in fact the preschool rather than the school staff groups who have the strongest feeling of having gained from Free from Bullying.

Summing up

For two years, Free from Bullying has engaged participant schools and preschools quite intensely. From interviews with the professional educators involved, we have learned that ownership of the initiative and its materials hinges to a major extent on one or more 'activist' or 'torchbearers' – formally designated as coordinators – who have the deepest insight and possibly also the greatest interest in the pilot project, and who are therefore typically in charge of communicating it to their colleagues.

As mentioned, the need for assigning a key person to a project such as Free from Bullying mostly springs from practicalities at each school or preschool. We stress this not to dismiss the value of the 'activists' and 'torchbearers', but to warn against the vulnerability associated with such an arrangement. According to the knowledge acquired through the follow-up research, the forward-looking point is that Save the Children and the Mary Foundation, along with schools and preschools trying out Free from Bullying, should pursue collective ownership to get the initiative to take roots, i.e. it is better if several people are involved. Furthermore, opportunities might be established for the entire staff group to discuss and reflect upon everything from the use of the materials and the culture within a group of children to the adults' role in connection with teasing and bullying.

On the issue of the staff acquiring new competencies as a result of taking part in Free from Bullying, the feedback is generally positive. However, one view that was aired is that the pilot project, notwithstanding its grand launch as a major and ground-breaking enterprise, does not, in fact, contribute much that is 'new', since work had been carried out along similar lines for many years before. This observation was particularly put across by the school personnel. Nevertheless, what makes the project and its materials so good, according to the professionals (not least the schoolteachers), is their ease of use as well as the concrete methods suggested and aids provided. Many also believe that it brings new insights into what bullying is as a phenomenon, and into what elements can (also) be mobilised in a preventative intervention. However, it is conceivable that this additional understanding and attention to the day-to-day fight against bullying is also, at least in part, a result of being under the spotlight as participants in the pilot project.

The municipal policy perspective

In one of the preceding reports (2nd report, see footnote 1 in the present report), we described the various ways in which the three municipalities involved were handling implementation, organisation and ownership of the pilot project. In particular, we examined the relationship between the municipal administration and participant preschools and schools. In an attempt to categorise differing municipal approaches, we established three headings:

- Well-organised central management
- Driven by committed local activists
- Relying on professional mechanisms

In this section, we shall try to home in on movements, changes and new trends that have since characterised these various ways of taking on Free from Bullying.

The example of municipal style originally dubbed ‘well-organised central management’ was, in brief, characterised by the municipality concerned entering very actively into the pilot project from the outset, among other ways by incorporating it into some of its pre-existing organisational structures. Accordingly, the municipal administration formed a clear view of how the project was to be prioritised and take root in the municipal management practice, laying down, at a very early stage, the division of responsibilities and procedures for communication to ensure a link between municipal involvement and the project work of individual educational institutions. Conversely, it was shown that participant schools and preschools did not take to the project with the same sense of commitment, involvement and clear procedures (see the 2nd report, section ‘Free from Bullying: from concept through initiative to project design’).

As regards this municipality’s continued work on Free from Bullying, the original approach has been maintained in the sense that the municipal administration remains closely involved in the pilot project’s development, and not least in reflections on how it may contribute to inspiring other schools and preschools addressing the same field. On the one hand, this entails that the pilot project’s exact implementation at the participant educational institutions is still followed closely. Although challenges seem to remain in getting all participant preschools and schools to play an equally active role in Free from Bullying, from the municipality’s perspective, the overall picture is that the pilot project is beginning to make its mark and is well on course to take roots in the day-to-day practices of some of the educational institutions. On the other hand, Free from Bullying, through its focus and intentions, has contributed even more to, and formed part of, a broad municipal policy drive to draw greater attention to the importance of teasing, bullying and wellness among children in the local preschools and schools. Accordingly, attempts are made to involve the municipality’s other educational institutions in working with materials and ideas from Free from Bullying. In principle, this is formulated as an offer to educational staff, who are invited to an introduction and course regarding Free from Bullying, while the municipal administration encourages them to obtain the Free from Bullying suitcase etc. In this effort, there are also expectations of drawing constructively on previous experiences to be passed on by professionals who took part in the pilot project.

In addition to bullying and children’s wellness in educational institutions being a centrally formulated municipal concern before and during the pilot project’s implementation, the advantage and need for explicitly addressing this issue has now come even further to the fore, partly stemming

from the positive experiences of Free from Bullying, partly against the background of municipally collected data on parents' prioritisation and expectations of greater intervention against bullying in preschools and schools. Not least the recognised parental pressure to get educational institutions to take teasing, bullying and wellness among children more seriously in their professional endeavour has been a significant motivating factor for the municipality to generally take action and egg on others with a view to spreading efforts adhering to the concept of Free from Bullying across the municipality.

The example of municipal involvement entitled 'driven by committed local activists' was previously described, very simplistically, as being characterised by a generally positive municipal view of the pilot project, yet without this being matched by clear backing at the organisational level, among other reasons due to extensive restructuring. In reality, this left the pilot project being carried forward mainly by the comprehensive commitment of participant preschools and school themselves (see the 2nd report, section 'Free from Bullying: from concept through initiative to project design'). This scenario has not changed significantly. The school and preschools continue to be highly active and deeply involved in Free from Bullying. In a fundamental way, they have taken on ownership of the project and still act as the real dynamic force, whereas the municipality's role is primarily to provide backing and offer assistance wherever considered appropriate and feasible. On the one hand, it seems to give the project local energy, which has translated positively into integration and firm roots in the educational institutions' day-to-day work. On the other hand, it may occasionally produce frustration among educators on the ground, who feel left too much to their own devices, having, so to speak, to fire themselves up.

However, as a motivating factor, it can be mentioned that several other educational institutions have noticed the project and have begun to express a wish to be informed and inspired on the basis of what participants in the pilot project have set in motion. Specifically, this means that measures are underway to utilise the adult professionals' knowledge and experience in an exchange with other municipal establishments, so that fundamental concepts and pedagogical tools of Free from Bullying can spread like ripples on a pond through 'bottom-up' initiatives (at the institutional level) with possible 'top-down' support (from the municipal administration). Generally, the municipal administration is manifestly enthusiastic about the intervention against bullying, and not least about the participant institutions' success in bringing the project alive and getting it to take root. However, as a matter of principle, it is not considered appropriate to issue municipality-wide prescriptions regarding the use of certain educational materials, such as those of Free from Bullying.

Finally, the third example of municipal participation was referred to as 'relying on professional mechanisms'. In brief, this was characterised by active involvement from day one, as the pilot project was set within the established municipal policy for, organisational approach to, and prioritisation of this field of work. Both the municipal administration and participant institutions expressed, from the outset, a shared feeling of commitment and joint ownership of Free from Bullying (see the 2nd report, section 'Free from Bullying: from concept through initiative to project design'). Stakeholders from this municipality report no drastic change in how the pilot project has been prioritised and managed. Nevertheless, some fairly radical decisions have been taken in parallel with the accumulation of experiences and assessments of Free from Bullying and its accompanying materials and practices. Against the background of a positive view of the importance and potential of the initiative in the effort to reduce teasing and bullying, it has been decided that all educational institutions in the municipality will work on the basis of Free from Bullying's materials, social practices and objectives. As a particular quality of the pilot project and its materials,

municipal representatives highlight the beneficial effects on more conscious efforts to smooth the transition from preschool to school. Specifically, this means that the municipality will fund the purchasing of suitcases and participation in introductory courses on how to work with and on the basis of Free from Bullying, combined with an instruction to educational institutions that this must henceforth be incorporated into their day-to-day practices, teaching programmes, etc.

Experiences shared across the three municipalities

Thus, although rather fundamental differences can still be observed in how the three municipalities deal with Free from Bullying at the administrative level, there are also some striking similarities in their assessment of experiences gained from the pilot project.

Firstly, there is agreement that Free from Bullying thematises a field of problems which currently needs to be addressed much more explicitly than has thus far been the case. In two of the municipalities it is spelt out that the initiative of Save the Children and the Mary Foundation has been optimally and rewardingly timed in relation to the municipal government's own priorities. The third laments that it had to be launched just when the municipality was in a state of organisational flux, though this is not meant to imply that Free from Bullying misses the target of a topical issue, but rather that the local administration was not, at that particular point in time, sufficiently geared to contribute as actively as it would have liked.

Secondly, despite the disparities in the organisational realisation of Free from Bullying, there is a shared expectation that it will not only live on meaningfully in participant educational institutions, but will also, to varying degrees, spread to other preschools and schools in the municipality. In this process, both the municipal administrations and the teachers already involved are assigned major roles (once again with marked differences in how this is handled specifically in each of the three municipalities).

Thirdly, the three municipalities seem to concur in their view of Free from Bullying's potential as a future framework for intervention against teasing and bullying. In particular, there is a shared assessment that – although the work with Free from Bullying may not have *verifiably* reduced the extent of teasing and bullying – it has set in train a fruitful process, given that greater awareness of the problem has been raised in children and adults alike. Not least, application of the materials and social practices has contributed to the children developing linguistic and other tools to handle teasing and bullying more constructively than before. Based on feedback from staff on the ground, all three municipalities express the sentiment that the children have generally become more caring in their social interaction.

Fourthly, a consensus remains at the municipal level that one of the major challenges ahead in implementing and disseminating Free from Bullying is how to get parents to participate more actively.

Summing up

The intention behind this report has been to paint a picture of the participants' views of Free from Bullying, and specifically what the pilot project means for the day-to-day life of preschools and schools, for children's teasing and bullying, and for the establishment of an anti-bullying culture. We have done this by letting children, parents and educators have their say, underscoring the patterns discerned in the extensive data from interviews with representatives of the aforementioned groups. While the adults first and foremost offer their perspectives on Free from Bullying – i.e. the pilot project, its organisation and materials, the cooperation carried out, etc. – the interviews with children from class 3 have more broadly discussed general experiences of teasing and bullying. In this regard, this report can be seen as supplementary to the 4th (and partly the 5th) report, which also conveys children's perspectives on these issues, although by interviewing children who are younger, and hence not as reflective as children in class 3 rather commonly are.

The follow-up research as a whole comprises various rounds of empirical data collection over a two-year period. Each round has produced one or several reports with subsequent feedback events being held in participant institutions. This report is based on the third round, which will be the last to include all involved groups and participant institutions in the three municipalities. In continuation of this publication, a feedback event will bring together the research team and the parties involved to reflect on the latest findings presented in this report, as well as to systematise experiences and look back at the pilot project from where we stand today.

Appendix

The following has been conceived as an addition to the 6th report describing individual materials, social practices and activities contained in the new Free from Bullying suitcase for schools. Accordingly, it is a form of preliminary evaluation of the materials designed and is primarily targeted at Save the Children, the Mary Foundation and professional educators.

Experiences and assessments of the Free from Bullying school suitcase

In the beginning of the school year 2008-09, all three participant schools received a new suitcase from Free from Bullying, whose contents had been revised and refined on the basis of the original version, which was henceforth to be used in preschools only. The new materials represent an attempt to target school-aged children in particular. Consequently, the interviews with school staff – encompassing management of schools and after-school centres, as well as teachers of pupils in reception class and early school years – inquired about experiences thus far regarding the new materials, which had been used for about three months at the time of the interview. We have here summed up their assessments of the various social practices and accessories from the school suitcase.³

Before turning to individual materials and practices, it must be stressed that the school staff's general response to the new suitcase has for the most part been overwhelmingly positive. In particular, many professionals express pleasure that they have been listened to and taken seriously by Save the Children and the Mary Foundation, which have followed up on suggestions and wishes for more age-appropriate materials expressed by interviewees in previous rounds of feedback.

Introductory booklets

Free from Bullying – What for? (*Fri for Mobberi – Hvorfor det?*), booklet on background to the project and issues for the professional educator

Free from Bullying – This is how we do it (*Fri for mobberi – Sådan gør vi*), booklet on social practices and activities

The new suitcase is accompanied by two booklets for the school staff. One offers a presentation of Free from Bullying and introduces a wide professional perspective on understandings of bullying and efforts to prevent it. Another provides detailed description of the pilot project's individual social practices and activities, including abundant suggestions and ideas for games and activities that can be carried out in class as part of the prevention of bullying – with educational as well as social aims, for children as well as adults.

Not all staff had read these booklets when we arrived to conduct the interviews. Most had browsed through them, and possibly picked out whatever they found to be most relevant to their own situation. Some had not even opened them, while a few had indeed gone carefully through the entire text. The latter was particularly the case at Vonsild Parish School, where the staff also revealed relatively extensive knowledge of the numerous materials. The principal has this to say about the booklet on the background to the project and issues for the professional educator:

³Although the suitcase contains new materials, it must be mentioned that a great deal is repeated from the original version, which has influenced, for instance, the choice of what to use and the experiences gained.

Yes, that booklet has been very valuable to me, also to get new perspectives on my role in cases of bullying or unhappiness, though I think it'll take some time before we feel the real benefits of it. My intention now is to hand the booklet to our 'AKT counsellor' [specialist in student behaviour, child welfare and special needs attached to many schools in Denmark], even if that person hasn't been directly a part of the project, because the booklet actually contains excellent theoretical background knowledge, which is also professionally quite easy to understand.

According to the school staff, the chief value of the two booklets is their great readability. In many cases, new class 1 teachers without previous practice of using the materials have had to familiarise themselves with the suitcase. Several of them were pleased with the clear and comprehensible presentation. However, even experienced 'users' of Free from Bullying find the booklets good and useful, such as this reception-class teacher from Skjoldhøj School, who says:

*Mariann: And then some new teacher's booklets are out, and they've been a great help for me, because then you can prepare yourself a bit at home, for instance before using the conversation boards in class. I think it's *great* with those booklets. I've been very pleased with them. They're easy to read. The material... it's simple and comprehensible. I've been really pleased with the teacher's booklets in the new suitcase.*

Interviewer: Is it both the one called 'Free from Bullying: why is that?' which is about educational theory, and the one that describes the activities? There are two booklets, you know.

Mariann: Yes, there are, but I think both of them have been good for me, because it's also something you can refer to, seeking answers to, say, how to use the conversation boards. Or if you feel like twinning your class with a class of older students. I think it presents some good examples. We haven't tried them out yet, but it's valuable to have them written down in plain language. So thumbs up to that. This is something I'm definitely going to use.

Another teacher says the following:

It's understandable and manageable and... if someone orders the suitcase, I actually think they should, well, be able to use it straight away. I mean, we've been privileged and attended some courses, where a lot has been explained. But I actually think that others who order the suitcase should be able to read those booklets and get the orientation they need.

The two easy-to-read booklets make it possible to either get a theoretical grounding, follow the suggestions and activities to the letter, pick out whatever is wanted, or simply seek inspiration. Here a teacher recounts how her reception class had in fact already, before she received the booklet, carried out many of the activities that it proposes. Nevertheless, she sees the publication as useful:

We did some of them without knowing beforehand that they were in the booklet (laughs). Then we saw afterwards that they were in there. And then we got a couple of new ideas by taking a look at it. [...] Because we've clearly taken that project and mixed it up with a lot of what was already going on here at the school regarding friendship, and this has actually worked very well for us. And then we've looked at the booklet if we thought we were short of some substance in terms of theory.

Another way of using the booklets – practised, for example, at Skjoldhøj School's after-school centre – has been to copy the literature lists and give them to parents in order to inspire and perhaps enable them to read some of the storybooks mentioned to their children.

Pupils' meeting

Pupils' meeting, children's meeting, class meeting, Free from Bullying meeting or even 'co-responsibility', as this activity is called at Hellerup School, is one of the most central activities of Free from Bullying. In the schools, it is typically chosen to hold this in 'Class Time' (a weekly session dedicated to the class talking about its social life, events and initiatives) when the children sometimes form a circle and hold a discussion moderated by the teacher. As such, this is not the reinvention of the wheel, since class teachers have undoubtedly raised issues regarding the class's social environment with pupils prior to participation in Free from Bullying. Nevertheless, many

educators are greatly relieved to have a concrete approach to this event, including particular accessories and activities. To many children, the accompanying ‘Buddy Bear’ cuddly toy symbolises the special contents of this meeting. For instance, a teacher tells how she always draws the teddy bear on the blackboard to mark the occasion of this gathering.

As can be seen, the pupils’ meeting has mostly been conceived as a classroom activity. This also makes it less frequent at after-school centres, where one staff member says:

We’ve talked about how it’s less clear-cut here at the centre. [...] We don’t, with all due respect, as it sounds almost derogatory, but we don’t hold children’s meetings and stuff like that. We think that goes more with the preschool and reception class. [...] The setting at an after-school centre is different, right? This is on a voluntary basis. They’re spread across various workshops, right? So this is why we’ve talked about how we can make sure the children know that we’re working on this.

Part of the story behind this quote is that the after-school centre concerned has gone to great lengths to integrate Free from Bullying into many of its activities and educational programmes, including an upcoming theme week dedicated to the pilot project.

Buddy Bear

Buddy Bear is an icon of Free from Bullying, and is used as a more or less standard fixture in the various classes and schools. While the former suitcase had a small teddy bear or ‘consolation bear’ for each child and one big one for the whole class, preschool section or centre, only the latter has survived in the new school suitcase. Its role varies widely from one place to another.

A reception class teacher relates that the bear takes turns to accompany the children home, and the idea is to get it to ‘recount its impressions’ from those visits in the words of its host (a practice that has yet to be consistently carried out). One class 1 teacher reports good experiences of using it at pupils’ meetings, where she speaks through it to the children by impersonating it with a funny voice:

I’m sort of the crazy one among us, I think, so I do those children’s meetings with a strange voice coming from the teddy bear. [...] The hand puppet version. They just love it! [...] And then we sit in a circle, and if I my concentration slips and I speak with my normal voice again, then they go “hey, the bear was meant to say that”, so then I go “oh yeah”, the teddy bear’s voice coming back. [...] They just take to it so well, and the teddy bear can say stuff which wouldn’t produce the same response if I asked them directly. [...] It can ask them stuff that, if I asked about it, I’m not sure I’d have got the same great answers. [...] The teddy bear can go really close, I think, stuff like “so you’ve tried that yourselves, hah?” [...] I think I’m getting better replies. That’s what I can judge from when I sometimes end up speaking with my own voice again. Then their answers are just not that exhaustive. I just think they really buy this Buddy Bear thing, at least they do in my class 1.

Using the teddy bear at the children’s meetings is the ‘classical’ way of using this accessory, which is also what we saw in preschools. However, an after-school-centre director relates that the children also use this Free from Bullying icon in many other ways:

It occurred to one of the children that we should photograph Buddy Bear, and then Buddy Bear should have a sticker too. And in this way, the project lives, you know, in many dimensions. With the new suitcase we’ve obtained one more Buddy Bear, so now we’ve got two, and then, of course, one has to be a boy and another a girl. Well, I think the children spent a whole fortnight preparing how the two were going to get married. I mean, they made a wedding dress, and they baked little wedding cakes and everything. And in general I think the games they come up with are sort of very friendly, and there is lots of positive energy in those cuddly toys. Whereas usually you may well see boys playing with teddy bears which preferably end up beheaded or getting into fights or something. These are not the kind of games Buddy Bear is used for at all. So I think it’s kind of an icon. [...] I also know from preschool and school that they use it

as a consolation bear, so that tender role may have been transmitted to us a bit. We also play hospital with it, it's been there too, oh yeah. They don't say it like that, but I see it a bit as the equivalent of the hospital clown. Then you've got this teddy bear walking around, visiting the kids when there's something seriously wrong with them (laughs). So it certainly has a life of its own in a kind of very positive role.

As in the above case from the after-school centre of Skoldhøj School, a reception-class teacher also mentions that they suddenly had *two* big teddy bears after receiving the new school suitcase. As a result, it was decided to give one away to class 5A with which they were twinned, symbolising the bond of friendship between the two classes. Now it was no longer just the children getting along, but also their respective teddy bears, who also got to wear the buddy bracelets.

Finally, it can be mentioned that the teddy bear is used in connection with the 'play writing' taking place in reception class at one of the schools. Here the teacher explains that the children are asked to 'play write' a story about how Buddy Bear has helped out some children. The narrations are usually based on the pictures in the conversation boards. In this manner, Free from Bullying is drawn into the everyday subject matter in the classroom.

Conversation boards

One of the most visible differences between the old and the new suitcase may be the pictures on the conversation boards, which have become much more relevant to school life. This is widely appreciated in the feedback, e.g. by this reception-class teacher:

And so, I clearly see the difference, for instance in the pictures. I mean, it's much more authentic to see pictures of schoolchildren instead of pictures of preschool children. And kids are very visual. They're keenly aware that there is a difference in "this is what you look like when you're big, and this is what you look like when you're little". So it's excellent that a new suitcase for schools has been made.

The conversation boards are indeed among the most popular tools from the suitcase. The vast majority have used them, typically as a part – or as an agenda item – of the children's meeting. One exception is Hellerup School, where the pictures were considered to differ too much from *their* particular school life. In the words of one staff member:

Teacher: *These things [takes the conversation boards out of the suitcase], well, we just make them ourselves. [...] Yes, it looks a lot like something we call 'cartoon conversations', because here [points at the conversation boards] you see a situation, but you can kind of just get a sense of what they're saying. In cartoon conversations you've also got some bubbles about what they say and think. So we use those at the same time.*

Interviewer: *Do you draw those yourselves?*

Teacher: *Yes, it's something we draw ourselves, depicting the actual situation that arises. So we don't really use these [Free from Bullying conversation boards], we don't really think they fit into our class. I mean, I draw my own whenever there is a conflict. Then I draw the actual conflict, because then there's lots of unspoken stuff that doesn't show, because the children always go "what did you say?" and "what did I say?" instead of "what were you thinking?" or "what was the reason you did it?" or "what did you forget to tell that person when you began to play" or "did you forget to ask, or did you just think about it?" [...] Then we talk about that. I mean, those who were parties to the conflict, and then the others can stand there and watch. [...] Because then they can see that "oh dear, I forgot to ask if I could join in". So it gives greater insight to the children. These are some of the possibilities that I miss in the conversations boards.*

Interviewer: *Bubbles... So you didn't use those boards at all?*

Teacher: *No, because we don't really find them appropriate for our class. Because our school is so special compared to this thing. It doesn't look like it at all, you see.*

As can be seen from the quotes above, it is important for the use of the conversation boards that the pictures are recognisable and that the children can identify with them.

One after-school centre was intensely involved in Free from Bullying right from receiving the first suitcase. When the school suitcase was introduced, and the teachers of early school years decided who should work with which materials, the conversation boards were ‘taken away’ from the after-school centre. This deeply bothered the director, who then decided to use the illustrations in a different manner. He explains:

In fact we started off one year before we were meant to, simply because we found it so interesting this thing. So we were a little frustrated that – when we were really going to take part, as those preschool children began to go to school – then the tasks were carved up between us, giving the reception class teachers the conversation boards, indeed asking us not to use them, because that would be kind of overkill. So a division of labour was made, and it was a pity for us to lose the conversation boards, as we were very pleased with them last time around, so that was sort of “oh no”. What we did then, after a while, as I was thinking “what a shame that is”, is that I took them and made reduced-size copies of all the auxiliary questions on the back. Then I pasted that text in one corner of the conversation board and put them up on the doors all around the house. And other places where children just pass by. And that has had an interesting effect, because the children crowd in front of a picture like that. And those who’ve taken part in the entire anti-bullying process know a lot about what goes on in this and that picture, and I can hear they kind of stand there and want to teach the other children about how you might talk about it. That’s actually very interesting. The oldest children read out the questions for the youngest, and lots of little conversations arise around those boards that just hang around in the house. This has been really great. And we found that, when the reception class pupils arrived in the month of August, they were delighted to see they’d come to a place that also had those pictures. They immediately recognised them. It gave them a sense of security and comfort. It was great.

As the quote illustrates, the initially lamented decision that the conversation board should be reserved for others inspired the invention of a new and rewarding use of the material. At another after-school centre, they have concluded that the pictures are most suitable for children’s meetings or other types of gathering. And since these are not held at the after-school centre, the director believes that the conversation boards fit more naturally into a school context.

One participant reception class has positive experience of using the conversation boards for ‘play writing’. We have described this activity in a previous report (2nd report, the section entitled ‘conversation boards’, page 10), and since the reception-class teacher says that she continues to use the pictures from the ‘old’ suitcase, we shall not elaborate on this practice here.

The massage programme

Another popular activity is the massage and its attendant programme, which all participant classes have chosen to use. The response to this social practice is exclusively positive, but does not differ significantly from that to the foregoing suitcase. Whether the massage forms part of children’s meetings or is more sporadically scheduled in the day-to-day varies from one place to another. At one after-school centre, they decided to offer the massage programme as a voluntary Friday activity:

After-school centre employee: *So this is where we’ve chosen to say that then we can schedule tactile massage on Fridays for those who want. [...] Just as you can choose to make drawings, you can join in the massage.*

Interviewer: *So it’s not like you gather the children in a group saying “this is what we do now”?*

After-school centre employee: *No. [...] They simply know it’s on, and then they show up.*

Although everyone says the children like it, some staff members consider the appropriateness in relation to particular children or in consideration of girls in early puberty, as can be seen from this quote:

As regards the tactile massage [...] we had two big girls at the time who were very worried if they could kind of get a sense of their own boundaries, and if they might some day be subjected to something that wouldn't be good for them, because they couldn't feel their own boundaries. And this is when we talked a bit about it, that if we introduce that "now we do tactile massage in this room, and it's for all the kids present", then it might seem a little like abuse, kind of. For girls like that it was very important to teach them somehow that "it's up to you". If you want to be touched where and when and stuff like that. And that's not exactly what the project suggests. Now, it's very, very innocent with the kind of massage that's suggested, but nevertheless, we were concerned, and it was a bit curious that it occurred to us. I don't think we'd have done that otherwise, not so clearly.

Accordingly, as in the use of other Free from Bullying materials, this activity has occasioned new reflections concerning pedagogical practice.

Dilemma cards for parents

After our first interviews with school staff – revealing, for instance, that some materials in the original suitcase were found to target an age group younger than schoolchildren – it also became clear that cooperation with parents was one of the pilot project's key challenges. More concrete materials to confront it were found wanting. Consequently, a set of dilemma cards for parents were developed for the next version of the suitcase. These were tested among professionals working with children in early school years at an event at which Save the Children introduced the new suitcase. Since then, some – but far from all – have chosen to use this tool at teacher-parent meetings. In an interview with a class 1 teacher from Vonsild Parish School, the first reaction was: *Wow, they are so great!* Here she recounts how the cards were used:

And then we said: "now, please sit down with people you don't talk to very much", and if both wife and husband were present, they had to split into separate groups. Then they got those six different ones – isn't that the amount of cards? – placed in a stack on each table. They were given I think about a quarter of an hour to discuss, that is, after the correct procedure of reading out and reacting to their respective cards, one after the other, with no interruptions allowed. And they did this so well. For example, regarding this one about birthday policy, they managed to establish what we want in our class. What's fair and "oh no, we're definitely not going down that road." They got some really good conversations going, I could hear. [...] We did this in each group, and then we summed it up in a quick plenary session at the end. One person from each group presented their conclusions and what they thought about it. They found it really exciting, because they ended up talking about something very different from what they were used to.

At the same school, where the staff's feedback to the dilemma cards is uniformly positive, a reception-class teacher also narrates her experiences:

What I also found to be great was the addition to the suitcase of some dilemma cards. That was actually a great idea, and at our first teacher-parent meeting, which we always hold at the beginning of the school year, we brought them along. We'd tried them out before at a meeting of teachers of pupils in early school years, just to get a sense of: "is this something that can be answered? Is this something that can be discussed? How many different views could there be for each card?" and so forth. Also to see how much substance there was to it, and how much time it would take. So when we got to the stage [at the parent-teacher meeting] when the dilemma cards were used, it turned out that all their children had been involved in examples of this, and the parents chatted with all and sundry, and managed to discuss the issues. Of course, some would speak more than others. But I'm also sure that some of them would not have said very much at the meetings, if there hadn't been this kind of... dialogue cards in it. We found that they ended up discussing something with people they might not know. So this made it a great tool. Because we might just say, after introducing some practical concerns, "any questions?" and stuff like that, but... yes, they have some questions, but they don't always have the knowledge of daily school life. Here was some tangible stuff for them to relate to as a basis for discussion. So, yes, we've used those cards quite a lot, I think. And we've also lent them to others around the school, to other classes, after explaining how to use them. And that's positive, I think, that people around the other classes want to borrow our materials (Ann, Vonsild Parish School).

Conversely, a class 1 teacher says that she tried the cards with Lars and Signe from Save the Children, when they introduced the new suitcase, but that time is too short for them at teacher-parent meetings. For this reason, she finds it unlikely that she will ever use them.

Yes, we tried to sit in small groups and do it, but I haven't spent time on it at meetings with parents. We can't do that. I don't think so. We've got a very small amount of hours for this kind of activity, and there are hundreds of other things. [...] If so, we need to have more time allotted, because otherwise you need to skip something else.

One after-school centre has also used the dilemma cards at a teacher-parent meeting. Their experiences are also positive, and the director confirms that they will therefore bring them into play at the other after-school centre as well. In fact, there is a general wish to use the cards as part of a wider plan to enhance parental involvement. The dilemma-card test results, including related reflections and assessments, are apparent in the following quote:

We used the dilemma cards at a teacher-parent meeting, and it worked really well. We had convened the meeting to hold elections for the after-school-centre council, but what took up time and attention was actually the dilemma cards. We split the parents into groups, making sure they didn't know each other that well. We also made sure that parents of boys and girls, older and younger children, were mixed together. And then they received those dilemma cards and had to return to tell us about their discussions, about what they had kind of concluded. And even if they had a whole hour and a quarter at their disposal, not every group made it on time. So they spent a lot of time on it, and the parents were quite pleased about the discussions they had. I mean, it really worked well. We would have liked more time to be set aside for it. So in our experience, perhaps we should have reduced it to three questions or something like that, because then there would have been material left for one more round. Now all questions have been kind of raised, so to speak, without having been thoroughly and properly discussed. But it has also inspired us to perhaps make up some other dilemmas. This is something we've talked about. We've kind of... well, it could be anything. How do we get the children to help us a bit more to tidy up? Or there could be lots of other situations that might also give rise to dilemmas. Like when parents stand there and hurry up their kids to leave quickly, which doesn't exactly support their children in finishing their things properly. It could be a game or some other business that has to be completed, perhaps a playdate, before leaving. It could be inspiring to make those cards, because it was... rewarding. It is known that when parents sit in small groups, they get to talk to each other, rather than us sitting there with fifty parents.

Although the overwhelming response from those who have actually used the cards with parents is positive, there are in fact a few shortcomings to be mentioned. One interviewed parent expresses the concern that the dilemmas are overly simple or naïve, finding that greater effort could be made to come up with more complex issues whose 'solution' would be harder to arrive at.

Another objection is that there are too few dilemma cards, and that there is a continuous need for new ones, perhaps matching the children's advancing age and maturity.

Dilemma cards for adult professionals

The school suitcase also contains dilemma cards targeted at the professional educators. Thus far, people have rarely used these on their own initiative, but a few mention them in connection with Save the Children's introduction to the suitcase, where they were presented and tested. One teacher, however, recounts that the cards have been used at a session of the 'Pedagogical Council' (a standard entity at each Danish school, composed of management and a cross-section of staff members, including from the after-school centre):

We used those cards for adult professionals at a meeting of the Pedagogical Council. I'm a member of it, so I said: "We've got to put that on the agenda", and then we did it, spending fifteen, twenty minutes on it, and it was great, because all those issues and problems regarding colleagues, well, there were some real dilemmas. Other situations just made you think: "Of course, this is what I'd do", and on these points there might be agreement. But in most cases

opinion was divided, and it was so difficult to hold your tongue until it was your turn to speak. [...]It's tough, but it's rewarding, because otherwise you let yourself be taken in by someone, and then you just buy it, instead of thinking it through, right? I think it's great. It's fantastic! And everyone agreed, both schoolteachers and other types of educational staff, that this was really something worth using.

As can be seen, this school used the cards as intended, which was fruitful albeit difficult for some.

Tips for parents in 'credit card' and poster format

The small folder with five tips for parents, found in the original suitcase, has in the school suitcase been shrunk to a 'credit card' with the same recommendations written on it. This signals that the pieces of advice can be stored in the wallet, thus always being at hand to remind the parents every day. Interviewed staff report that the tips have generally been well received, but that parents have made no particular comments about the special format. Some professionals feel the advice has had an effect, e.g. in terms of opening out invitations to playdates at home. In general, parental feedback is said to be positive.

Stickers

The stickers in the suitcase are far from the most frequently used material. Nevertheless, many recount how they have used them. This reception-class teacher seems to have used them more or less as intended:

Reception-class teacher: *We use the stickers for the children's meeting, when some are awarded a sticker, if others can say they've helped or been a good friend. Then you can earn a sticker, but it has to be others telling a good story about how you've been a good friend.*

Interviewer: *Does it tend to be the same children who've been good friends, or does it vary?*

Reception-class teacher: *Yes, it tends to be the same children.*

As the quote says, the stickers are handed out as a prize for friendly behaviour, but as a result it is mostly the same children who earn the distinction. Another teacher has confronted this by using the stickers as a collective prize. Rather than holding up the exemplary individual, *everyone* gets a sticker if there has been a particularly positive incident in class worth noticing and rewarding. This reception-class teacher makes the following reflection on the use of the stickers:

We've used them a couple of times, when there has been some really, really good situation that we could praise the class for, saying: "Today, you've just showed that you're all good friends, and there has been nobody hitting or teasing each other, and all the breaktimes have gone well. So today we raise the flag, and everyone gets a sticker", for example. [...] Another option would be to hand them out kind of on the basis of merit, but we've chosen not to do that. [...] I mean, it's very well to single someone out and say: "Today, say, Anne Louise, has done something that was really, really good. I saw her comforting someone". And in this way, you encourage positive behaviour by giving them a sticker as a symbol of some sort of honour. And I imagine this might work in some places, but I can also picture how suddenly a whole crowd of kids would jump on someone getting hurt, to arrive first with the plaster, and stuff like that. And then we might in fact end up discussing: "Oh, is it me or you who should get that sticker? Because I came first to wipe off something, or to give comfort." And then it will become a fight instead, then it becomes something negative. So we've simply used the teddy bear for that instead, the big one, to make remarks. Say I've heard through the grapevine that someone has done something good or something bad at breaktime, then it has sometimes gone through the teddy bear, that it has seen or heard something that wasn't very good, or something that was great. And then there are some, perhaps just a few, who've been praised, being singled out in a way. But the stickers have been used mainly as a collective event.

In contrast to the last round of feedback, when there was more uncertainty as to how the stickers were to be used, this time we hear school staff characterise them as useable, albeit in a variety of

ways. It is also worth noticing that the stickers might have value in themselves, as when a class 1 teacher simply handed the stickers to the pupils without giving much thought to their purpose. She says merrily:

Yes, but I was so stupid, I just gave them away before reading that they were actually meant as a reward for when they help each other. So now they've got them. That was a bit of a mistake. I was a little trigger-happy (laughs).

Postcards

The postcards are another repetition from the first suitcase, and will therefore not be described in depth here. One way of using the cards not previously reported is to let the children take them home at a particular point in time after the class has carried out certain Free from Bullying activities. The teachers hope that this will prompt the parents to inquire about the pilot project, and give the children a chance to narrate something specific. On this use of the postcards, the reception-class teacher says:

Well, it was in the run-up to, for instance, a teacher-parent meeting. And then I said to the children that I'd tell the parents something about Free from Bullying and what we did, and what it was about. And they were going to try some cards [the dilemma cards], which they were going to discuss. Such as this thing about inviting everyone from class or only the boys or only the girls for birthday. And then we kind of signalled that now the parents were also supposed to know something, and then the children got a postcard to take home and show them at home. Perhaps the parents would ask: "Where is that from? Why did you get that?" And their child would go: "This is because you're going to hear about Free from Bullying tonight". [...] So that's the way we've used it, with a postcard that might show one of those big cards [conversation boards], which we've talked about.

Pixie books and story-reading book

As in the preschool suitcase, the school version contains some so-called 'pixie books' (tiny illustrated booklets). These have been used in a variety of ways. For instance, a reception-class teacher reports that all the books have been read out in class and been talked about with the children. She thinks the pixie books are great, and has chosen to make enlarged copies for the story-reading sessions. As most other materials, the books are used primarily in the school context, and to a lesser extent at the after-school centre. Many children have previously been handed the books to take home, and are familiar with them. However, since they are fond of repetition, they also enjoy hearing them read out loud at the after-school centre, a director explains.

In addition, the new suitcase has a book entitled 'Secret Friends' (*Hemmelige venner*), which forms part of an activity described in the teacher's booklet. A class 1 teacher, for example, says that she has read this book to the class, who enjoyed it so much they warmed to the idea of trying out the accompanying game. As a teacher of Danish, this interviewee also found the story to be well-written, easy to understand and gripping for the children.

Song of friends

Among the interviewed educators, there is some doubt as to what Free from Bullying's 'song of friends' really is. Most are aware of a song about friendship used at their school, but they are unsure if this is the one. This is because, in some places, a music teacher has composed a special school song, often on the occasion of Crown Princess Mary visiting the school. One interviewee reports that they sing the song in class before every children's meeting in order to signal that this is a

special occasion. It is our overall impression that staff members are not very familiar with the song, but nevertheless believe the children are. The replies seem to indicate that only a few adults have been eager to pass on this song (or another).

Older children befriend younger children

This is an activity repeated from the first suitcase. The idea is to ‘pair up’ children from different age groups and year levels, who are meant to help and support each other, for instance at breaktimes and at various events spanning the age divide. The idea has been implemented at a couple of preschools, while in some schools the concept of twinned classes has been used prior to the pilot project. For a description of this practice, we refer to the second report of the follow-up research.

‘Better Buddies’

The Free from Bullying school suitcase also launches a project called ‘Better Buddies’. This entails twinning a reception class with a class 5, thus making them accompany each other throughout school life. This has been carried out at Vonsild Parish School. A reception-class teacher talks about their experiences thus far. She found that the process of ‘buddying up’ the children in pairs became slightly rushed due to the imminent visit of Crown Princess Mary, which led to insufficient consideration as to who would make the best match. Some children were allowed to choose their buddy, perhaps because they knew some of the children in their ‘twin class’ beforehand, and had found a relationship with good ‘chemistry’. The adults were happy with this. Other children were put together by the adults, which is commented upon here:

And then there were some, of course, who didn't know anyone, so we paired them up as best we could. And this produced some funny constellations, and about some of them we can say afterwards: "This just can't have been a coincidence, there must be some reason why these two came together". We have a couple of special buddy pairs who match so well (laughs) in a variety of ways. [...] And this is where one might say that there are good and bad things, I mean, if the big buddy finds it hard to compromise, and the little buddy is also not very good at compromising, for example. Or if the big buddy is a little childish, and perhaps not that good at taking care of someone who is younger, well, then you can learn from that as well.

According to this teacher, who is responsible for the youngest children, one outcome of ‘Better Buddies’ thus far is that her pupils feel very safe walking around the school. For example, she says that this year there have been no reports of anyone being afraid of ‘the big children’. It has also resulted in the little ones being taken along to new places (such as the large sports hall). They are usually not allowed to go there without an adult, but when accompanied by their older buddies, the teacher gave them the green light. One side effect, however, has been that some children have been visited by their buddies in the classroom a little too often, causing the teachers to make rules about the maximum and minimum frequency of such visits (no more than twice, and at least once a week). This rule was also partly made to ‘spare’ the older children, who tend to have greater need for their own time.

One apparent outcome of this initiative was a change in conduct among the younger children, which the adults had not foreseen:

In the beginning there was something going on with the reception class kids behaving like babies, kind of appealing to their older buddy to sort of... well, it was over the top. And it also went over the top the other way around, when some of the older children went around lifting those cute little girls with braids and dress, finding them just so sweet. And that, in turn, went over the top, when the little ones felt, well, even younger than they actually were. So we've had a talk about this along the way. It's all about this question: "How can you be a good buddy? And how can you be a good older buddy to your younger buddy? And how can you be you a good younger buddy to your older buddy?" These are

two sides of the same coin, because either too little or too much latching on to each other can become irritating. But I think so many older students have taken it to heart. And what's funny to see is when the older buddies have been reading for the younger ones, or when they've done workshop activities together, and they have to say goodbye, then they get a hug before they leave (laughs). This isn't something we asked them to do. It's quite spontaneous. I think it's very sweet.

Other social practices described in the booklet 'Free from Bullying: this is how we do it'

One of the two booklets for teachers presents, firstly, a series of so-called 'social practices', which Save the Children and the Mary Foundation consider to be an integral part of Free from Bullying, and secondly a host of optional activities. Among the standard social practices are 'Boss for an hour', 'The good mate' and 'Children draw the line'. In the interviews, we asked the adult professionals about their use of these practices, but – at least at this early stage – experiences were few and far between. One interviewee comments on the use of 'Children draw the line':

We have used 'Children draw the line' quite a lot, precisely because we had some kids who did not listen to the boundaries of others, and this actually led to a lot of acrimony. So we've spent a lot of time on that one about boundaries. About remembering to say "no". When someone comes up and tells me about someone who has done something, I ask: "Did you remember to tell him you didn't want it? Did you say 'don't do that please!' did you?" And sometimes there are in fact some kids who haven't even expressed their objection to it. And then you get these kids who have said it ten times: "No, no and no", and then there's someone who doesn't respect it. Someone you simply need to grab hold of and say: "You know what? You have to learn one thing here!" This is when we have to be a little strict on this. The last thing has been particularly necessary in the class I'm teaching this year, whereas it might have been more the other thing that was necessary last year, teaching those quiet kids to object when someone flattens them. This year there have been some who have flattened the others and wanted to have their way. To be the king or queen, and not stop when someone says "stop". So on this issue we've spent a lot of time.

This is the only person who refers directly to this Free from Bullying social practice. However, it is very likely that many others have addressed the same field without necessarily attributing it to the pilot project. The same applies to what the booklet calls 'The good mate'. The last of these supposedly obligatory practices is entitled 'Boss for an hour', and is an idea taken from Save the Children Norway, in which a group of pupils are tasked with organising an enjoyable activity for the whole class. None of the interviewees had tried out this social practice.

Friendship and cooperation exercises as well as school-subject activities

As mentioned, the school suitcase also contains a wide range of suggestions for optional activities to be carried out with the class or group of children. These are divided into 'Friendship and cooperation exercises' and 'School-subject activities'. We asked the staff interviewees about their use of these. It is clear that they have thus far been put to limited use, as only a single educator mentioned an activity from this vast archive or catalogue of ideas, which she had tried out. However, it must be stressed that the ideas are plentiful, and – as some people mentioned – several of them may well have been used without the practitioners knowing that they also feature as ideas in Save the Children's and the Mary Foundation's materials.

Theme week

As previously mentioned, one after-school centre plans to make a theme week exclusively dedicated to Free from Bullying. The intention is to let the children feel that this project is also running at the after-school centre, and not just in class. The initiative is taken against the background that many of

the materials are targeted at classroom work. However, since the after-school-centre staff also see themselves as active participants, they have been thinking outside the box, coming up with the theme week, among other ideas:

So we carry out a theme week so that... well, we are divided into 'functions' here... so that for each 'function', or workshop, the heading is always 'Free from Bullying', and the children must know that this is what it's about. So at our image workshop, the adult down there – by the way, this is also something described in... I think it's the practice booklet – well, the adult could organise a painting and drawing event about it. [...] And when we exhibit the works, which is also something we take very seriously, and which forms part of our educational programmes, then that same heading is used too. I mean, the workshops don't need to be changed as such, but the activity on offer in the workshop is that you have to paint with someone two years older or whatever. Draw what a 'good friend' looks like, you know, all that stuff, right? [...] And in our jewellery workshop, the task could be to weave some friendship bracelets or something like that, right?

Suggestions and ideas for new materials

Since our interviews in this third round of empirical data collection were aimed at learning more about the new materials targeted at schools and developed on the basis of previous feedback from the adult professionals, less time was dedicated in this round to inquiring about new ideas. Nevertheless, the interviews have made clear that the various Free from Bullying activities are implemented differently, inventing new ways of performing them, which diverge from Save the Children's and the Mary Foundation's proposal. This is what we have sought to highlight above. As mentioned, there is widespread satisfaction that the suitcase has become more school-specific, though one principal still requests something more digital, e.g. video clips, videogames or cases in which the class can relate to live pictures. Accordingly, he finds further scope for developing the suitcase contents, which is indeed in line with the intentions of Save the Children and the Mary Foundation.

Final comments regarding the Free from Bullying tools

Overall, there is great satisfaction with the new school suitcase. It can be ascertained that a very substantial part of its contents have already been in use three months after it was brought into existence. Of course, one should not underestimate the effect of the schools already being familiar with the previous suitcase, from which several materials were repeated.

All three participant schools are committed to the pilot project Free from Bullying, although they express it in different ways, not least as regards the use of concrete materials. We have addressed how, for instance, Hellerup School finds the pictures on the conversation boards to be out of touch with local conditions, hence preferring a homemade alternative, just as this school has also chosen to call the children's meetings 'co-responsibility'. In many respects, Hellerup School stands out from the two other participant schools. This springs partly from its special physical premises, but also from the self-perception prevailing at this school regarding the use of materials such as those of Free from Bullying. This is illustrated by the following quote:

Interviewee from Hellerup School: No, we've definitely not used them [the two booklets]. We've taken a look at them, and then we've asked ourselves: "What can we use? And what are we doing already?" And then we've concluded that the stuff in the suitcase is what we do already. Because our school is one that's very advanced. So many of those things, we have used.

Interviewer: In those booklets there are lots of practices described, which do not come with any particular teaching aid.

Interviewee: *No, I haven't really looked at them. But I think that a suitcase like that would be great for those who haven't played with the stuff before. For people thinking: "Okay, we've got an issue with some children, can we please have some materials." That'd be great.*

Although this quote may give the impression of scepticism towards the pilot project's materials, this does not seem to be the case on the whole.

It is only natural that enthusiasm for Free from Bullying varies from one person to another, since it also depends on each educator's temperament, professional experience in the same field, etc. In this as well as in previous reports, we have argued at some length that the pilot project tends to be carried forward by a few individual activists, whose fervour enables them to communicate it to their colleagues. However, it is also invaluable to the life of such an undertaking that the educational institutions' chief manager is committed, has a passion for it, and take pains to learn about the materials, since this seems to rub off on the rest of the staff. At two of the three schools, the principal has been changed in the course of the pilot project (even several times). Only Vonsild Parish School has had the same principal from start to finish. This appears to be manifested in the degree of knowledge and commitment, and might also be one reason why the staff of this particular school express the greatest enthusiasm for the school suitcase. Signs are that the professionals at Vonsild have acquired mastery of more materials from the new suitcase than their colleagues from other schools. Obviously, we cannot determine whether this is attributable to individual teachers or springs from some special energy which the school has brought to the pilot project.