

ToWe Project

Children's voice and expressions



Manual, first edition to be developed together with project partners

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Introduction

Welcome to this manual about the child's right to have a voice in early years' settings and the implication of this for the early years' practitioners. Based on our interpreting of some phrases of the UN Convention, we will highlight play as the child's preferred mode of expression. This manual will present several studies of toddlers' bodily mode of expression and their interaction in play, as well as suggestions of how to support these early relationships in play. Furthermore, we will invite you to consider how different views of the children may affect the educational practice in the setting. Possibly, you might get confirmed prior knowledge, but we will also challenge you to encounter something that makes you reflect on accustomed ways of interacting and perceiving young children.

Aims of the manual

The aim of the manual is to promote Early Years' Practitioners (EYPs) professional development concerning the toddlers' specific mode of expressions and relationships in order to attend to the children's right of free expression. The manual will

- offer EYP's theoretical knowledge about young children's specific mode of communicating and the child's right according to the UN Convention of the Child's Right.
- Expand EYPs' consciousness of young children's diverse modes of expressions and how they can reflect on observation from their own setting.
- Develop EYPs consciousness of the complex interactions among children and thereby improve their ability to support toddler's play.

Theoretical background and literature

“The child’s mind is at least as rich, abstract, complex and strong as ours. The child thinks, reasons, learns, knows, acts and feels. Still, what they are thinking might be quite different of what we think. Children are born astonishing alike us and astonishing different from us.”(Gopnik, Meltzoff & Kuhl, 2002 s.232¹).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – the child’s right to expression and to be heard

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (UNCRC) is rooted in humanistic principles that all human beings – regardless of age, gender, race and ability – should be treated with respect and dignity on their own premises. The implementation of this Convention, founded in the 1980s and signed by many countries, is a great challenge to many sectors of society. The convention also puts the question to early childhood education: what does it mean to treat toddlers with respect and dignity on their own premises? Here we will discuss this by taking a closer look to articles 12 and 13 of this Convention. Article 12 stating that the views of the child have to be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child and article 13 on the child’s right to freedom of expression through any media of the child’s choice.

Two documents of the UN committee on the Rights of the Child offer some further explanations of how this might be interpreted; *Implementing child rights in early childhood*² and *the right of the child to be heard*³. They emphasize that implementing children’s rights means rethinking the educator’s role in early childhood: “A shift away from traditional beliefs that regard early childhood mainly as a period for the socialization of the immature human being towards mature adult status is required. The Convention requires that children, including the very youngest children, be respected as person in their own right”.⁴ This is a radical interpretation, as they argue that there is no limitation to age. We are asked to perceive the young child as a complete person and to think less of overcoming their immaturity. According to this, even the newborn is entitled to the dignity of a person.

What about the phrase in article 12 «according to their maturity»? This phrase has to be connected with the child’s right to protection, which is the overall issue of the convention. Children are vulnerable and not expected to be mature enough to take responsibility for themselves; therefore society has specific duties to ensure the protection of the child and family. We may also ask: Can infants and toddlers express their views? The document claims that young children are able to “make choices and communicate their feelings, ideas, and wishes in numerous ways, long before they are able to communicate through the conventions

¹ This quote is based on the Norwegian version of the book *The scientist in the crib*.

² UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. General Comment No 7. 2005 *Implementing child rights in early childhood*.

³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: General Comment No 12. 2009 *The right of the child to be heard*.

⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. General Comment No 7. 2005 *Implementing child rights in early childhood*. page 3

of spoken or written language”.⁵ Thus, the document states that children can express their view in many kinds of ‘languages’. We have to look for more than words when it comes to children’s voices. The documents continuous: “Consequently, full implementation of Article 12 requires recognition of, and respect for, non-verbal forms of communication including play, body language, facial expressions, and drawing and painting, through which very young children demonstrate understanding, choices and preferences”.⁶ This means adults have to be aware of what children express through play, facial expressions, gaze, gestures and the whole body. Furthermore, adults have to respect these utterances as adequate and meaningful forms of communication.

These citations indicate that the fulfillment of these rights depends on the quality of the interaction processes between the adult and the child. The UN document outlines the desired quality of the adult’s interaction with the child like this: “To achieve the right of participation requires adults to adopt a child-centered attitude, listening to young children and respecting their dignity and their individual points of view. It also requires adults to show patience and creativity by adapting their expectations to a young child interests, levels of understanding and preferred ways of communicating”.⁷ Whether the child is respected or not, depends on how the adult encounters the child. The quote uses many positive words to describe the requested adult attitudes and acts: listening, being patient, use creativity and be child-centered in order to adapt to the child’s interest and conditions. It is easy to agree to such ideals, much more difficult to live them in everyday practice.

Researchers have argued that the UN convention not only changes the status of the children, but also the way we as educators think about ourselves (Woodhead, 2008 cited in Bae, 2010). Berit Bae, a Norwegian researcher, has identified some problematic issues in the way Norwegian ECEC-settings have responded to the UN Convention. She asks if the child’s right to participation is interpreted with a bias towards individualism, meaning too much effort is put on the individual child’s freedom of choice and less on the child expressing her/his views together with peers. Bae also asks for a deeper understanding of the importance of play in relation to the child’s right of freedom of expression. She refers to several studies in which researchers have asked children what they prefer to do in their setting. The majority of the children answered “play or to be with friends” (Søbstad, 2004). They also told that they play to have fun and for the sake of playing. Based on the children’s clear answers, Bae promotes the idea that play and playful interaction might be considered as children’s preferred mode of expression (Bae, 2010). Children can exercise their right to participate and freedom of expression through playful interactions with adults and peers. Still, this depends on what educators regard as appropriate ways of playing and how they structure both playtime and the daily routines.

Summing up: The implementation of the UN Convention in early education/child care settings, is a demanding, continuous journey. There exist no simple methods of how to make this work,

⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. General Comment No 7. 2005 *Implementing child rights in early childhood*. Page 7.

⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: General Comment No 12. 2009 *The right of the child to be heard*. Page

⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. General Comment No 7. 2005 *Implementing child rights in early childhood*, Page 7

but we can attempt to give more space for the child's right to influence than we did before. Often children express that their preferred mode of expression is play. Therefore, we will invite you to observe and elaborate toddler's interactions in play. As outlined above, the realization of children's right requires a rethinking of the child as a person as well as the role of the early childhood practitioner. We will therefore challenge you to reflect on your assumptions about children and what you might take for granted.

Questions for team discussion:

What do you mean by "respecting the child's dignity"? In which situations do you think educators might possibly offend the young child's dignity?

Different views of young children

We will now examine how our ideas about young children are expressed in the interaction between children and adults in early years' settings. Being a teacher and caregiver for young children is demanding, because it means that we have to relate to people who are at a different stage of their lives compared to us adults. They are newcomers to the world who are just beginning to experience and explore the world around them. Developmental psychology has shown us how children gradually build up their motor, social, moral, linguistic and cognitive skills through what they experience on a daily basis, and it has also made us aware of qualitative differences between children and adults. These include children's limitations in relation to their understanding of the concept of time, relative inability to predict the consequences of their actions, and relative inability to regulate their emotions. This does not mean that young children are worth less than adults are, but it emphasises the fact that they act on the basis of different premises than adults.

Psychology's view of children has changed in line with modern research methods and improved knowledge. While we used to emphasise the young child's need for protection, closeness and maternal care, researchers have recently been describing children as able to look for objectives and meaning in their world, from birth onwards (see for example Gopnik, Meltzoff & Kuhl, 2002). A dominant model of understanding in modern developmental psychology is the transactional model, in which the focus is on how the characteristics of the child and the characteristics of the environment continually influence and affect each other over time (Sameroff, 1987). A child's development cannot be explained solely by the influence of the environment on the child, since the characteristics of the child – such as temperament – also influence how the caregiver socialises with the child, which in turn is affected by how the adult interprets the child's behaviour. This means that different children will provoke different reactions from the same environment. However, the same child will also react differently when it is confronted with different environments. The transactional model is based on the

idea that the child and the environment are shaped by one another. Through observations of infants, Daniel Stern (2003), who has played an extremely significant role in developing the adult understanding of children as competent, has shown the significance of the mutual relationship between caregivers and the infant's innate ability to interact. Several researchers highlight the interaction between a child's abilities and the environment around that child, and how these interactional experiences contribute to the child's steadily increasing understanding of itself, other people and the world in which the child is living. They draw attention to the manner in which the child's individual development always takes place in the context of relationships and interaction. Sommer (2014) also uses the term *relative resilience* to show that the child is both competent and vulnerable.

Fostering children's development is a main mission of kindergartens. Early years practitioners also hold different views on children. The manner in which we define young children is significant to the way in which we socialise with them and the care we give them. Our view of the child is related to how we as adults *perceive, interact with* and *relate to* children as people (Johansson, 2013). It can be difficult to express our own perceptions of children as people, but the way different adults socialise with children in the setting tells us something about their views of the child. Swedish researchers studied the interaction between adults and children at 30 early years centres, and found that the staff represented three different views, which are presented through the following headings. Under the heading '*adults know best*', the kindergarten teachers are described as acting primarily on the basis of their own perception of what is best for the child. Kindergarten teachers who think that children are irrational are presented in the heading '*children are irrational*', while those who think that children also have intentions and interests which should be respected are presented under the heading '*children are human beings*' (Johansson, 2013). Let us take a closer look at what these three different perspectives involve.

Adults know best

What characterises this mode of relating to children is the fact that the adults act on the basis of their own view of what is best for the child. Kindergarten teachers believe that it is their goal to do what is best, and therefore do not find it necessary to relate to the child's way of looking at things. As a result, the asymmetry between the child and the adults becomes entrenched, and the child becomes an object in the adult's efforts to achieve their goal. Kindergarten teachers may well give the *child a right to choose, but the choice is based on the adults' structure*. An example of this is when a child is apparently given a choice, such as whether or not they would like more apples, but with the adult passing over the piece of apple without waiting to hear whether the child says yes or no. The child does not participate in the decision. In situations where children and adults have different wishes, the kindergarten teacher may also first go along with a child's wish, for example to wear a particular hat, only then to swap the hat for another one without the child's knowledge. What the child expresses has little significance, because it is the *adults who know what is best for the child*. Children do not know what is best for them, and therefore have to submit to the adults' will. They must learn to cope with adversity and follow rules. For example, all children should eat all of their food. The consequence of such a rule can be that children are forced to eat food, although the adults may also feel that using their position of power is unpleasant. In such situations, kindergarten teachers have to step back from their emotions, in order to ignore the child's reluctance. The argument that *only adults know best what is best for the child* can then be used to justify this lack of empathy with what the child is feeling.

Children are irrational

The assumption that children act without the ability to learn from their experiences and create meaning often arises in situations in which a child does something they are not allowed to do. In such situations, there is a tendency for adults to think that the child has acted without a real purpose, or that the purpose was to test the adults. Kindergarten teachers therefore do not try to understand the child's endeavours, but interpret them as an attempt to push the boundaries. The adult's reaction is therefore to stop the child and set boundaries for their actions. It is also not uncommon for these kind of 'negative' expectations to be associated with certain children, who are then met with less openness and interest by the kindergarten teachers.

Children as human beings

If we assume that children are human beings, this means that we assume that—in the same way as ourselves—they need to be able to act according to their own intentions, to be understood and met with care and affection. This requires different social conventions to those that we use if we think that young children are irrational and their actions are random. The Swedish kindergarten teachers who regarded the children as human beings showed that they were *focused on the children's experiences*. This meant that they listened to the children's expressions, even though these were often only sounds and gestures, and they tried to interpret and confirm them. They also showed *respect for the children's desires*. For example, when a child expressed that they did not want to answer the adult's question, the kindergarten teacher might drop the question. The children were allowed to determine how much of themselves they were prepared to reveal to others, thereby protecting their integrity. However, respect is not synonymous with the idea that an adult should always go along with a child's wishes. It is more about showing that they understand the child's wishes and want to come to an agreement with the child. For example, if a child wanted to continue playing rather than come in and eat their lunch, the kindergarten teacher might have a friendly chat with them about what they were playing with, and then the teacher would help the child up, and they would both sit down to eat. This is about prioritising the child's individuality, because *children should be able to be themselves*. The kindergarten teacher endeavours to find a balance between the collective and the individual. For example, the cloakroom situation could create a dilemma when it is time for all the children to go outside; some will not want to go outside, but they all have to. Of course, there could be very good reasons for a child not to want to go outside, and the teacher's task would then be to find out the reasons behind this resistance. It is not always possible for the adults to find out what is causing the resistance, but it means something to the child that they have been approached by an adult who has tried to understand the child's perspective. Interacting with a child like a human being also means *giving the child control* by allowing them to participate in decisions that concern themselves. In other words, the kindergarten teachers allow children to do things in their own way, even though it is not the correct way. For example, a child might put their boots on the wrong feet and will not comply with the adult's suggestion to swap them over. Kindergarten teachers who make it a priority to allow children to create their own experiences will accept the child's decision. For them, the most important thing is for the child to feel that they can have an influence on what is happening.

As we have seen from Johansson's presentation of the three different views of the child as a person, the kindergarten teacher's view plays an essential role in determining how much account adults should take of children's needs, intentions and wishes. Let us now look at this from the child's perspective. What does it feel like for them, and what significance can this have for their perception of themselves as a person? Some children will frequently feel that their expressions are met with benevolent interest and that their voice will be heard. On the one side, this will strengthen a child's

confidence in their own initiative, but on the other side, it may also help to develop a very strong sense of individualism, which can weaken the child's sensitivity towards other children in the group. Other children will experience that their emotional expressions and opinions are often ignored and seldom regarded as important. They often feel that they are the object of somebody else's will. According to Daniel Stern, even infants generalise their repeated experiences of interactions with their caregiver, and these repeated perceptions form the basis for the child's self-perception (Stern, 2000). It is not about individual incidents, but the significance of what happens on an everyday basis in encounters between the child and the adult. Repeated experiences of being ignored or misunderstood can result in a reduction in the child's self-esteem, a feeling of inferiority and doubt in their own abilities.

The description we have given here is based on some categorisations that do not entirely correspond to the complexity of what takes place in the educational activities in a kindergarten. Most children will feel that they are treated with respect, are sometimes ignored and very occasionally affronted. These experiences are common to all mankind, and are also familiar to ourselves as adults. The challenge for educators is to find a balance between consideration for the child's life here and now and consideration for the child's future, and between the child's right to participate and the child's need for protection. This is a dilemma that is part of our work as a teacher in a kindergarten.

Questions for team discussion:

What view of the child as a person is important to us? How do we talk with and about the child? In which way do we adapt our work to the diverse intentions, needs, experiences and interests of the child?

Toddler's community in play

As already mentioned in the chapter about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child, play and interaction with peers are activities that children appear to value greatly. If the kindergarten staff are to be able to support children's play on the children's terms, we need to know more about what play can mean to the participants. We will therefore present some of the research about toddlers' play in early years' settings. Traditionally, infants' play has been described on the basis of Piaget's theory, as functional play, with objects and their own bodies, and at about the 18 month mark, this transitions into simple symbolic play, in which the child imitates simple actions that it has seen in the environment around it (Lillemyr, 2011). Examples of this first kind of pretend play include a dog eating and sleeping, or a child playing 'mother' and performing actions typical of that role with a doll. This kind of play has been described as parallel play, i.e. children play the same games alongside each other, and the recommendations for practice have been to provide multiple examples of all the play objects (toys). The premise was that toddlers are egocentric and not mature enough for social

play. This knowledge was based on observations of children in the home environment or in laboratories.

When researchers began to study children's play in toddler settings, it became clear that their play was more social. Carroll Howes (1992) observed that one-year olds can take turns at playing peekaboo (mutual and complementary play), and that from about the age of 18 months, children take part in cooperative social pretend play, in which they take complementary roles that show they are cooperating in the game, even if they do not necessarily put words to the roles. When children approach the age of 3 years, they increasingly begin to use language to negotiate the roles and to develop a shared roleplay.

In the Nordic countries, several studies of toddlers' play are based on the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2002) description of the body as a form of expression. He is not concerned with the body as a tool or with the child's motor skills, but with the fact that the body forms the basis for the child's perceptions of the world. It is with the body that the child is in the world, and it is through the body that it experiences the world. The body holds experiences, skills, opinions and wishes, long before we can express them with words. Merleau-Ponty understands the body and expressions of the body as an integrated whole, in which expressions represent both what is observable and the child's inner emotional life. Children understand relationships with adults and their peers, with things and activities, through the body (which has a past, a present and a future). It is in this kind of interaction that children can form new experiences and develop their understanding of themselves and the world. A prerequisite of this is that the content of the child's expressions must be recognised, i.e. that we facilitate or support the experiences, skills, opinions and wishes that the child presents through its expressions.

Using this theory and her own observations in Norwegian kindergartens as a basis, Gunvor Løkken (2004) has created the term '*the playful quality of the toddling style*'. She describes the characteristics of this play in relation to the child's playful mentality (they *are* playful), they're here-and-there movements, their slapstick-style humour and the quality of the many recurrences. She interprets a playful 'glee concert'⁸, performed by seven toddlers as a cooperative concert with no adult conductor. She ascribes an existential value to this kind of toddler play, in which the child can perceive the toddling Being of I, Thou and We in the everyday context of day care. Toddlers' play is typified by a certain amount of chaos, in which the body is a key element. Løkken also shows how even the youngest children use their bodies to express themselves, when they are greeting and seeking peers, and when they set up and hold meetings with others. Following Merleau-Ponty's theory, expressions of the body are understood as a totality of bodily gestures, facial mimicry, gestures and the position of the body in the room. Løkken (2004) also refers to Stambak & Verba (1986) and their description of how children create a mutual understanding without using words, by: (a) expressing an idea, (b) the other(s) understanding this fully or partly and expressing their agreement with the idea, (c) this response provoking an agreement from the other(s), (d) the interaction continuing with various suitable responses, but the basis of these recurrences and variations is the initially expressed idea. According to Løkken (2004), over time this can develop into play routines and a distinct toddler culture.

In an Icelandic kindergarten, Palmadottir (2015) has studied how toddlers use their bodies to express that they want to initiate interaction with other children and try to involve their peers in play. They

⁸ *Group glee* is a similar term describing this kind of phenomenon observed in toddler groups. It is characterised by joyful screaming, laughing and intense physical acts which occurred in simultaneous bursts or which spread in a contagious fashion from one child to another (Sherman, L. W. In *Child Development*, 1975: 46 (1) pp 53-61).

use their gaze, toys, repeated to-and-from movements with toys or sitting down next to another child to communicate that they want to initiate some play with them. It transpired that the child's place in the social hierarchy determined which child would be allowed to join the play and which would be rejected. If a child was rejected, they often demonstrated helplessness. When they manage to establish mutual play, the challenge is to keep the play going and prevent the playing partners being attracted by someone else's play. Children who want to join an existing game must adapt their actions so that their own wishes are fulfilled while also ensuring that they are in agreement with what the other children want. The children often used objects to form attachments to others, either by offering or finding these objects for others. Objects and games on the floor, suited to the height of the child, facilitated the children's bodily play. But even if toddlers have communicative skills, they can still be defenseless and show uncertainty in relation to their position and participation in the group. It was the two-year-olds who guided and showed care for the younger children, even though they might still reject their attempts to join the game. Through their interaction, the children showed their choice of potential playing partners and toys. It was the oldest children who decided whether the youngest children's wishes to participate would be complied with or not. These were clear positions of power related to age. Palmadottir concludes by pointing out how demanding it can be to describe toddlers' playing activity and to interpret what meaning is taken from these interactions.

Fitting in, taking the other person's perspective into account, and reciprocity or taking turns appear to be important aspects of toddlers' meetings with their peers and adults. Studies also show that interactions between toddlers can be characterised as negotiations, disagreements, conflicts, frustrations and rejections/protection (Alvestad, 2010, Rosell, ongoing). It may be particularly in these cases, where the dialectic between the vulnerable and the competent tends to become prominent, that the need for support from adults becomes apparent.

Based on Merleau-Ponty's theory, Johansson (1999) studied how toddlers expressed ethics – what is worthy of pursuit (positive or negative and right or wrong). A central result of this study is the children's expressions of rights, both in terms of an expressed right to things/objects and an expressed right to share or protect valued relationships with others. Løkken (2004) also emphasises how small objects can lead to conflicts and disagreements during toddlers' interactions with each other. Greve (2009), who has studied friendships between two-year-olds, refers to how, when children have relationships in which personal preferences are expressed, they can be closed and protective when they meet other children. Alvestad (2010) has studied toddlers' negotiations in play. In this study, it emerges that children negotiate about relationships, the content of their interactions and material objects – both in a dyad, in dyads or during the group's meeting with other children. Therefore, disagreements, conflicts and negotiations appear to be part of children's everyday encounters with each other in a kindergarten. The challenge is to support and safeguard the children's expressions and rights in these situations.

Children's opinions, which are conveyed through their expressions, can also be connected to things/objects, and the activities that can be created through the use of bodies, space and various objects in the setting. Children express meaning by behaving or getting involved in a particular way, where things/objects/activities may have particular meanings that result in particular actions (Johansson, 1999). Things/objects/activities may be of different significance to children in the kindergarten, and some will appear more appealing than others (Bengtsson, 2103b). Gadamer (2010) refers to an understanding of *play*, in which there does not necessarily need to be a fellow player, but there must be something to play with – to provide counter play. Gadamer (2010) refers to the example of a cat playing with a ball of wool, in which the object (ball of wool) creates tension, variation and becomes a fellow player in the game. The basis for toddlers' involvement with

things/items and their activities is the body. Objects can then be understood as a part of the body and the body's expression. The challenge is to support and safeguard the content that emerges in the child's expression with regard to objects and the activities that are created.

The theory that the body is the basis for toddlers' understanding of themselves, other people and the world they live in, is also a theory that challenges the idea about what content should be attached to various 'phenomena' in the kindergarten. **An expressed meaning considering a phenomenon is grounded in the body and the bodily experience – which means that both children and adults can have different views and understanding of a phenomenon.** Taking the initiative, opening up to others, a kind of reciprocity, are important in relationships both with peers and adults. Being a guide, having a guiding function by being the one who takes initiative and comes up with ideas can also be important when children form an understanding of themselves and the world. In relationships with other people, the emotional aspects of the bodily expressions are also a central part of safeguarding toddlers' behaviour. Stern (2003) refers to the term *affective attunement* as an example. **This term describes that when a child encounters a caregiver, the caregiver feels, experiences and recognises the child's own feelings behind an expression. Moreover, the child experiences that the caregiver returns those feelings in an interaction – not just a simple imitation of that expression (for example, a child crying because it misses its mother or father, or crying after a conflict with peers).** Safeguarding the child's emotional expression, and not least safeguarding the child's emotional development/development of the self (cf. Stern, 2003), thereby becomes important in order to support and safeguard children's expressions and their rights – just as these are also stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child. The importance of seeing children as subjects, and a change in the view of the importance of the relational in modern developmental psychology, can be related to the Norwegian philosopher Hans Skjervheim's (2001) description of an encounter with a mutual “third party”. Skjervheim (2001) writes that an encounter between two subjects is a meeting between two people who share the “third party” of a common focus and commitment. Encounters between human being are around something “a third party” which we share, focus on, quarrel about or enjoy together. In the context of an early years' setting, examples of this “third” could be the common understanding and commitment to a child's experience, the child's initiative, a book, a song, an object, an activity, etc. It is by sharing the child's experience or an object the adult can confirm and recognize the child as a subject of its own.

In order to safeguard the dialectic between the vulnerable and the competent in toddlers' relationships, we here allude to the essential importance of the adult as an indirect and a direct supporter. An indirect supporter means that the educator was involved in the design of the room, the organisation of the children's groups and activities, as well as emotional presence and an observation of the children's initiative, their bodily expressions, and their play – both alone and with their peers. A direct supporter means that the adult interacts directly with a child or a group of children, for example about a child's initiative or as a guide during a conflict between their peers. Through an awareness of this oscillation between being an indirect and a direct supporter, we also have the option to increase our knowledge and ability to safeguard toddlers' expressions.

Supporting peer interactions in play

Above we have presented research on how toddlers' interact with each other during playtime in early years settings. This research has proven toddler's ability to engage in reciprocal interactions and shared play. Some researchers' suggest protecting the child's play and advice against adults' intervening as this might disturb the toddlers' fragile play community (Løkken, 2000). Others, like

Schaffer (1984), tell us not to overestimate the children's social abilities. Even though young children are able to develop relationships with their peers, they are still apprentices in social settings. When children interact with caregivers, the adult usually will adjust their actions to the child's in order to make it a successful experience (Smith & Ulvund, 1999). When interacting with peers, all toddlers are apprentices that encounter new challenges (Schaffer, 1984). Interacting with peers is a bit unpredictable. The outcome of inviting another child to play by offering a toy might result in the other child walking away with the toy. The interaction with peers demands other kinds of acting and negotiating than interacting with adults, and this social competence is achieved by experience (Frønes, 1994). So, how should EYPs promote toddler's interactions and joy in play?

The challenge for EYPs is on the one hand not leave toddlers with a challenge they are not able to manage on their own. Toddlers need some support to create and maintain complex peer relations in play. On the other hand, we might support them in inadequate ways, hindering playful interactions in toddler style. The question is not if adults should intervene or not, but how. Listening to children's expressions means that the EYP has to take the different children's abilities and intentions and the actual context into consideration before acting. Instead of giving general advice, we will present some strategies of scaffolding early peer relations. According to Ellen Os (2004), there are direct and indirect strategies.

Indirect strategies

Indirect strategies are characterised by teacher behaviour that might provide the toddlers a basis for peer relations. This is about the quality of the relationships and attachment. Secure attachment is a condition for exploring behavior and play (Ainsworth, 1970, Abrahamsen, 2013). Promoting children's wellbeing is an important part of the indirect strategies.

The organisation of the physical environment also affects toddler's peer relation (deStefano & Mueller, 1982). Big play objects seem to inspire toddlers to play together, as well as space for running and hiding games. Still, toddlers also need protected corners to unfold their first attempts of social pretend play.

For children play is not limited to a certain time of the day, they are in the mood of playing quite often, and that might cause a challenge for adults who are expected to work efficient. It is worth keeping in mind, that Emilson (2006) has identified playfulness as an important quality in the EYP's communication with the child. When adults allow play to turn up in routine situations, for instance peekaboo elements when dressing up, then they communicate in the children's preferred mode of expressions.

Direct strategies

Direct scaffolding is about direct intervention to initiate or facilitate ongoing interaction in play. This might be done in several ways, according to Os (1994):

Directing attention to peers ("Spotlight")

This is about adults directing a toddler's attention to their peers, by talking about children arriving or leaving. For instance, when a child arrives: "Look who is coming now. Say hello to Mary." EYPs also might also comment what other children do. "Look, what they are doing. They are making sand cakes."

Administrating turn-taking (“Chain”)

Taking turns might be difficult for children to administrate on their own. Often EYPs structure the play, for instance running down the slide, in terms of talking about whose turn it is now. This makes it easier for children to do this together and to maintain the activity.

Facilitating joint activities (“Catalyst”)

EYPs might also mediate contact between peers and help them to start joint play activities. This is about being a kind of catalyst, encouraging children to engage in complementary roles or the same play theme. It seems to be a challenge for toddlers to create a shared meaning out of different intentions and wills. Often adults’ are very attentive and interactive to the individual child in the group, without linking children to each other (Os, 2004, Johansson et al, 2015). Instead of being the main interaction partner, the adult may also act as a catalyst for coordinating the play activities together.

Prolonging ongoing play (“Rubber band”)

EYPs might help toddlers to maintain their play by focusing on children who lose focus or by refreshing or elaborating the play theme. Offering new objects might vitalize the play. The adult might also add new elements by demonstrating new play actions to the children’s play.

Explaining signals (“Interpreter”)

Young children might have difficulties in understanding each other due to their relatively limited verbal language. They might need an interpreter helping them to find the right signals or words or to interpret peer’s intentions. EYPs can help them by putting words to actions, like “Tom also wants to play with cars.” or “He did not want to hurt you, he just stumbled.” It might also be an adult repeating what one child said. “Did you hear, Mary said NO.”

Regulating behavior (“Regulator”)

The right to objects is an important issue for children in early years’ settings. Os (2004) observed that EYPs often gave short verbal instructions when a conflict was looming. These instructions were a call for borrowing an object to others “Lend!” or “Share!” or “Exchange”. The adults also encouraged the children to comfort their peers, when a child was crying after being attacked by another child, telling them to “Hug!”

Birgitta K. Olofsson (1996) advises the educator to play with the children. Inspired by Howard Gardner’s (1979) description of play as a symbolic language, she claims that adults have to introduce children to the language of play as they do with verbal language. In other words, by being playful and enacting play behavior in everyday life situations the adult initiates the world of play to the child. In play we communicate by certain play signals – like smile, mimicry, pitch - that “what we are doing now

is play”, according to Gregory Bateson (1976). When we frame our actions as play, we are able to create imaginary situations within the real world.

Playing with children (“guide”)

When EYPs play together with the children, they demonstrate what people do in play. They animate the objects and show how the child may do this. Thus, objects are transformed into play items. For instance, when toddlers might drive dolls in a doll pram, the adult may talk to the doll as if it was a baby or to the child as a mother/ father. EYPs can identify possible play sequences and phrases, when they join toddler’s play. For instance how to feed the doll (be careful, not too hot, we have to blow), how to put it to bed, get asleep, and wake up again.

Observe, reflect and act

This part of the manual contains several tools for analyzing the way young children interact and create meaning in play. Observations or narratives (written episodes) will create a sound basis for reflection in the working team. We suggest discussing your own observations or narratives regularly in team meetings (for example dedicate some time every week for this on your agenda). The issue is to achieve a better understanding of the complex and ongoing interactions in toddlers’ play in this setting. After discussing the observed processes in play, you might consider adequate ways of supporting the children’s play using direct and/or indirect strategies.

Toddlers’ Play Routine (Løkken, 2004)

- How do toddlers create common (play) routines:
 - Somebody expresses an idea
 - Peers understand this idea totally or partial and react according to the idea
 - This answer creates respect and response from other children.
 - The interaction continuous with recurrences and variations, but the basis of these recurrences and variations is the initially expressed idea.
- Those recurring interactions may develop into different toddler routines.
- Toddlers create these routines by using the body, the room and things (often big objects).
- The children often express joy and excitement – usually accompanied by laughter and loud shouts.
- Examples of this kind of routines:
 - Running routines – Toddlers run back and forth in the room (from one wall to the other), or around a table, with or without objects, in a repeated pattern (a routine)
 - Mattress routines – Toddlers are actively using big mattresses. The children use the mattress, their bodies and eventually the room in a repeating pattern (a routine)
- Jumping routines – Toddlers jump from benches, chairs, sofas etc. to the floor or a mattress. They use objects, the room and body in a repeated pattern.
- Toddler routines often appear as open activities – independent of the number of children or their age.
- Toddler routines are created and developed by the children. They are the children’s own initiatives and expressions, collaboratively created with peers.

Question:

1. Which play routines do you have observed toddlers creating in your setting?

Toddlers Peer-Communications (Engdahl, 2011; Greve, 2007; Johansson, 1999; Løkken, 2004; Michelsen, 2004; Rosell, ongoing)

- Young children use the body for expression: mimicry, gestures, gaze, movement, sounds, words, the body's position in the room and by using small and big objects.
- Children greet, observe, tune in, take the other's perspective and execute turn taking in their communication with peers
- Imitation and repetition of peer's expressions, as well as variations, are central in toddlers' interaction with peers.
- Humour, joking and joyful shouts are prominent in the communication.
- Children may seek out another child for several reasons: because of the activities created by peers, activities created by the use of certain objects or the objects this child is holding in its hand. Eventually it might just be that this child comes into their sight,
- Children may offer toys/objects as an act of invitation (an initiative) to joined activity.
- Children express initiatives in their communication with peers in order to create shared activities. The degree of initiative and openness to peer's initiatives creates different and varied interactions among toddlers. A summary of several studies of young children's communication with peers (especially 2-3 year olds), identifies the following characteristics:
 - Children show high competence in taking initiatives and openness in accepting that peers may take initiatives (peer's input) and in following up these inputs. The interaction is featured by mutual and interactive construction of the activity – a kind of turn taking. Interaksjonen får et preg av en gjensidig og vekselvirkende oppbygging av en aktivitet – en tur-taking.
 - Children show high competence in taking initiatives and taking initiatives, but they are less open or attentive to peer's initiatives. Barn viser en stor kompetanse til å ta initiativer, komme med ideer til aktiviteter, men er mindre åpne eller oppmerksomme på andre barns initiativer. One of the children seems to rule and organise the activity. The interaction is vulnerable, conflicts might occur and frequent shifts of initiatives to different activities might occur.
 - Children show high competence in confirming and coming into line peer's initiatives, but they seldom take own initiatives.

- Children are to a high degree occupied with their own activities, they are interacting with adults or they are walking around in the room (often carrying different objects). They seldom seek out for peers.

Question:

Have you observed some of these different kinds of interaction amongst the children in your setting?

Toddlers' Negotiations (Alvestad, 2010; Johansson, 1999)

- Toddlers can express different rights in their communication with peers.
- Toddlers can express their right to things/objects in order to protect their personal activity.
- Toddlers can express their right to things/objects in order to protect their relations.
- Toddler's disagreements can occur within a dyad (me-you).
- Toddler's disagreements can occur when a dyad interact with other children of the group (we-them)
- When toddlers negotiate and express agreement, the negotiations include imitation, variation, taking turns, turning of heads, gaze and the body's position as well as intersubjectivity/taking the perspective of the other.
- When toddlers negotiate and express disagreement, the negotiations might include power, control and manipulation.

Question:

How do different children negotiate during playtime?

Friendship among Toddlers (Greve, 2007)

- The term friendship includes a dimension that goes beyond the being together.
- Friendship includes a historic dimension based upon the past, the here-and now and is pointing ahead. In other words, friendship needs time to develop.
- Hallmarks of friendship: expressions for equality, joint interest, relations based on voluntariness and expressions of a joint WE.
- A joint we may be expressed by creating meaning together, relating to each other's lifeworld, using humor, shared expressions of morality (right-wrong, positive-negative) or by protecting/maintaining the relation within/against the peer group.

- Different types of friendship relations with different content of the «joint we» can be found.
- Friendship relations may be dyads, triads etc.
- Hallmarks of friendships are especially visible from the age of two.
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Question:

Are there established or developing friendships in your group of toddlers?

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