

The ToWe Project

2015-2018

Enhancing Opportunities for Toddlers' Wellbeing



**ENHANCING THE EDUCATION AND WELLBEING
OF DISADVANTAGED TODDLERS THROUGH THE
DEVELOPMENT OF TRAINING AND MATERIALS
TO SUPPORT EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS**

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Disclaimer:

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Introduction

Welcome to this manual which supports the practice of Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) to enhance the education and wellbeing opportunities for disadvantaged toddlers. It underpins EYPs' knowledge and understanding of the different dimensions that impact on toddlers' wellbeing. The manual covers the application of the Wellbeing Audit Tool, underpinning the different dimensions of wellbeing and the implications of these, the theoretical background and the international and national policies that impact on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) provision. The context of wellbeing within each partner country (political, economic and societal aspects) will be explored and how these support or hinder disadvantaged toddlers' wellbeing.

The wellbeing of children has been universally recognised by UNICEF (2013) in their report card 11: Child Well-Being in Rich Countries. The scores of wellbeing for each partner country demonstrate a range of ranking positions:

- Norway - 2
 - United Kingdom - 16
 - Spain - 19
- (UNICEF, 2013:5)

The EURYDICE (2009) document *Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities* identified how effective preschool education can promote life-long learning and provide opportunities to increase equality by supporting children in reaching their full potential. This research particularly focused on diverse and disadvantaged children and their families; highlighting "what seems essential for all approaches is a positive socio-emotional climate, with emotionally safe and stable relationships, with sensitive-responsive, non-intrusive teachers" (ibid:32).

Aims of the Manual

The aims of the toddlers' wellbeing manual are to:

- Familiarise Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) with the theoretical background, dimensions and aspects of wellbeing and how these can be used to evaluate practice;
- Increase Early Years Practitioners' awareness of the complexities of the dimensions and aspects of wellbeing of toddlers;
- Provide Early Years Practitioners with a Wellbeing Audit Tool to evaluate and help them improve the quality of their current provision and practice;
- Help Early Years Practitioners distinguish effective strategies of good practice for toddler wellbeing identified by the Setting Partner EYPs through their action plans, strategies, shared practice and reflective dialogue.

Theoretical background and literature

The International Context of Wellbeing

The discourse regarding wellbeing has come to the fore since 2000 particularly with UNICEF (2000:3) stating that “the league tables of child poverty presented in this first *Innocenti Report Card* are the most comprehensive estimates so far of child poverty across the industrialized world”. This provided a context under which wellbeing was assessed across 29 members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). However, prior to this the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognised “that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding” (UNICEF, 1989a:3). This encapsulates all that wellbeing entails and the requirements of meeting these needs today and for the future, both in relation to the rights of the toddler and their learning and development.

At the turn of the century the European Union called for “specific targets to be established as part of an effort to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty” (UNICEF, 2000:5). In this paper the United Kingdom was identified as committing to halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020. This has been a political driver for European countries to focus on poverty and disadvantaged families.

National Context for England, Norway and Spain

England


The Children Act, 1989 provided a legal foundation for the welfare and developmental needs of children within the United Kingdom and reflected certain elements of the UNCRC (UNICEF, 1989). This led to the Every Child Matters agenda (DfES, 2003) outlining the outcomes for children’s services within the UK. This agenda underpinned the Children Act 2004, and the Childcare Act of 2006, which created a basis for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DCSF, 2008) framework which supported the provision of wellbeing for children.

The above legislation has underpinned the continued political agenda of More Affordable Childcare (DfE, 2013) which has increased the amount of affordable provision for children and their families.

Early Years Entitlement, Early Years Pupil Premium and Free Early Education and childcare for Two year olds (FEET) (DfE, 2015) makes provision of good quality settings for disadvantaged toddlers to support the promotion of their development and learning.

Early Years Entitlement makes provision for all 3 to 4 year olds in England to have 570 hours of free early education or childcare per year (DfE, 2015). This usually is taken as 15 hours each week for 38 weeks of the year but has been extended to 30 hours for working families that are eligible (DfE, 2015). The Early Years Pupil Premium provides additional funding support for early years settings to improve the education they provide for disadvantaged 3 and 4 year olds (DfE, 2015).

Free Early Education and childcare for Two year olds (FEET) is offered for disadvantaged toddlers who meet the specific eligibility criteria (DfE, 2015). This gives them the same entitlement as Early Years Entitlement of 15 hours for 38 weeks of the year.



The UK Government have identified wellbeing as a strategic area for development of government policy. This has led to the recognition of policy objectives in how wellbeing can be translated into policy in order to build a high wellbeing recovery within health and education with the identification of four key areas for development of wellbeing:

1. Building a high wellbeing economy: labour market policy
2. Building high wellbeing places: planning and transport policy
3. Building personal resources: mindfulness in health and education
4. Valuing what matters: arts and culture

(All Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing Economics, 2014)

This has provided a driver to introduce 'Mindfulness' within schools and settings to improve the wellbeing of teachers, practitioners and children (All Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing Economics, 2015).

UNICEF commissioned Ipsos MORI (2011) to undertake a qualitative research study. "UNICEF's Report Card 7 put the UK at the bottom of the child well-being league table, including on three key well-being measures" (ibid:1). The UK government can be seen to be actively addressing this concern through the above initiatives.

Norway

Although the UN for several years has ranked Norway as the best country in the world to live in (Human Development Index), there are also a growing proportion of children in Norway who are living in poverty. This is particularly so amongst the increasing population of immigrants who have long-term low incomes. This is one of the reasons why there is a lower participation rate in kindergartens (public or private kindergartens) for minority children than for children in the rest of the population. Several subsidy schemes have therefore been established to ensure that children from low-income families have access to kindergartens. In 2015, all 4 and 5 year olds living in households with a low income received the right to 20 hours free attendance at a kindergarten per week. From 1 August 2016, the scheme will be extended to include 3 year olds. The amount considered to be a low income will be decided by the ministry on an annual basis. All kindergartens will also offer a reduced fee, if the fee for the kindergarten is higher than 6 % of the household's combined income. These subsidies are intended to help improve not only the wellbeing of all children, but also their development and abilities. In other words, participation in kindergartens will help to even out social differences.

Wellbeing is discussed in a number of ways on the national information website of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. The term is never defined, but material has been prepared to inspire the nurseries in their work of fostering the wellbeing of all children. The guidance booklet "Children's wellbeing – adults' responsibility. Preventive work against bullying starts in kindergartens" emphasises the responsibility of the staff for the psychosocial environment, children's relationships and friendships during play, and also the cooperation between home and kindergarten. Short videos have also been made that can be used as a basis for professional discussions on children's welfare and adults' responsibilities.

Bullying in kindergartens

The Prime Minister and all the other parties involved in education (= stakeholders) have signed a *Manifesto against Bullying*, in which they undertake to ensure that every child has a good and inclusive upbringing and learning environment with zero tolerance for bullying. The result of this is that bullying in kindergartens has become an important topic in the Norwegian social debate.

The national *Centre for Learning Environment* provides videos and guidance material on how kindergartens can prevent bullying and how they should act if a child is bullying another child. In terms of prevention, they refer to the fact that international research literature particularly emphasises the importance of close relationships and interactions to a child's safety, wellbeing, development and learning. The Centre for Learning Environment also provides articles and master's theses about aggression and bullying in kindergartens (Laeringsmiljøsenderet – UiS, 2016).


The National Parents Committee for Kindergartens provides academic articles and practical suggestions about what parents and kindergartens can do if a child is being bullied. One important point that people must acknowledge is that it does go on in kindergartens, and they must prevent occurrences from being trivialised. Characteristics of this kind of harassment among very young children are: hitting, shoving and hair-pulling, teasing, being laughed at, being called bad names, property being destroyed and hidden, being excluded. These are described in an information notice that has been distributed in six languages (FUB, 2016a). A new definition of the term 'bullying' has been developed, and this says: "Bullying of children in kindergartens means the actions of adults and/or other children that infringes upon the child's perception as belonging to a community and being a meaningful person within that community" (FUB, 2016b).

In a national survey, 97 per cent of kindergartens declare that they work systematically on social competence and children's wellbeing. 85 per cent of kindergartens state that they have procedures on following up information about a child's wellbeing. Kindergarten managers also believe that the staff largely, or to an extremely high degree, work at ensuring that the children feel that they have safe relationships. However, other studies show that when children have been observed and interviewed, not all children at kindergartens are seen, understood and acknowledged. We can summarise by saying that children's wellbeing is a subject that has received a great deal of discussion, but it is not a reality for all children in kindergartens. However, this is what we should aim at.

Spain

The term 'wellbeing' is not frequently used in official documents. It is implicitly included in the main goals of Early Childhood Education in Spain. However, the description of the aim of Early Childhood Education (birth - 3) in the Catalan curriculum (Departament D'Educació, 2010) clearly relates to this concept, and states that the aim of Early Childhood Education is:

to contribute to the children's development at the emotional and affective, physical and motor, social and cognitive levels, by providing a comfortable atmosphere where they feel welcome and which generates learning expectations (Departament D'Educació, 2010).



Furthermore, and in the same official document, it is said that the educational action should foster toddlers' affective development, their personal growth, the creation of a positive and balanced self-image, the discovery of their surroundings and of the possibilities of their own bodies, movement and body control, so that they can become more and more autonomous. It should also allow them to experiment, relate to one another and communicate with other people (children and adults) through different languages, by learning to live with one another.

Explicitly, the term 'wellbeing' is only mentioned once in the Curriculum (Departament D'Educació, 2010), in which it is related to physical (not emotional) wellbeing. However, a new document published in 2012, in which guidelines to be followed in the first cycle of ECE (birth - 3) are described in detail, includes a number of requirements that must be met in order to ensure children's wellbeing (Generalitat de Catalunya Departament d'Ensenyament, 2012).

Specifically, it says that, to ensure children's wellbeing, good relations between different members of the educational community must be fostered, highlighting here the fundamental importance of families. It also emphasizes that daily life activities must be organized so that children experience them as a time to look after themselves and as a source of wellbeing. A further aspect regarding wellbeing is related to providing the presence and possibilities for children to play in school, that is, understanding play as an activity that is basic and essential to ensure learning and foster wellbeing.

Definitions of Wellbeing

The term 'Wellbeing' is widely used within ECEC provision however perspectives of this terminology and what this means varies between practitioners and countries. You will find that there are many differing ways that wellbeing can be defined and this will have an impact on your own beliefs, values and practice in working with toddlers.

Below are two differing definitions defining what wellbeing entails:

When we want to know how each of the children is doing in a setting, we first have to explore the degree to which children feel at ease, act spontaneously, and show vitality and self-confidence. All this indicates that their emotional well-being is OK and that their physical needs, the need for tenderness and affection, the need for safety and clarity, the need for social recognition, the need to feel competent and the need for meaning and moral value in life are satisfied. Interventions that secure the well-being of children make them stronger and keep them in touch with their feelings and emotions (Laevens, 2005).

Statham and Chase (2010:12) "term well-being as the quality of people's lives. It is a dynamic state that is enhanced when people can fulfil their personal and social goals." They state that the definition of well-being, particularly childhood well-being is not only complex but multi-dimensional, and should include dimensions of physical, social and emotional well-being; it should focus on the immediate lives of children but also consider their future lives; and should incorporate some subjective as well as objective measures (ibid:12).

Reflection:

- Read and identify what are the common words being used to explain the concept of

wellbeing here?

- How do the definitions reflect your own beliefs, values and practices relating to supporting the wellbeing of toddlers?

Here are three definitions from the TODDLER Project (2013a):

England

“Wellbeing is a state of being or condition of existence that characterises an individual realising their full potential through their own prosperity, welfare, life satisfaction, health, eudemonia (human flourishing) and happiness” (TODDLER-Sutherland and Styman, 2013a:21).

Norway

“Wellbeing is a positive physical, mental and social state. It is enhanced by conditions that include positive personal relationships with adults and peers, an environment that promotes challenging indoor and outdoor play activities, and an inclusive community that allows the individual child to experience joy and happiness, to unfold his/her potential and to express his/her view on the ongoing activities” (TODDLER- Røthle and Mørkeseth, 2013a:31).

Spain

“Creating the necessary conditions so that children’s wellbeing can be guaranteed is the axis around which the main aims of Infant Education 0-3 (Early childhood education) revolve. Wellbeing is the physical and emotional state that lets the child fully develop his/her autonomy according to his/her possibilities, individually or in relation with others, in a specific context and through different languages, considering each and every need they have, every instinct and ability” (TODDLER- Corcoll López, Flores and Geis, 2013a:52).

Reflection:

- Reflect upon your understanding of the concept of wellbeing
- What does this mean to you?
- Why is it an important consideration when working with toddlers?

Reflect upon your own country’s definition of wellbeing:

- How is this demonstrated in your practice?
- Identify similarities between each country - England, Norway and Spain’s definition of

Using the Wellbeing 'Wordle' (Figure 1) create your own definition

There are a number of theoretical frameworks, such as, Bronfenbrenner (1979) that can be applied to represent the complexity and relationship between the learning, development and societal systems that impact upon a toddler's wellbeing. His ecological systems are:

1. **Macrosystem** – the national ideology that influences a country's political, economic, cultural and societal context.
2. **Exosystem** – the wider society that impacts on the family and influences the experience that the toddler has within their family, for example, parental employment status and the effect of this on the toddler.
3. **Mesosystem** – the interrelations between the different systems and the impact that these have on the toddler's wellbeing and development, for example, the family experience to the day-care experience.
4. **Microsystem** – the toddler's interaction, relationship and experience with their immediate environment.
5. **Chronosystem** – the constant movement through the ecological systems and the pattern of environmental events and transitions over the course of life that impact on development.

The Macrosystem can be applied to identify the political and social reforms that underpin each country's policies in relation to the impact on their national policies, societal systems and culture; which impacts on the lower order systems of Micro, Meso and Exo. Fundamentally these external systems influence the wellbeing of toddlers and their families as they experience the ecological transitions through the changing environmental circumstances of the home and the wider environment, such as, new siblings or attending day-care.

Reflection:

Reflect upon the impact of the Macrosystem upon the Mesosystem or Microsystem.

- How does this impact and influence your provision and practice in supporting toddlers' wellbeing?

England

For example, the National Political Policy of the UK (Macrosystem) in regards to the provision of the Free Early Education and childcare for Two year olds (FEET) funding for disadvantaged toddlers. The impact this has had on early years settings and their provision in regards to the challenges they have faced in working with disadvantaged toddlers (Mesosystem).

Norway

For example, the government will establish by law a requirement for all early years practitioners to have a good competence in Norwegian. According to a national survey there is a great difference in EYPs' language competence. One of three Heads of ECEC-settings answers that there is a problem with the Norwegian language amongst their employees from linguistic minorities. The Minister of Education states: A good kindergarten is a setting in which the children learn Norwegian. Therefore he will put this into the law for all private and public ECEC-setting (macro level).

Spain

For example, the Catalan government (macrosystem) has established a new requirement for students who want to access Early Childhood Education University studies. Through a test, they need to show language competence in Catalan and Spanish. This is to ensure sufficient knowledge of both languages before entering University and, in due time, before entering the professional world (mesosystem).

Figure 2 - Toddlers' Wellbeing Wheel provides a framework for Early Years Practitioners to use in supporting the development of their knowledge and understanding of toddlers' wellbeing and the application of the different dimensions of wellbeing. This framework represents the various elements of a toddler's life coming together.

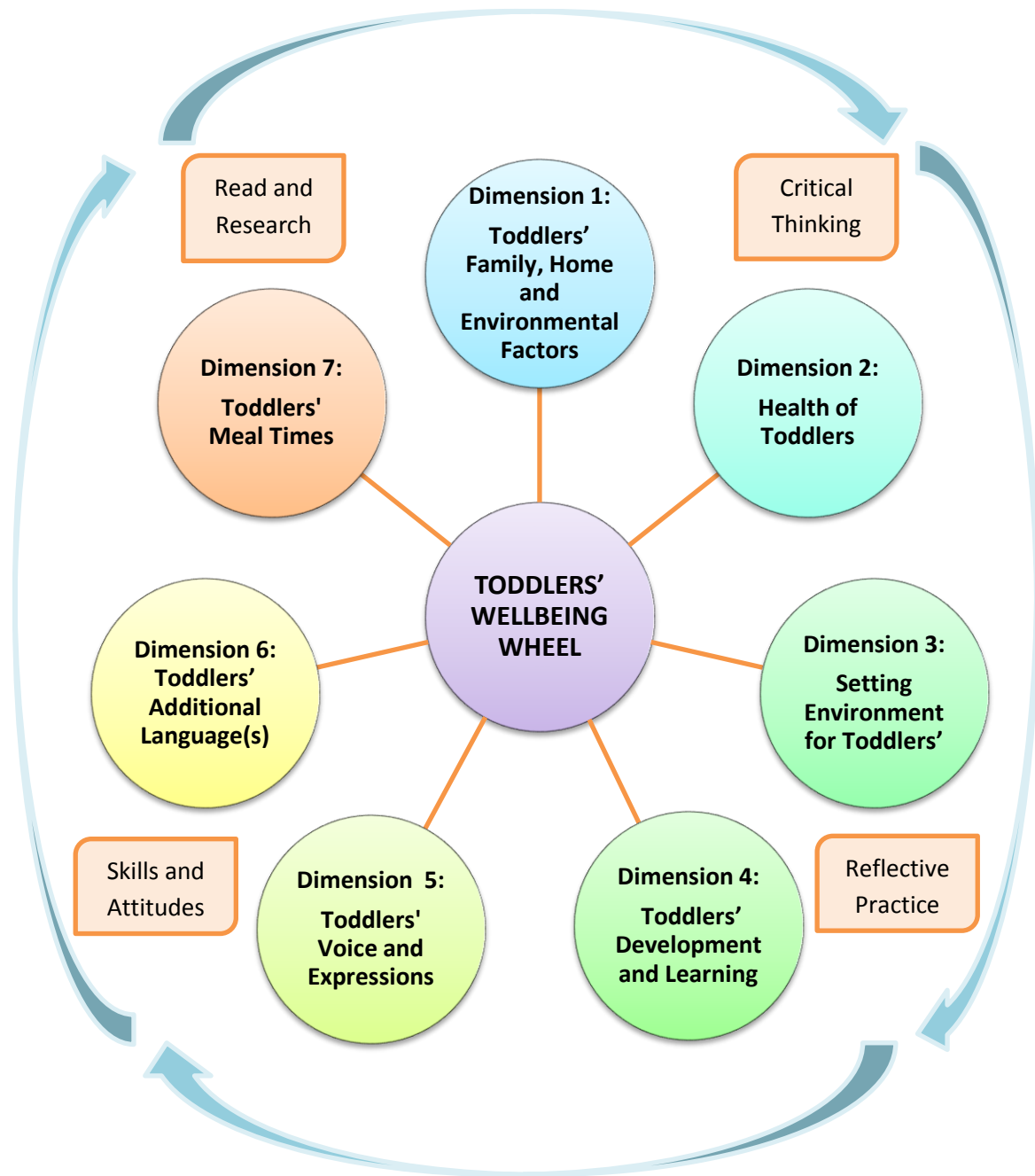


Figure 2 – ToWe Toddlers' Wellbeing Wheel - Mukadam and Sutherland

This training manual will introduce you to the meaning of critical thinking and reflective practice and how you can develop the necessary aptitude to read and research and develop the skills and attitudes towards enhancing opportunities for toddlers' wellbeing.

Four Pedagogical Characteristics:

1. **Critical Thinking**
2. **Read and Research**
3. **Reflective Practice**
4. **Skills and Attitudes**

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the active process of making logical connections between differing concepts and ideologies. This process involves the application of the knowledge, analysis of the concept and synthesis of the understanding achieved and the new understanding, values and beliefs developed and applied through this learning.

Reflection:

Apply the below points to answer the critical questions:

- A critical thinker raises vital questions and problems, challenging beliefs and values, formulating them clearly and precisely
- Gathers and assesses relevant information and reaches well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards (e.g. ToWe Dimensions of Wellbeing Wheel)
- Thinks open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognising and assessing, their assumptions, implications and practical consequences
- Communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems

(Paul and Elder, 2013)

Critical questions:

1. What has been the impact of the education policy in your country over the last 10 years?
2. How has early years education and care been influenced by recent government policy and initiatives in your country?

Select a dimension of wellbeing from the wheel and consider your setting.

1. Consider its current impact on toddlers in your setting?
2. What impact does this aspect have on supporting toddlers' learning and development?

Read and Research

Read and Research is a key skill that provides opportunities to engage with current sources of information, literature, theory and research in order to develop critical thinking and to enhance knowledge and understanding.

Reflection:

- Where would you currently look for information to read and research an area of your practice?
- Consider how you would identify if the source of information you are accessing is a reputable and scholarly source?

Find a piece of research and identify:

- Where is it cited?
Is this a reputable site?
- Who is the author?
- What are their credentials?
Their qualifications, experience and expertise with in the field

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is about the thoughtful consideration of experiences and the application of the knowledge gained in practice. “Reflective thinking is active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1938). This is an active process that links to critical thinking and can also be defined as “being willing to engage in continuous self-appraisal and development in order to better understand the reasoning behind a concept and why that concept is held, whereas routine action is guided by tradition, habit and authority” (Sutherland and Dallal, 2008).

Reflection:

- Why is it important to reflect regularly on your practice?
- Reflect upon how your personal values, principles and beliefs are influenced by early years philosophies and theory?

Skills and Attitudes

Skills and attitudes are important in developing positive trusting relationships with toddlers and their families. The skill in this situation is about having a sound knowledge and understanding of toddlers’ wellbeing, learning and development and the factors that may inhibit this. The attitude relates to the personal principle, values and beliefs that influence how people relate and respond to each other. The three main building blocks of skills and attitudes for EYP’s in supporting toddler wellbeing are first, to **empathise** by having an understanding of the situation, then to **engage** with improving the situation and lastly to **encourage** those around to support with the improvement of the situation.

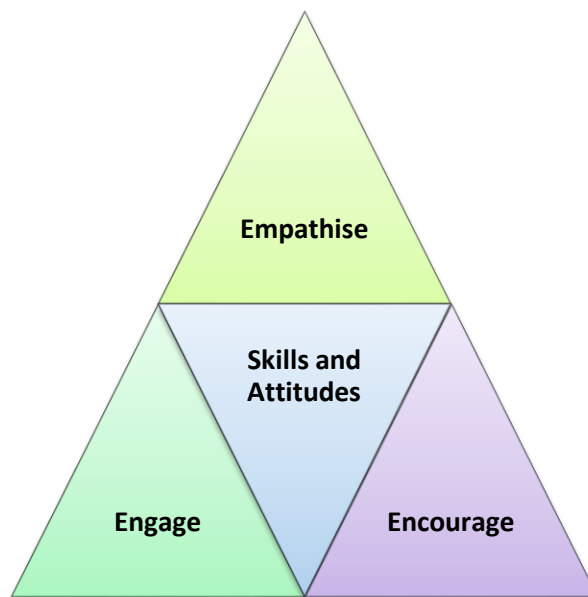


Figure 3 - Skills and Attitudes

Reflection:

Identify a situation where you have used these three skills and attitudes in supporting a toddler and their family?

What impact can these skills and attitudes have in supporting future early years practice?

- Empathise
- Engage
- Encourage

Dimensions and Aspects of Wellbeing

UNICEF - Child Well-Being in Rich Countries

“The true measure of a nation’s standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born”
(UNICEF, 2007:1).

UNICEF (2000) commissioned the first report to identify the cost of closing the child poverty gap and moving children away from the absolute and relative poverty lines (see table 1 for definitions of poverty).

Relative Poverty	Absolute Poverty
Families lack the income required and live below the average standard of living for the country and the society that they live in. They are considered impoverished if they cannot maintain the living standards of society.	Families lack the minimum income required to meet one or more of the basic minimum needs for living and sustaining life.

Table 1. Definitions of Poverty

The key findings of this report identified that the United Kingdom was in the bottom four of the league table for **relative** child poverty and Spain were in the bottom four of the league table for **absolute** child poverty. The league table identified that Norway was second from the top after Sweden for relative child poverty and Luxembourg for absolute child poverty.

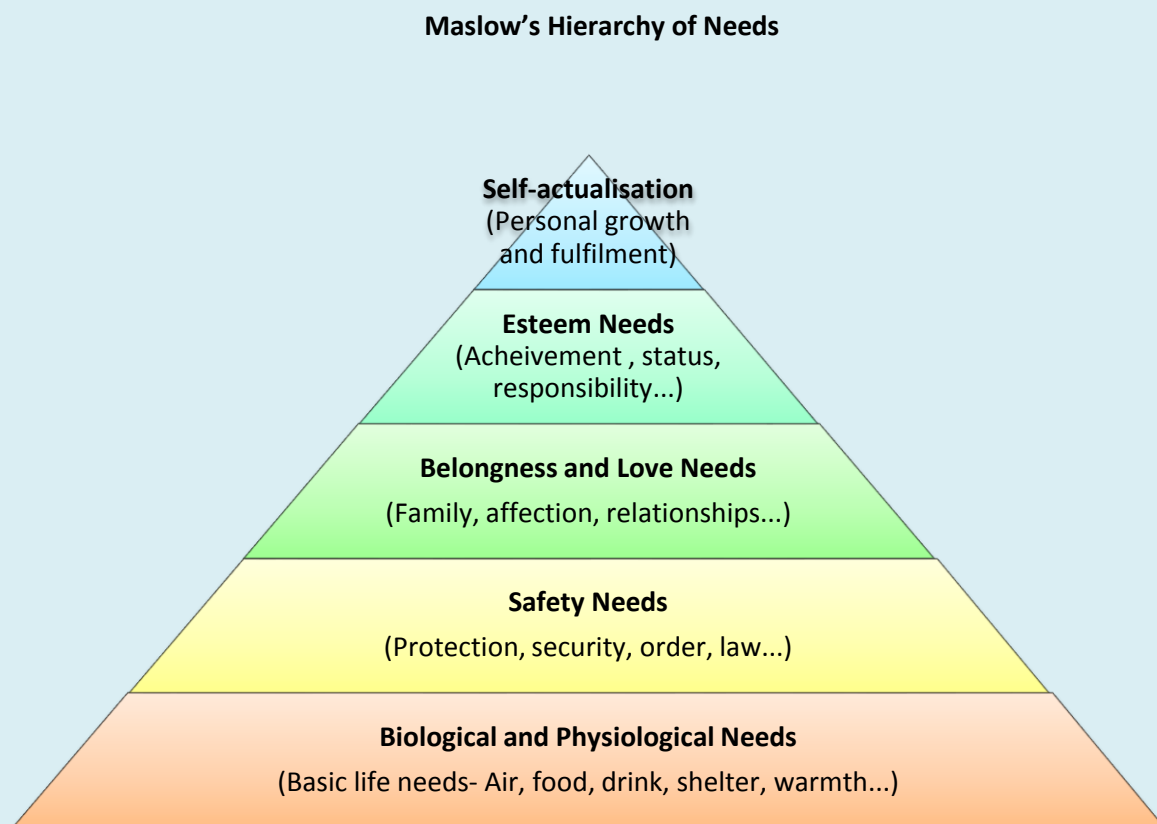
In this first report card UNICEF identified key factors that affected child poverty and the measures each country undertook to monitor child poverty and the strategies developed to close the child poverty gap. The report categorises the links between income and poverty for children examining to what extent low income matters for children’s wellbeing? Existing studies that call into question the size of income’s role do clearly underline the need for government policies to operate on a whole range of issues in order to equalize lifetime opportunities
(UNICEF, 2000:12).

Reflection:

Provide examples of the causes by which a family may find themselves in relative poverty?

Identify some of the basic needs required to be above the absolute poverty line?

Consider where relative and absolute poverty are on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.



(Chapman, 2016)


UNICEF Report Card 7

Report Card 6 (UNICEF, 2005) reviewed child poverty across the 24 OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries highlighting that 17 of these countries poverty had increased. This resulted in Report Card 7 (UNICEF, 2007) which builds and expands on the analysis of this report card and provides dimensions for measuring child wellbeing in 21 OECD countries.

This report card measures and compares child wellbeing under 6 dimensions rather than by using income poverty as the key measure.

There are six dimensions with forty separate indicators:

1. Material Wellbeing
2. Health and Safety
3. Education
4. Peer and Family Relationships
5. Behaviours and Risks
6. Young People's own Subjective Sense of Well-being



This Report Card supports the measurement of wellbeing so that priorities, initiatives and strategies can be identified and developed by OECD countries to assist change and improvement.

UNICEF Report Card 11

This Report Card uses five dimensions to measure wellbeing within 29 OECD countries and updates and enhances findings from Report Card 7 reporting on the changes within wellbeing since 2000. It is divided into three parts: the presentation of league tables on child wellbeing, what children have to say about their own wellbeing and the changes in well-being (UNICEF, 2013:1).

The dimensions of wellbeing are averaged from the component and indicator scores. This is done first by averaging the indicator scores and then averaging the component scores to provide a final score for the dimensions. The report cards summarise and identify trends relating to child wellbeing in rich countries (UNICEF, 2013).

Below are the dimensions of child wellbeing with their component and indicators for the initial league table of child wellbeing in 29 of the world's most advanced economies for Report Card 11:

1. Material Well-being

1.1 Monetary Deprivation

1.1a Relative Child Poverty Rate

1.1b Relative Child Poverty Gap

1.2 Material Deprivation

1.2a Child Deprivation Rate

1.2b Low Family Affluence Rate

2. Health

2.1 Health at Birth

2.1a Infant Mortality Rate

2.1b Low Birth weight Rate

2.2 Preventive Health Service

2.2 Overall Immunisation Rate

2.3 Childhood Mortality

2.3 Child Death rate, age 1 to 19

3. Education

3.1 Participation

3.1a Participation Rate: Early Childhood Education

3.1b Participation Rate: Further Education, age 15 - 19

3.1c Participation Rate: NEET Rate (% age 15 – 19 Not in Education, Employment or Training)

3.2 Achievement

3.2 Average PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) scores in reading, maths and science

4. Behaviour and Risk

4.1 Health Behaviours

4.1a Being Overweight

4.1b Eating Breakfast

4.1c Eating Fruit

4.1d Taking Exercise

- 4.2 Risk Behaviours
 - 4.2a Teenage Fertility Rate
 - 4.2b Smoking
 - 4.2c Alcohol
 - 4.2d Cannabis

- 4.3 Exposure to Violence
 - 4.3a Fighting
 - 4.3b Being Bullied

5. Housing and Environment

- 5.1 Housing
 - 5.1a Rooms per Person
 - 5.1b Multiple Housing Problems
- 5.2 Environmental Safety
 - 5.2a Homicide Rate
 - 5.2b Air Pollution

(UNICEF, 2013:5)

Reflection:

Select one of the 5 dimensions of wellbeing and reflect on its components and indicators considering how this has impacted upon your role and settings provision?

Leuven Wellbeing and Involvement Scales

This tool consists of a set of two 5 point scales developed by Professor Ferre Laevers and his team at the Research Centre for Experiential Education (Leuven University, Belgium) to measure children's wellbeing and involvement in order to improve the quality of provision using a self-assessment process. The Experiential Education (EXE) project, started in 1976, provides a theoretical framework for the identification of quality and how the context/approach through the process leads to the outcomes. The process focuses on two dimensions: emotional wellbeing and the level of children's involvement (Laevers, 2005a, 2005b).

Well-being refers to feeling at ease, being spontaneous and free of emotional tensions and is crucial to secure 'mental health'. Involvement refers to being intensely engaged in activities and is considered to be a necessary condition for deep level learning and development (Laevers et al, 2005a:3).

This process involves EYPs carrying out short 2 minute observations on individual children and ranking their wellbeing and involvement using the rating scales starting from extremely low (1), low (2), moderate (3), high (4) to extremely high (5). The observational data is reflected upon and this can be a shared experience. Influencing factors are taken into consideration when the outcomes are extremely low or extremely high and strengths are identified as well as strategies to improve the quality of provision for the child (Laevers et al, 2005a).

Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale (SSTEWS)

This is an environmental rating scale to support the evaluation of the use of the concept of sustained shared thinking and emotional wellbeing which include the domains of social and emotional development and cognitive development as key areas in creating Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).

The longitudinal research studies of The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) (Sylva et al, 2004) and Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002) influenced the development of STTEW and promoted the value of the active engagement of EYPs in supporting toddlers' learning.

The STTEW rating scales are completed by EYPs who observe a group of children in all areas of the settings provision both indoors and outside. EYPs make professional judgements as to where in the scale the settings provision is as well as other EYPs' practice (Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish, 2015).

The scales have the following headings identifying the different areas of practice:

- Sub-scale 1 – Building trust, confidence and independence
 - Item 1: Self-regulation and social development
 - Item 2: Encouraging choices and independent play
 - Item 3: Planning for small group and individual interactions/adult deployment
- Sub-scale 2 – Social and emotional well-being
 - Item 4: Supporting socio-emotional well-being
- Sub-scale 3 – Supporting and extending language and communication
 - Item 5: Encouraging children to talk with others
 - Item 6: Staff actively listen to children and encourage children to listen
 - Item 7: Staff support children's language use
 - Item 8: Sensitive responsiveness
- Sub-scale 4 – Supporting learning and critical thinking
 - Item 9: Supporting curiosity
 - Item 10: Encouraging sustained shared thinking through storytelling, sharing books, singing, and rhymes
 - Item 11: Encouraging sustained shared thinking in investigation and exploration
 - Item 12: Supporting concept development and higher-order thinking
- Sub-scale 5 – Assessing learning and language
 - Item 13: using assessment to support and extend learning and critical thinking
 - Item 14: Assessing language development


(Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish, 2015)

The sub-scale ratings rank from 1 to 7. With supporting criteria for the indication of each scale with 1 being - inadequate, 3 - minimal, 5 - good and 7 - excellent.

Reflection:

Reflect on how these two scales support the assessment of the quality of provision in early years settings?

- Framework

- 
- Headings
 - Rankings
 - Observation
 - Reflection
 - Actions

Using the Wellbeing Audit Tool

Introduction to the use of the wellbeing audit tool

The audit tool supports Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) in the self-assessment, evaluation and reflection of their provision, practice and the toddlers' individual needs. It is an evaluative tool that is not about rating/ranking the settings provision but identifying what is done well and what could be developed further to improve on the opportunities and experience for disadvantaged toddlers. This tool helps EYPs to identify areas of strength and areas of development to assist in improving the quality of EYPs provision and practice.

The audit tool uses a variety of approaches from discussion with parents, observations of toddlers and practice, and the assessment and auditing the environment and learning opportunities.

The dimensions used within this audit tool are:

1. Family, Home and Environmental Factors
2. Health of the Toddlers
3. Setting Environment for Toddlers - Current Practice and Provision
4. Toddlers' Development and Learning
5. Toddlers' Voices and Expressions
6. Toddlers' Language(s)
7. Toddlers' Meal Times

These dimensions have been influenced by the UNICEF Report Cards but developed to support early years provision and practice. The seven dimensions interlink with each other and the audit will specifically address dimensions 1 – 4 with the other dimensions (5-7) being acknowledged within this audit tool but the other tools and materials will fully explore and examine this.

The audit tool indicators provide EYPs with questions and/or statements, relating to the dimension, which facilitate opportunities for the self-assessment, evaluation and reflection of provision and practice; highlighting areas of strength and areas for development within each dimension.

Areas of strength are an opportunity for EYPs to highlight the successes, achievements and good practice of the setting in meeting the needs for disadvantaged toddlers or to comment on the responses to the question. Areas for development are an opportunity for identifying areas that would benefit or may need further reviewing, to improve on the quality of the provision and practice within the setting for disadvantaged toddlers. This is an opportunity to share with other colleagues reflecting on the quality of provision and how to improve and develop this further.

The strategies describe how you are going to improve the quality of provision and practice in relation to the identified areas for development. This provides EYPs with direction pointing out how they are going to enhance, increase or extend opportunities for learning and development, resources and provision. See table 2 - Wellbeing Audit Tool Headings.

Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan

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Table 2 – Wellbeing Audit Tool Headings

Actions – from the identified strategies, actions can be formulated, to prioritise the development of aims and objectives to ensure a successful outcome for the area of improvement. Creating a setting develop plan supports the achievement of the identified areas for development setting out the priorities, steps and targets to be taken to achieve this within a chosen time-frame. Table 3 - provides an example of how this can be completed.

Identification of the Priority - Aim	Targets - Objectives	Key actions – Actions to be taken	Who is responsible and by when	Date Achieved and date to be reviewed
To develop the key person (KP) approach within the setting to support the settling in process and attachment of toddlers within the setting.	To review the KP approach	Review policy at team meeting looking at legislation and theory	EYP and/or manager leads team meeting	
	To rewrite the policy	Add new statements to the policy making links to legislations	EYP and/or manager	
	To provide staff training on the importance of theorists around KP approach	In-house training on the importance of the KP approach and theorists	EYP and/or manager delivers to staff	
	Introduce to parents	Produce an information leaflet for parents	EYP and/or manager	

Table 3 – Example of completed setting develop plan priority

Identification of the Priorities – these are the key priorities identified from the audits strategies for the enhancement of provision and practice within the specific dimensions. This sets out the aim for the priority outlining the key intention to be developed/improved. The targets identify specific objectives and goals to be achieved in addressing the key priorities. The key actions are the steps to taken to achieve the priorities and targets. The priorities are the cake, the targets are the ingredients and the key action is the recipe. The ‘who’ is responsible, sets out clearly a named EYP who will take responsibility for leading and implementing the development and the ‘by when’ provides a time-frame for the achievement of this.



The dimensions will interlink and impact on each other with the aim to enhance the overall quality of provision. The dimensions can be used individually or as a whole to determine or prioritise particular aspects of wellbeing.

Dimension 1 - Family, Home and Environmental Factors

This particular dimension deals with the toddlers and their families home and living conditions and while this may not directly involve the setting it still requires thought and consideration in order to improve EYPs' understanding of the toddlers' home situations and to adapt the setting provision and resources. These are sensitive issues for families so tact and consideration are required as to whether it is appropriate to ask the families questions about their family and home environment.

Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical, social and mental needs. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this
(UNICEF UK, 1989b: Article 27).

1.1 Environmental Factors

When considering environmental factors EYPs need to have a good understanding of how they impact upon the toddlers that they work with. The immediate environment in which they live affects their healthy growth and development. "Research has demonstrated that children's life chances (the factors that affect their current and future wellbeing) are affected by the standard of their housing" (Harker, 2006:7).

Housing

The accommodation that families have access to and the surrounding infrastructure can vary greatly within any given location. The type and condition of the housing that the toddlers may be living in will greatly impact upon their health and wellbeing. EYPs need to take into account the conditions in which toddlers are living to support families in accessing the resources they need within the provision.

Type of Housing:

Through home visits and discussions with families the type of housing that the family live in can be accessed and understood. The family can be in rented, owned or sheltered accommodation with the property type being a flat, apartment, house, bed-sit, boat or caravan etc.

The condition types of the home that toddlers may be living in include: overcrowding, poor physical conditions, such as, infestation, damp, cold, insufficient beds or sharing, lack of facilities or working facilities, not wind or weather tight, structurally unsafe, insufficient repair. Is the family experiencing relative or absolute poverty?

Location and Access to services and facilities:

The opportunities for families to access essential services and local facilities are vital for families with young children and barriers, such as distance, transportation and travel, financial hardship and geographical locations can hinder opportunities and create barriers to accessing these services:

- Education and Care Provision and Professionals

- Medical and Health Care Facilities and Professionals
- Shops and Public Services
- Transportation

Safe and Stimulating

The opportunities for a safe and stimulating home environment may vary depending upon the housing conditions and life style of the toddlers' families. If access to outdoor play opportunities is limited, local facilities such as parks and playgrounds can be used. Families living in poor housing or refuge are more likely to experience potential accidents or hazards due to the physical conditions of the home (Harker, 2006).

This can have an impact upon toddlers' emotional well-being and physical health. Play opportunities within the home may be limited due to living conditions, overcrowding, and lack of provision or parental interaction.

Poor housing conditions have damaging impact upon children's learning..... parents in overcrowded homes were less responsive and spoke in less sophisticated ways to their children.... Children living in temporary accommodation often face limited space to play and some studies suggest that this can lead to depression of aggressive behaviour

(Harker, 2006:23-24).

1.2 Family

Demographics of Family and Life Style

EYPs need to be aware of the demographics within the geographical location of their setting and the families accessing/attending the setting. This will help inform their provision and practices and awareness of the diversity and issues within their community. The demographics/structure and health needs of the family will also influence the wellbeing of the toddler, such as, a new sibling, parental illness or mental health issues, support provided by the extended family and family support network.

The family income and standard of living plays an integral part in supporting the needs of the toddler and family and whether they are in relative or absolute poverty. The life style choices that families make will also have an impact upon a toddler's wellbeing. Families are more at risk if they have health issues or additions, such as, mental health, disabilities, smoking, alcohol and drugs. "Bad housing in childhood is linked to long term health problems, which can affect employment opportunities later in life" (Harker, 2006:29).

Home Language and Additional Languages

EYPs demonstrate that they are actively respecting linguistic identities, by promoting toddlers' confidence and fostering communication – verbal and non-verbal. EYPs can improve their settings ethos and atmosphere by participating and engaging with the toddlers and their families from the outset identifying resources for working with additional language(s).

This links to Dimension 6 and Toddlers' Additional Language(s) Content and Material.

Reflection:

How does poor housing impact upon the wellbeing of toddlers within your setting?

For example a damp house may cause respiratory problems and asthma.

Identify some of the factors that impact upon toddlers' health and wellbeing?

For example, parental addiction may create a lack of engagement and meeting the needs of the toddler.

Dimension 2 - Health of the Toddlers'

2.1 Physical and Mental Health


There are many different factors that may impact upon a toddler's physical and mental health. The World Health Organisation (WHO) is concerned with the international health of the world and carries out a wide range of health related research, providing direction and co-ordination to the United Nations and the world health agenda. "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO Constitution, 2016).

They provide standards, frameworks, recommendations and guidance on a range of child health issues that support governments in developing their policies and initiatives to promote the health and well-being of children and their families.

What happens in toddlers' young lives has a critical impact upon their growth and development as they are more vulnerable and susceptible to illnesses, disease, maltreatment and malnutrition and this then influences and impacts upon their life chances and opportunities. Michael Marmot, chair of the Marmot Review (2010) and World Health Organisation's Commission on Social Determinants of Health (WHO, 2008) highlighted this clearly in the below citations:

People with higher socioeconomic position in society have a greater array of life chances and more opportunities to lead a flourishing life. They also have better health. The two are linked: the more favoured people are, socially and economically, the better their health
(Marmot, 2010:3).

The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional – are laid in early childhood. What happens during these early years (starting in the womb) has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and well-being– from obesity, heart disease and mental health, to educational achievement and economic status
(Marmot, 2010:16).



It is important for EYPs to be aware of the factors that may inhibit toddlers' development and what strategies and initiatives can be put in place to help negate any disadvantage.

Health and Childhood Illnesses


Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this

(UNICEF UK, 1989b: Article 24).

There are many different health concerns and childhood illnesses that toddlers will be exposed to within their daily lives or in some cases as a chronic illness, some can be prevented or immunised against, treated or avoided. Some may be genetic/hereditary and others environmental. Here are some of the health concerns and childhood illnesses that toddlers may experience:

- Allergies and food allergies
- Asthma
- Chickenpox
- Cold sores
- Coughs, colds and flu
- Cystic fibrosis
- Diarrhoea and vomiting
- Ear problems - glue ear or ear infection
- Eczema
- Epilepsy
- Febrile seizures/convulsions
- Fifth Disease – slap cheek syndrome
- Hand, foot and mouth disease
- Impetigo
- Infestations - head lice, worms
- Malnutrition
- Maltreatment
- Measles
- Meningitis
- Mumps
- Obesity
- Rubella
- Scabies
- Scarlet fever
- Sickle cell anaemia
- Sleeping Disorders
- Tonsillitis
- Whooping Cough

EYPs need to be able to know what the policies and procedures are for the identification of, reporting of and care of toddlers when they are experiencing any health concern or childhood illnesses, especially if they become ill while attending the setting. It is important that EYPs know



how to deal with each illness, who should be contacted, if the illness requires reporting and to whom. EYPs need to be able to identify what infection control measures need to be implemented, such as, washing hands, cleaning of the environment and how vomit, blood and bodily fluids should be dealt with.

Chronic illnesses are illnesses that last over three months and may not have a cure, for example, allergies, asthma, cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anaemia and epilepsy will require more specialist provision and the right strategies put in place to support the inclusion of toddlers within the setting. This will more than likely mean that some form of training will be required.

Needs and Abilities

“A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to support disabled children and their families” (UNICEF UK, 1989b: Article 23).

“Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live” (UNICEF UK, 1989b: Article 30).

Toddlers are all unique and develop at their own rate depending upon their individual needs and interests being met. The setting environment (Dimension 3) and how development and learning is supported within the setting (Dimension 4) play an important role as to how a flexible and adaptable environment can easily meet the needs of all toddlers. The review and reflection of provision, policies, the environment and resources alongside the behaviour and attitude of EYPs, parent(s) and other children contributes hugely to the un-remarkableness and ease that toddlers with any particular need or disability are embraced as part of the settings community. How EYPs work within the ethos and legislation of inclusion and equality of opportunity to demonstrate that all toddlers are valued within the setting is vital in supporting toddlers in reaching their full potential.


Factors that Inhibit Wellbeing

Toddlers’ health and wellbeing may be affected by either or both biological/genetic or environmental factors including: maternal diseases during the anti-natal period, genetic/hereditary diseases, such as, haemophilia and muscular dystrophy, environment and environmental teratogens such as toxins and chemicals, legal and illegal drugs, foetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol, smoking, obesity, nutrition, general health, mental health, disabilities, learning difficulties, chronic illness, stress, maltreatment, abuse and foster care. These are all factors that can inhibit and impact upon a toddler’s health and wellbeing.

2.2 Health Checks

Health Checks

Most children during their first five years of life will experience health checks and reviews to check that they are healthy and developing ‘normally’ for their age in relation to their development. This will often be reviewed by a range of health care professionals who will review the following: gross motor, fine motor, vision, communication and hearing, social skills and behaviour and safety. Other aspects that might also be reviewed are toddlers’ sleeping habits, teeth and eating. Percentile charts are often used to monitor a child’s height, weight and head circumference to make sure that



they are within a similar percentage. This is important as through the monitoring of a toddler's development any specific conditions or concerns can be identified and appropriate intervention put in place to help support the toddler. The Healthy Child Programme, two year review (Department of Health, 2009) was introduced in England to support closer collaboration between early years setting and the early years services ensuring that all toddlers' development is monitored and appropriate provision put in place.

Parental engagement is key to the success of the two year review, especially those who may be ambivalent about preventive services or for children who experience psychological, social or economic disadvantage. It can be harder to connect with parents at this age as they may have had little contact with services since their child was a baby and may not know the health visitor and their team

(Department of Health, 2009:11).

Immunisations

Immunisations help to prevent diseases they often take the form of vaccinations where an infant or adult is immunised to help prevent or reduce the chances of catching the disease. These vaccinations help the body to build up anti-bodies to the diseases being vaccinated against and many countries routinely immunise young children under a health programme for the immunisation of these children. Each country will have a schedule for when these vaccinations are administered with many happening within the first year of life. Booster vaccinations are then provided at routine points during a child's life to help maintain the immunity to disease.

An important thing to also to address is, are staff immunisations up to date?

Reflection:

What WHO health agendas do you know of?

What are the warning signs that a toddler may be suffering from physical or emotional ill health?

What legislation is in place to support inclusion and equality of opportunity within your country?

How is this reflected within your setting?

What health checks and immunisations are provided for toddlers in your county?

Why might families not be accessing these health checks and immunisations?

What vaccinations should the toddlers in your setting have already received?

Dimension 3 - Setting Environment for Toddlers - Current Practice and Provision:

The setting environment provides toddlers with the opportunity to develop and extend their learning. A rich and stimulating indoor and outdoor environment will support toddlers' curiosity and exploration challenging them to achieve higher expectations and goals within a safe and secure environment. A positive supportive environment will develop toddlers' confidence and skills in all areas of their learning and development, contributing particularly to their wellbeing.

3.1 Opportunities for Play and Learning

There are many quotes from varying theories and educationalists extolling the importance of play as the way in which children learn. It is a natural way for toddlers to explore and experiment making discoveries about their immediate environment. This is where play is fun, enjoyable spontaneous and engaging with each toddler demonstrating their own unique interests in different aspects of the environment. This is where engagement with the families supports toddlers' interests being met within the setting.

Poem about the importance of children's play:

*"Play is not a shop bought toy or lots of money spent
For children play has never been an organised event
A child at home plays endlessly left to his own devices
Play can deal with everything from customary to crisis
And when a child is under stress the need to play increases
It helps to clarify the fears and feelings it releases"*


Anonymous

Reflection:

- What are your feeling and perceptions from reading this poem?

Play is a medium for learning, and practitioners who acknowledge and appreciate this can, through provision, interaction and intervention in children's play, enhance progression, differentiation and relevance in the curriculum

(Moyle, 2010:10).



The context for play is imperative as plenty of space is required both in and out of doors with time to be able to engage in exploration and trying things out, taking risks and expressing themselves. At this age toddlers tend to be in the parallel stage of play often playing alongside other peers but not always engaging socially with them. For example, EYPs may observe a small group of toddlers running around pushing buggies and ‘push toys’ following each other and chasing each other around equipment; however as they tire of this they go off to explore other materials and are no longer engaged in the activity with those particular peers. EYPs support toddlers towards the next stage of associative play.

The ability to join groups of other children, and the desire to do so begins, at an early age and progresses through a developmental sequence. Parten focussed on the different types of social play.... Unoccupied Play... Solitary Play... Onlooker Play... Parallel Play - This is usually seen during toddlerhood. During parallel play toddlers will play alongside each other and with similar materials but don’t interact with each other. Associative Play and Cooperative Play

(State of New South Wales, Department of Education and Training, 2006:12).

Children experience many different types of play during their childhood. These are often identified by different theorists, such as, Piaget, Smilansky and Parten with sensori-motor play, symbolic play, games with rules, functional play, constructive play and dramatic play (State of New South Wales, Department of Education and Training, 2006).

Adult involvement and engagement is important as they set-up the activities, experiences and resources for toddlers to engage with. Through the use of observation toddlers’ play can be observed and appropriate involvement and engagement can be applied in order to extend and develop toddlers’ learning.

Vygotsky saw the adult as vital to the process of ‘scaffolding’ the child’s behaviour. When you scaffold a building, you support it structurally while internal developments occur. It is a common sight on building sites. We scaffold child’s development almost without thinking


(State of New South Wales, Department of Education and Training, 2006:6).

Reflection:

Reflect upon the other types of play that you have observed toddlers engaging in within your setting?

3.2 Health and Safety

The health and safety of toddlers is a fundamental requirement within any early years setting to keep toddlers both physically and psychologically safe and protected. Each country will have its own legislation that must adhere to in the protection of toddlers in relation to health and safety and safeguarding/child protection.



The planning and communication of the settings safety requirements, policies and procedure is essential to managing health and safety. It is through the use of daily routines that procedures are implemented that support the checking, recording and reviewing of safety standards.

Areas for consideration include:

- the building and its physical condition, fixtures and fittings, emergency equipment, security, resources and furniture
- the assessment of risks and hazards
- toddlers' medical conditions and allergies
- administration of first aid and recording of incidents and injuries
- vetting and the safe recruitment of staff
- safety routines and procedure in and out doors, in and off the premises

It is important the EYPs are alert to changes in behaviour and mood swings, the ability to settle the toddlers and the relationships established with others. Being aware of the signs and voice of the toddler, knowing and taking responsibility in adhering to the policies and procedures reporting of safeguarding incidents is essential in the protection of toddlers.

3.3 Learning Environment – Development and Learning:

The environment is the conditions or influences under which a person lives and develops. It is all around us, the surrounding objects, scenery and circumstances.

The learning environment plays an important role in supporting toddlers' learning and development providing a platform of experiences, opportunities and activities which encourage them to explore, investigate and make discoveries about themselves and the world around them. The learning environment needs to be flexible, adaptable and dependable supporting toddlers' all round development and providing different spaces and opportunities that capture their interest and curiosity while meeting legislation and curriculum requirements.


These four identified areas link very closely and help to underpin Dimension 4 - Development and Learning.

Physical Environment

The physical environment needs to consider the overall appearance of the setting, use of space available, access and use to the range of resources, so that the physical environment has a positive impact on their sense of wellbeing. The EYPs' planning, structuring and resourcing is a key component in the setting up of the physical environment in support toddlers' development and learning. Both the in and outdoor environments offer different learning opportunities and freedom to explore the natural environment and experience variation in the weather and atmosphere.

Social Environment

A good social environment needs to be a warm, friendly and inviting atmosphere that enables socialisation for toddlers in developing positive relationships with EYPs and their peers. EYPs support toddlers in building relationships and friendships both on a one-one basis and in small groups. Toddlers will show preferences with whom they would like to share their time with. They are



learning the etiquette of society starting with sharing, caring, taking turns and listening as they are playing alongside each other using the materials and resources within the setting.

Emotional Environment

The atmosphere created within the environment for toddlers should be one that is warm, accepting, welcoming and inclusive. The EYPs provide emotional support for toddlers in managing their emotions and feeling in a positive manner so that they feel safe and secure within their learning environment. The toddlers will feel “‘like a fish in water’- that is how you can describe children who feel alright” (Laevers et al, 2005a:8). A range of resources, activities and experiences can be used to support the toddlers’ expression of their feelings. This can range from physically invigorating to soothing therapeutic activities and experiences. The use of mindfulness can support the wellbeing of toddlers’ as it helps them to relax, focus on the moment and notice how they are feeling.

Cognitive and Language Environment

A rich cognitive and language environment provides toddlers with the new and stimulating resources and activities that engage them in problem solving, exploring and extending their knowledge, language and communication through concrete experiences and engagement with EYPs. Toddlers have the opportunity to independently and/or with adult support engage in discovery, exploration, and problem solving that leads to learning. By providing a range of situations and experiences toddlers will be supported in developing their competence and communication with others.

3.4 Staffing

Staffing is an important part of caring for the needs of toddlers. Maintaining the right level of staffing, with the right experience and qualifications to meet statutory requirements is not always easy if the sector has a shortage of early years practitioners. Maintaining early years practitioners’ wellbeing as well is important as happy staff will often lead to happy children! It is not just getting the environment right for the toddlers but also the adult as well. The physical environment is important in regards to the physical health and safety of practitioners and the aesthetic atmosphere has an impact upon how they feel about their working environment. The climate and working organisation also impacts upon psychological mental health as the support, hours worked, adult child ratios and opportunities available can have an impact upon how early years practitioners feel and their emotional health.

Practitioner training and experience

Staffing plays a key role in the education and care of toddlers first with the employment of suitable practitioners who can meet the needs of the toddlers. Do they have appropriate qualifications, training, skills, experience, knowledge and understanding to support disadvantaged toddlers and their families? Further Continuous Professional Development (CPD) may be needed to support their development and understanding of supporting the needs of toddlers that have fewer opportunities.

Your Professional Role

The professional role of an EYP may vary from country to country however there are some key responsibilities to being a professional that apply to any early years setting. An example of an EYP’s responsibilities includes:

- modelling good practice to others
- being a reflective practitioner
- leading and instigating change and innovation of policies, provision and practice to best meet the toddlers' needs, curriculum and legislation requirements
- encouraging and supporting other practitioners in the development of their knowledge and understanding of early years practice and disadvantaged toddlers
- building positive relationships with toddlers, their families, colleagues and other professionals.

This links to the four Pedagogical Characteristics of Critical Thinking, Read and Research, Reflective Practice and Skills and Attitudes.

When considering EYPs professional role the dimensions below are useful in the identification of factors and traits relating to professionalism and early years.

Dimensions of Professionalism:

- Knowledge - Specialist knowledge, unique expertise, experience
- Education and training - Higher education, qualification, practical experience, obligation to engage in CPD
- Skills - Competence and efficacy, task complexity, communication, judgment
- Autonomy - Entry requirement, self-regulation and standards, voice in public policy, discretionary judgment
- Values - Ideology, altruism, dedication, service to clients
- Ethics - Codes of conduct, moral integrity, confidentiality, trustworthiness, responsibility
- Reward - Influence, social status, power, vocation

(Brock, 2006:4).

Reflection:

What CPD have you had access to recently?

How do the different dimensions represent your professionalism and professional role as an Early Years Practitioner?

What is the distinction to being a professional and behaving professionally?

What standards are there in your country that identifies Early Years Practitioners as early years professionals?

What qualities do you consider to be important for an EYP to have?

Key Person Approach

The use and deployment of EYPs is vital in providing a safe and secure environment for toddlers and a secure-base from which they are able to develop and learn. The Key Person approach is where a specific person is allocated or chosen by the child/toddler and they take on the intimate care and provide an attachment figure for the toddler while they are in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) setting. The key person establishes a positive and trusting relationship with their key child (toddler) providing them with a sense of belonging, care and security. They know their key children/toddlers and respond sensitively to their feelings, needs and interests providing emotional reassurance and meeting their intimate physical needs.

A key person has special responsibilities for working with a small number of children, giving them the reassurance to feel safe and cared for, and building relationships with their parents. They will also talk to parents to make sure that the needs of the child are being met appropriately, and that records of development and progress is shared with parents and other professionals as necessary

(DCSF, 2008:15).

This approach is supported by the research based evidence of John Bowlby, James and Joyce Robertson and Mary Ainsworth.

Bowlby believed that there are four distinguishing characteristics of attachment:

1. **Proximity Maintenance** - The desire to be near the people we are attached to.
2. **Safe Haven** - Returning to the attachment figure for comfort and safety in the face of a fear or threat.
3. **Secure Base** - The attachment figure acts as a base of security from which the child can explore the surrounding environment.
4. **Separation Distress** - Anxiety that occurs in the absence of the attachment figure

(Cherry, 2012).

And they are important in supporting the toddler's transition into the setting and the forming of attachments to key figures (carers); with more recently the key person approach being championed by Elinor Goldschmied with her consultancy work in England, Italy and Spain. She also developed Heuristic play for toddlers using natural and everyday materials to explore and make discoveries with.

Reflection:

How does your environment support a toddler's sense of belonging?

How do EYPs in your country support and meet the intimate care needs of toddlers?

Dimension 4 - Development and Learning:

EYPs have an understanding of the developmental milestones that children progress through during their formative years, providing them with appropriate expectations of how to continually support toddlers' development.

“Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential” (UNICEF UK, 1989b: Article 6).

The development and learning of toddlers is important as from when they are born they develop at different rates and at their own unique pace. Toddlers go through predictable sequences accomplishing a range of different tasks and skills. These have been explored by a range of different theories under four main areas of learning:

1. Behaviourist perspective
 2. Cognitive perspective
 3. Humanistic perspective
 4. Social Learning perspective
- (Cooper, 2013).

These theories provide a range of different perspectives and a framework for understating how children develop and learn.

The environment and the adults that care for toddlers, influence and support their learning and development. Toddlers learn through a range of opportunities to explore, experience and gain an understanding of their environment. This dimension supports EYPs in reflecting upon their provision and practice and is broken down into the different aspects of development and learning. This however can be reflected upon holistically as each area impacts and informs the others.


4.1 Personal, Social, Emotional and Spiritual

Personal development is a life process of self-development and self-growth relating to how toddlers achieve/reach their full potential through the development of identity and personality including self-esteem, self-confidence and self-awareness.

Social development is related to the learning of skills needed to interact with others. This can be both with individuals and in-groups. Social skills include toddlers learning to get on others, forming relationships, learning to share and take turns, co-operating and reposing to others.

Emotional development is related to the healthy expression and control of toddlers' feelings and emotions. Through play toddlers can explore their feelings and learn to respond to them.

Toddlers' spiritual needs can be considered and nurtured and is dependent upon their developmental maturity. Spirituality is very dependent upon families' own beliefs and values and influences a child's understanding and awareness of who they are and their existence in the world. This supports the exploration of feelings relating to where they are from and in dealing with emotional situations such as bereavement. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 14 (freedom of thought, belief and religion):



Every child has the right to think and believe what they choose and also to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents to guide their child as they grow up

(UNICEF UK, 1989b).

These closely correlate and interlink with one another as each aspect has an impact on the other.

Interaction, Engagement and Play

This aspect of Personal, Social, Emotional and Spiritual development is about how you provide opportunities for toddlers to interact, co-operate and be involved with one another and others (peers, siblings, staff, parent(s) and carer(s)) either in a group or individual situation. EYPs act as good role models in setting a good example of how to engage and interact to form positive and trusting relationships with others.

EYPs through play encourage opportunities for toddlers to express their feelings and frustrations in a safe and nurturing learning environment where they can develop strategies for coping with new and challenging situations.

Attachment

Attachment is the close relationship and bond held initially between a child and a parent/main care giver where they feel more secure in their presence. The child will exhibit distress when separated from that parent/main care giver. Theories, such as, John Bowlby, James and Joyce Robertson provide a framework to recognise the need children have for consistency, stability and security and the effect this has on their development if these needs are not met. A Key Person approach is where toddlers have a main carer responsible for their primary care needs providing them with the reassurance to feel safe and secure while also building positive trusting a relationship with the family.

Settling-in

Settling-in is a gradual process where a toddler is experiencing a transition from one setting to another, for example, from the home to the early years setting. This procedure links closely with attachment as the EYPs become the key person supporting the settling in process of the toddler's transition both within and beyond the setting. Transitions that toddlers face may be vertical which refer to movement across various settings such as from home to the early years setting or horizontal which is the movement from one activity to another as part of the daily routine.

Meal and Snack times

This is an opportunity for toddlers to build relationships with one another and EYPs and strengthen skills such as autonomy and independence as they learn how to feed themselves and use utensils.

Also link to Dimension 7 and Toddlers' Meal Time Content and Material.

4.2 Cognitive, Language and Communication

Cognitive development is related to thinking and learning skills such as concept formation, problem solving, creativity, imagination, memory, attention and concentration.

Language and communication relates to the development of communication skills through speaking (verbal), non-verbal (gesture and body language), listening, reading and writing.

Attention and Concentration

This aspect relates only to attention and concentration but to the skills and concepts that support this, such as, concept formation, recall, memory and problem solving as these would not happen if a toddler did not concentrate or pay attention to what was happening.

The use of engaging toddlers in sustained shared thinking supports their interaction and collaboration with others as EYPs engage in problem solving and an opening for toddlers to express their ideas and thoughts. The use of open ended questions such as 'what' can further support this however the use of 'why' may not be appropriate for this age group to understand.

Voice and Expressions

This aspect links to Dimension 5 and Toddlers' Voice and Expressions Content and Material but here addresses how EYPs listen to toddlers and provide them with opportunities to develop their language and communication skills. It is important that EYPs are positive role models and this includes how they communicate with the parent(s) and main care giver(s).

Home Language and Additional Languages

This aspect links to Dimension 6: Toddler's? Additional Language(s). It is important that EYPs respect and foster the toddlers' home languages to support their linguistic identity and help develop their confidence in the use of the spoken language both in the home and host nations' language.

4.3 Physical

Physical development is related to the development of body movement and control involving both gross (large) and fine (small) motor skills, balance and spatial awareness, whole body and hand-eye co-ordination. EYPs make suitable provision for toddlers to be active and interactive both in and outdoors to improve their coordination, balance, spatial awareness and manipulation and movement skills.

Physical Abilities and Attitudes

The physical abilities are the skills that toddlers acquire and master such as balance and co-ordination through the development of positive attitudes toddlers have toward risk taking, challenges and trying new things out. The role of the EYP is to facilitate and enable toddlers in providing opportunities for the development of these physical skills and abilities while also developing confidence and positive attitudes.

4.4 Behaviour

Behaviour and self-control relates to how toddlers develop an understanding of what is right and wrong and why. This links closely to Personal, Social, Emotional and Spiritual development as toddlers learn the impact of their actions on those around them.

Emotional Resilience

Emotional resilience is the ability to which a toddler learns to manage their feeling and emotions when experiencing stressful or frustrating situations. This is where EYPs play an important role in providing opportunities for self-expression and understanding of feelings.

Regulating Feelings and Behaviours

This is where EYPs support toddlers to recognise the feeling and emotions that they are experiencing and constructively helping them to cope with these feeling, describe and voice these feelings and emotions.

Conflict Resolution

Conflicts arise with toddlers as they are they are learning to share their space, materials and toys with other children. However this can be a very emotional time for toddlers as they do not always understand the need to share or take turns. They may become very physical and hurtful to other children. High/Scope provides a range of strategies for EYPs to support them in conflict resolution with young children with six steps to help young children to settle disputes and conflicts:

1. "Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions,
2. Acknowledge children's feelings
3. Gather information
4. Restate the problem
5. Ask for solutions and choose one together
6. Be prepared to give follow up support"

(High/Scope, 2016)

Reflection:

Identify some of the factors that may affect toddlers' development and learning?

What strategies do you use to support toddlers' learning and development?

Toddlers Creed

If I want it, it's mine!

If I gave it to you and I change my mind later, it's mine!

If I can take it away from you, it's mine!

If I had it a little while ago, it's mine!

If it's mine, it will never belong to anyone else, no matter what.

If we are building something together, all the pieces are mine!

If it looks like mine, it's mine!

If it breaks or needs putting away, it's yours!

(Author Unknown)

Dimension 5: Toddler's? Voice and Expressions

This links to the contents and materials in Toddler's? Voice and Expressions. From the completion of these what questions and statements could you use for the audit to identify the quality of your settings provision and practice in supporting toddlers' voice and expressions.

Reflection:

Contents and materials from the Toddler's Voice and Expressions:

- What are the diverse modes of expressions that you have observed?
- How can you enable and empower the voice of the toddlers'?

Dimension 6: Toddler's? Additional Language(s)

This links to the contents and materials in Toddler's? Additional Language(s). From the completion of these what questions and statements could you use for the audit to identify the quality of your settings provision and practice in supporting toddlers' additional language(s).

Reflection:

Contents and materials from the Toddler's? Additional Language(s):

- What resources are provided that support additional language(s) within your setting?
- How do you identify the languages spoken within the home and make provision for them within your setting?



Dimension 7: Toddler's? Meal Times

This links to the contents and materials in Toddler's? Meal Times. From the completion of these what questions and statements could you use for the audit to identify the quality of your settings provision and practice in supporting toddlers' meal times.

Reflection:

Contents and materials from the Toddler's? Meal Times:

- How do you support and maintain healthy eating/drinking habits?
- How do you encourage independence skills and choice during meal and snack times?

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ToWe Project

Enhancing Opportunities for Toddlers' Wellbeing



Toddlers' Wellbeing Audit Tool

Name of Setting:

Date.....

Completed by:

Reviewed.....

Disclaimer:

"This publication has been produced with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the ToWe Project and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the NA and the Commission."

Dimension 1: Family, Home and Environmental Factors

These are sensitive issues for families, so tact and consideration are required as to whether it is appropriate to ask the families questions about their family and home environment.

Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan
1.1 Environmental Factors				
Housing and the Home Environment: Housing: What type of housing does the family live in? What type of property do they live in? What is the condition of the home? 3 Physical Condition 4 Number of people per room 5 Sleeping arrangements and habits. Location and Access to services and facilities: What type of access does the family have to:				

- Education and Care Provision and Professionals
- Medical and Health Care Facilities and Professionals
- Shops and public services
- Transportation

Safe and Stimulating:

What access and opportunities do toddlers have to play outdoors?

What play and learning opportunities are there within the home?

What books, toys and play space do toddlers have within the home?

How do the family provide a safe home environment for the toddler?

Stair gates, hazards made safe, supervised, clean home and clothing - hygiene,

Safeguarding

Safety of the environment

Liaison and communication with other professionals.				
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Indicators 1.2 Family	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan
Demographics and Life Style: Demographics of the Location – Diversity: Are the family experiencing any discrimination, bullying, segregation etc.? Are there any issues impacting upon the community? Health of Family /Carers: Are there any health issues or disabilities that impact the family? Family Background: What are the family's beliefs/values? Do they conflict with societal expectations?				

<p>What family support network does the parent have access to?</p> <p>Income:</p> <p>Are members of the family employed/unemployed?</p> <p>Are the family in low paid employment?</p> <p>Are they in receipt of benefit/financial support?</p> <p>Life style:</p> <p>What life style choices are being made by the family?</p> <p>Are there any addictions that may impact upon the family?</p> <p>E.g. smoking, alcohol gambling and drugs.</p> <p>Languages:</p> <p>What languages are spoken at home?</p> <p>Link to Dimension 6 and Toddlers' Additional Language(s) Content and</p>				
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Material				
How is liaison and communication with other professionals supporting the family and the toddler's health and education?				

Setting Development Plan

Identified Priority - Aim	Targets - objectives	Key Actions – actions to be taken	Who is responsible and by when	Date Achieved Date to be reviewed

Dimension 2: Health of the Toddlers'

These are sensitive issues for families, so tact and consideration is required as to whether it is appropriate to ask the families questions about their family health, illnesses, disabilities and life style.

Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan
2.1 Physical and Mental Health				
Health and Childhood Illnesses What are the settings policies and procedures for the identification of, reporting of and care for toddlers with a childhood illness? What provision is made for the inclusion and care of toddlers with chronic illnesses? Allergies Asthma Epilepsy Cystic fibrosis What infection control measures do you have in				

<p>place?</p> <p>Good hygiene practices</p> <p>Notifying agencies and parent(s)</p> <p>Needs and Abilities</p> <p>What resources do you have to support the individual needs and interests of toddlers?</p> <p>Spring-loaded scissors, bi and multi-lingual books. Interests – dinosaurs etc.</p> <p>Link to Dimension 3 and 4</p> <p>How does the setting respect and welcome the toddlers' culture, language(s) and any disabilities?</p> <p>What culture or language(s) are the EYPs experienced in?</p> <p>What training might EYPs need in this area?</p> <p>What provision is made to support their full inclusion of toddlers with disabilities</p>				
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<p>within the setting?</p> <p>Link to Dimension 3 and 4</p> <p>Factors that Inhibit Wellbeing</p> <p>What provision do you make and how do you support toddlers that may be experiencing a factor that inhibits their wellbeing?</p>				
<p>Indicators</p> <p>2.2 Health Checks</p>	<p>Areas of Strength and/or Comments</p>	<p>Areas for Development</p>	<p>Strategies</p>	<p>Actions – Setting Development Plan</p>
<p>Health Checks</p> <p>How does the setting follow up and make provision in relation to the results of the health checks on the toddlers?</p> <p>How do you communicate and liaise with Health Care Professionals if you have a concern regarding a toddler within your setting?</p> <p>How does the setting engage and work with parent(s) in facilitating toddlers' health care checks?</p>				

Immunisations How do EYPs check that toddlers are up-to-date with their health care checks and immunisations? What records are kept of toddlers' vaccinations? How do you check that all staff are up-to-date with their own immunisations?				
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Setting Development Plan

Identified Priority - Aim	Targets - objectives	Key Actions – actions to be taken	Who is responsible and by when	Date Achieved Date to be reviewed

Dimension 3: Setting Environment for Toddlers' - Current Practice and Provision

Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan
3.1 Opportunities for Play and Learning What opportunities does the				

<p>setting provide for in and outdoor play?</p> <p>How often are the resources, activities and experiences reviewed and changed to meet the toddlers' interests?</p> <p>How are EYPs effectively engaging with the toddlers' play?</p> <p>Being invited</p> <p>Scaffolding learning within it being a test!</p> <p>What are the types and levels of play being exhibited by toddlers?</p> <p>What activities, experiences and resources are EYPs providing both in and outdoor to support toddlers different types of play?</p>				
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Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan
3.2 Health and Safety				
How does your setting plan and communicate the safety procedures to all staff, children, parents and visitors?				
What health and safety procedure are implemented within your setting?				
Risk Assessments				
Checklists				
How are toddlers made aware of the risks, hazards and boundaries within the setting?				
How are toddlers made aware of who they can trust?				
How are EYPs being alert to changes in behaviour, mood swings and in their ability to settle in relationships?				

Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan
3.3 Learning Environment – Development and Learning: Physical Environment Assess the appearance of the setting? Welcoming Attractive Colour scheme Flooring – type, safety, convenience and colour Pictures and posters – suitability and interesting How is the space being used to promote different learning opportunities? Flow Room layout Access to resources Set up and structure Self-selection				

How is the physical environment planned for and resourced?

What opportunities do toddlers have to explore the physical environment both in and out of doors?

Social Environment

How are the attitudes and behaviour of EYPs providing a positive role model?

How do EYPs create a warm, friendly and inviting atmosphere for toddlers and their families?

How do EYPs provide opportunities for socialisation to support the development of positive relationships?

With adults

With other toddlers and children

How do the EYPs support toddlers in building

relationships and friendships?

1-1

Small groups

What expectations do EYPs provide to enhance and support the development of etiquette?

Sharing

Caring for others and animals

Listening

Taking turns

Emotional Environment

How do EYPs provide a warm, accepting, welcoming and inclusive environment?

How do EYPs model positive behaviours and attitudes for toddlers recognising their feeling and listening to their voice and expressions?

How do EYPs respond and provide emotional support for toddlers in managing their

<p>feeling in a positive manner?</p> <p>What opportunities are set up within the environment to provide physically invigorating and soothing therapeutics activities and experiences?</p> <p>Cognitive and Language Environment</p> <p>How is the environment set up to provide access to interesting and stimulating resources and activities?</p> <p>Encouraging problem solving, exploring and extending knowledge and concept formation.</p> <p>What opportunities are planned and set up within the environment to encourage independent discovery, exploration, and problem solving?</p> <p>How is the environment planned and set up to support the development of language and communication?</p>				
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Books, technology, home corner, visual stimulation, opportunities for mark making etc.				
Indicators 3.4 Staffing	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan
<p>How does the environment meet the wellbeing of EYPs?</p> <p>Quality of the physical environment.</p> <p>Staff room, lockers for personal possessions, appropriate setting,</p> <p>Climate, feelings and work organisation.</p> <p>Supervision and support, career development and CPD opportunities.</p> <p>Teamwork and collaboration</p> <p>Time to complete necessary documentation</p> <p>Practitioner training and experience</p>				

<p>What training, qualifications and experience do EYPs have?</p> <p>What knowledge and understanding do they have of working with disadvantageded toddlers?</p> <p>What CPD opportunities have EYPs had recently?</p> <p>Your Professional Role</p> <p>How is professionalism developed and maintained within the setting by EYPs?</p> <p>How are the professional roles and responsibilities of the EYP demonstrated within the environment and the policies and practices of the setting?</p> <p>Key Person Approach</p> <p>How is your environment set up to support a toddler's sense of belonging?</p> <p>How are toddlers' intimate care needs met?</p> <p>How are key persons/carers</p>				
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<p>selected or chosen by the toddlers?</p> <p>How do EYPs establish a positive and trusting relationship with the toddlers that they work with?</p>				
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Setting Development Plan

Identified Priority - Aim	Targets - objectives	Key Actions – actions to be taken	Who is responsible and by when	Date Achieved Date to be reviewed

Dimension 4: Development and Learning

Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan
4.1 Personal, Social, Emotional and Spiritual Interaction, Engagement and Play How do the EYPs welcome and greet toddlers and their families? How do EYPs say farewell to the toddlers' and their families? How do EYPs respond to toddlers personal, social and emotional needs throughout the daily routine? How do EYPs providing opportunities for independence skills and self-care? What opportunities are provided for toddlers to engage and interact with others?				

How does EYPs support and promote toddlers' self-confidence and self-esteem?

How do EYPs provide toddlers with opportunities for appropriate choices?

What do EYPs do to support toddlers in managing their feeling and emotions?

How are families' values and beliefs respected and acknowledged?

Consideration of social and cultural aspects of the family.

What skills and attitudes do the EYPs display when engaging with the toddlers?

What play opportunities are provided for toddlers to engage in social and emotional aspects of play? For example therapeutic experiences such as messy play.

How do EYPs praise and encourage the toddlers and

<p>recognise their achievements?</p> <p>Attachment</p> <p>How do the EYPs support toddlers' need for a main care giver within the setting?</p> <p>For example provision of a key person.</p> <p>How are EYPs responding in a sensitive way to the toddlers' feelings, ideas, needs and behaviours? (reassure and comfort)</p> <p>How does the EYP relate and engage with the toddlers' parent(s)/main care giver?</p> <p>Settling-in</p> <p>How do the EYPs work/interact/engage with the toddlers and their families in supporting the settling-in process?</p> <p>How do EYPs support vertical and horizontal transitions of toddlers?</p>				
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Meal and Snack times How are EYPs providing opportunity for toddlers to engage in social interaction? How do EYPs provide opportunities for independence and autonomy? Link to Dimension 7 and Toddlers' Meal Time Content and Material				
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Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan
4.2 Cognitive, Language and Communication Attention and Concentration, Recall, Problem Solving, Memory What opportunities do EYPs provide for toddlers to engage in exploration, creativity of thought and problem solving? How do EYPs extend toddlers' concentration and attention during an activity or story-				

time?

What activities, games and experiences do EYPs do with toddlers to encourage recall and memory?

How do EYPs use stories, books, songs and rhymes to support rhythm, rhyme, singing, sequence and repetition?

How do EYPs use toddlers' interests and curiosity to extend their concept formation?

Voice and Expressions

What opportunities do EYPs provide for two-way communication of speaking and listening?

How do they EYPs listen and respond to the various modes of communication used by toddlers?

How do EYPs facilitate and 'scaffold' language

development through play?

What do EYPs do to model positive language and communication?

How do EYPs support toddlers' interactions with each other?

Link to Dimension 5 and Toddlers' Voice and Expressions Content and Material

Home Language and Additional Languages

How do EYPs promote the use of the toddlers' home languages within the setting?

What activities, experiences and resources do EYPs use to support the recognition of the home language within the setting?

Link to Dimension 6 and Toddlers' Additional Language(s) Content and Material

Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan
4.3 Physical Physical Abilities and Attitudes What opportunities do EYPs provide for physical development both in and out of doors? How do EYPs enable toddlers to learn to move with confidence, use their body imaginatively, have spatial awareness and be safe? How do EYPs encourage positive attitudes towards engaging in new physical activities and experience? Willingness to try and take risks.				

Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan
4.4 Behaviour Emotional Resilience How do EYPs support toddlers to regulate and express their feelings? What opportunities for self-expression and understanding of feelings are provided by EYPs? What activities and experiences do EYPs use to support emotional resilience? Regulating Feelings and Behaviours How do EYPs support toddlers to recognise and describe the feelings and emotions they are experiences? What activities and experiences do EYPs use to help toddlers regulate their feelings and behaviours? Conflict Resolution				

<p>What do EYPs do to help toddlers resolve conflict and manage their feelings and behaviour?</p> <p>How do EYPs encourage toddlers to problem solve and come to an agreed solution during a conflict?</p> <p>How do EYPs provide continued support in this area?</p>				
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Setting Development Plan

Identified Priority - Aim	Targets - objectives	Key Actions – actions to be taken	Who is responsible and by when	Date Achieved Date to be reviewed

Dimension 5: Toddlers' Voice and Expressions

Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan

Setting Development Plan

Identified Priority - Aim	Targets - objectives	Key Actions – actions to be taken	Who is responsible and by when	Date Achieved Date to be reviewed

Dimension 6: Toddlers' Language(s)

Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan

Setting Development Plan

Identified Priority - Aim	Targets - objectives	Key Actions – actions to be taken	Who is responsible and by when	Date Achieved Date to be reviewed

Dimension 7: Toddlers' Meal Times

Indicators	Areas of Strength and/or Comments	Areas for Development	Strategies	Actions – Setting Development Plan

Setting Development Plan

Identified Priority - Aim	Targets - objectives	Key Actions – actions to be taken	Who is responsible and by when	Date Achieved Date to be reviewed

ToWe Project

Enhancing Opportunities for Toddlers' Wellbeing



Toddlers' Wellbeing Strategies

Setting Partner: Achieving for Children

Dimension	What bought about the strategy	Implementation	Impact of Strategy
Well Being as a focus (supporting Dimensions 1-4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do settings know if toddler Well Being is being supported in Children's Centres as they would like to think? Do practitioners reflect enough on this? What does Well Being mean to all staff in the Children's Centre – and to parents? Is this viewed similarly internationally? Reading & reflection on IO3 materials and ToWe manual AIMs: to ensure practice includes supporting toddler Well Being To raise the profile of Well Being across Children's Centre provision - making it 'visible' to all that Well Being is a focus To support parental awareness of how to support this within the home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting with Children's Centre colleagues to support them with action planning around Well Being. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring time taken to read and discuss materials, use sections of audit, and display ideas and undertake activity suggested to raise the profile with colleagues and parents. Individual settings undertook Well Being audit with several individual families and also used areas of the audit across all provision – e.g. Health section of audit for some families / Environmental audit for group. Collating activity around Well Being and sharing ideas with all project members and with other Children's Centres. Meeting with to Centre Managers to ensure ToWe and Well Being is a shared focus by all – understanding re time commitment. Dissemination to Achieving for Children Early Years Team, the wider Children's Centre Partnership Board – health partners etc. meetings and newsletters. 	<p>Toddlers –individual toddlers and groups as a whole are being supported in terms of Well Being through careful observation & interaction, appropriate environmental provision and greater awareness by practitioners of Well Being. Individual records will evidence good attainment at Personal, Social and Emotional Development and Learning Journeys will evidence examples of positive Well Being, confidence and self-esteem.</p> <p>Parents – are well informed through observation of provision and discussion with practitioners, handouts, displays. Questionnaires and end of year reviews will evidence greater awareness of need to support toddlers' Well Being and ways of how to do so.</p> <p>Staff - have a real knowledge of Well Being and observations of children demonstrate this. They are supporting children, using strategies and tools suggested within the manual – e.g. asking questions posed, giving children time to persevere, matching the environment to current needs, analysis of film of children at play. Well Being is central to the way of thinking for project setting practitioners and messages are also being shared with other Children's Centre staff</p>



			<p>Practice – Reflection on practice, whilst always having been a part of Children’s Centre s, is now firmly centred around toddlers’ Well Being – the environment layout, experiences established, etc....always now with Well Being in mind.</p> <p>Team discussions indicate use of reflection on Well Being as a method to support children further and ensure that provision – and themselves as key individuals – are really supporting toddlers in this respect. Highlighting the importance of this to parents is now central to Children’s Centre practice.</p>
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Setting Partner: Sandvedhaugen Barnehage – Sandnes Kommune

Dimension	What bought about the strategy	Implementation	Impact of Strategy
Wellbeing	<p>After reading the wellbeing manual, we became aware that the way we practiced the settling in period weren't consistent with our practice of theories, such as, John Bowlby and Circle of Security. Our experience the wellbeing manual was quite extensive and we found it necessary to limit the contents we wanted to work with in this manual. We chose to focus on the settling in period and the role of the significant adult (key person) using the attachment theories and The Circle of Security. Furthermore we reflected on our cooperation with the families and how to involve them.</p> <p>We saw the importance of working to make safe the relationship between staff and family and build a positive relationship with them.</p> <p>This was important because we wanted to support the children's feeling of being secure and feeling settled in.</p> <p>We saw the importance of illustrating the key person's role and how to work, especially during the settling in period.</p> <p>We also reflected a lot regarding which questions we should use in conversations with parents/guardians. Here our main reflection point was:</p>	<p>The content in the parent-teacher meetings for «new» parents/ guardians that takes place in in spring has changed. The content is now primarily aimed at children's need during the settling in period, and how the parents can support and help their child during this period. This is of course set against attachment theories and The Circle of Security.</p> <p>We always send a letter welcoming the family to the setting. The letter contains among other things, more about what's important for the child during the settling in period. For example we write about the importance of not to disregard children's emotional needs (voices and expressions) as communication. We also see that it's important not to use diversion as a tactic, used by both parents and staff, to derive from children's emotions. We now reassure the children that it's ok to show their emotions.</p> <p>We now have an enhanced focus on</p>	<p>By reflecting and changing the way we work in the settling in period, we can to a greater extent see even more positive interaction among the children in the class/group.</p> <p>The feedback we've gotten from the parents in a survey show that the settling in period has been experienced as secure for both them and their child.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is important for us to know so we can create a good environment for their child? 	<p>the parents taking a more active part in the settling in period.</p> <p>Our staff have become more conscious of the importance to make parents feel secure of the role of key adult/person and staff. The staff have also become more aware of the importance of their role by using the attachment theories and The Circle of Security.</p>	
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Setting Partner: Escola Bressol Mas Balmanya (SUARA)

Dimension	What brought about the strategy	Implementation	Impact of Strategy
Wellbeing	After reading the manuals, the entire team discussed them and determined that it was essential to give health an important place at the school. For this reason, we are creating a folder in which we will be putting all the information on both the children's health and the health of the professionals who work at the school.	We professionals at the school more clearly understand the protocols we should follow if any child is ill. This folder is also a form of support that really helps us get families to understand the importance of children coming to school in good health.	<p>The families attach more importance to their children's health as an important aspect of their wellbeing.</p> <p>The professionals also attach more importance to this issue and feel more supported whenever we have to intervene with a family.</p> <p>The children's wellbeing has indirectly improved.</p>
Wellbeing	<p>After reading the material, the entire team discussed what we thought needed improvement at the school to create an atmosphere of wellbeing. We chose four items which we thought were important for each professional to work on in order to achieve a better atmosphere of wellbeing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tone of voice. 2. Asking for the children's permission to engage in actions such as blowing their nose, putting on their bibs, moving their chair closer to the table, etc. 3. Sharing time with the children / the adults 	The atmosphere of the school and the respect we show towards the children at these times has improved a lot. The atmosphere is warm, pleasant, full of wellbeing and especially carefully thought out and taken into account by all the professionals at the school.	<p>The families have noticed an improvement in the classroom atmosphere and have asked us for advice on how to deal with different situations at home (we held a talk on boundaries at the request of the families where we told them about the self-observation work we were doing based on ToWe).</p> <p>The professionals have changed some of our bad habits, so the overall atmosphere at the school has improved.</p> <p>The children are more independent when</p>

	<p>should be in constant motion.</p> <p>4. Not speaking with each other when we are with the children.</p> <p>Once we had chosen the items, we developed observation grids for each item, and each of us observed ourselves and noted down whenever we raised our voice and why, when we had moved a child's chair closer to the table without letting them know, etc.</p> <p>We also observed our colleagues and noted down the things we saw our colleagues do.</p> <p>Once the grids were completed, the entire team analysed when and why the poor conduct happened, and we sought other solutions to deal with these situations.</p>		<p>engaging in certain actions, and since the atmosphere is pleasant, they feel respected and listened to by the adults, and this is conveyed through their actions.</p>
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ToWe Project

Toddlers' Voice and Expressions Manual





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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

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



wishes in numerous ways, long before they are able to communicate through the conventions 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.

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

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, 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 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.


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).



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 bug 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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ToWe Project

Enhancing Opportunities for Toddlers' Wellbeing



Toddlers' Voice and Expressions Strategies

Setting Partner: Kew, Mortlake, Barnes and East Sheen Children's Centres - Achieving for Children

Dimension	What bought about the strategy	Implementation	Impact of strategy
Toddler's voice and expression	After reading the ToWe research and recommendations for taking toddlers' views and voices into account, valuing their different forms of expression and getting parents, carers and other practitioners to value their voices and expressions too.	<p>Keep children's voices and expressions in mind when during interactions, in order to extend and enhance them.</p> <p>Use video cameras and voice recorders to record children at play, practitioner's interactions with children and children speaking.</p> <p>Activities and opportunities for children to choose activities and influence the session planning.</p>	<p>Practitioners are able to extend children's interactions both with themselves and with other children.</p> <p>Watching ourselves interacting with the children was enlightening, and made us change the way we spoke and interacted with children – making sure that we were aware of them around us and the many different ways they communicated, not just verbally.</p> <p>Several activities where we have made it explicit that the children's choice influences what they will play with in future.</p> <p>An ongoing effort to record in evaluations which children were doing particular activities which we then factored into the planning for the next session – ensuring that we give the correct credit to children by writing their names in brackets next to the activities they inspired.</p>

Setting Partner: Sandvedhaugen Barnehage – Sandnes Kommune

Dimension	What bought about the strategy	Implementation	Impact of Strategy
Voices and Expressions	After reading the manual we saw that we could benefit from observing the children`s play and interaction more systematically. This is to get a more clear picture of how the staff best can support the children`s play and interaction	<p>We have used every day practical stories to see how and where we can support the children`s voice and expressions. We`ve limited that to primarily observe children`s play and interaction. We`ve used the questions found in the manual to reflect upon our view of young children in play and interaction. Furthermore we saw the importance to reflect upon our own values and how to express them.</p> <p>What we do with the observations we`ve carried out, and what we find there, has also been an important question.</p> <p>Reflecting upon the questions has also increased our knowledge around toddlers and their voice and expressions and how they play.</p> <p>The adult`s role in toddler`s play has also been reflected upon.</p> <p>The staff has increased their</p>	<p>We`ve been better at using the materials and the staff as a resource.</p> <p>We also see the children as a resource. The children participate and contribute more to their everyday life, especially contributing so that we can see more wellbeing.</p> <p>We`ve communicated better with the parents, to better let them know that children`s play is the most important teaching environment. Play is also an attractive phenomenon in itself.</p> <p>We`ve invited parents for «Stay and Play», so they can play together with their children in the setting/class.</p> <p>The staff can now observe more interaction among children when playing. Most of the children play together in for example in the kitchen area and with dolls.</p> <p>The children show to a greater extent interaction, taking turns and sharing. The children also laugh more and sing together. The children show more wellbeing and are</p>

		<p>awareness on how to use indoor and outdoor space and materials.</p> <p>After hosting the job shadowing, we've gotten important feedback from our colleagues from Barcelona and Kingston that we present the children with too many toy's for them to play with. Reflecting upon this, we now think a lot about what toys and materials we present when.</p> <p>We have supervised the staff in how to better observe how we can help children to interact with each other in play.</p> <p>We emphasize that the adults are role models, and in that way we can show the children how we can use the different toys and materials.</p> <p>The staff have been aware their responsibility to build good relations to both children and their parents.</p> <p>To be a playful adult has been something we have often reflected upon, also in routines like getting dressed and from one activity to</p>	<p>more aware of the things happening around them.</p> <p>The staff have also become more playful.</p> <p>The staff now also facilitates more regarding children's independence to maximize wellbeing.</p> <p>Using observation has become more important to us so better to put in good steps to help children in their play, learning and development.</p> <p>The parents have become more conscious of what we most emphasize and why.</p>
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		<p>another.</p> <p>We have changed our daily schedule to implement even more play.</p>	
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Setting Partner: Escola Bressol Mas Balmanya (SUARA)

Dimension	What brought about the strategy	Implementation	Impact of Strategy
Voices and Expressions	<p>After reading the materials, we became aware that there were some behaviours in the children that we found bothersome but that were actually just simple play routines typical at this stage of maturation. For example, when the children ran around the classroom in circles chasing each other, or when a child began to beat a spoon or metal pot to make sound and the other children followed their lead.</p> <p>We analysed which of the children's behaviours were play routines that we found bothersome (because of the noise or space) and we sought alternatives that we could give the children at certain times so that they could engage in the play routine they wanted without bothering the other children's play. For example, when the children started running around the classroom in circles chasing each other, we gave them the possibility of doing it outside.</p>	<p>We professionals at the school have found alternatives so that the children can engage in their play routines without bothering anyone else and in the right places for this kind of play, such as running and noisy games outside.</p>	<p>The professionals better understand the children's play and were able to provide them with the opportunity to show us what materials they need and we make it available to them.</p> <p>The children are freer, choose more what they want to play and how they want to play, and we adults only interfere to make alternative proposals if the space is not appropriate for the kind of play they are engaged in.</p>

Voices and Expressions	<p>After reading the materials, we were working on what our intervention should be when resolving conflicts. We recorded ourselves resolving some conflictive situations among the children and later watched it together as a whole team. We reflected and laid on the table everything that led to our interventions: often times we acted as judges without even seeing what had happened, we didn't give the children the chance to tell us what had happened, why they were crying, who had the toy...</p> <p>After giving ourselves time to act better as professionals and giving the children the time to solve their conflicts independently, we once again recorded ourselves and saw that the children were capable of independently solving many of the conflicts that arose in their day-to-day lives at school. Therefore, now we only intervene – and we do so as impartially as we can – at times that we're watching and the conflicts are not solved on their own.</p>	<p>The children have shown us that they have the ability to solve many conflicts by themselves without the need for our intervention, and this makes them feel more self-assured. The atmosphere is also more relaxed ever since we professionals have started dealing with conflicts in this way.</p>	<p>The professionals trust the children's abilities more and give them time to defend themselves, explain themselves, stand up for themselves, etc.</p> <p>The children are more self-assured and independent, and they feel more listened to and more valued.</p>
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ToWe Project

Enhancing Opportunities for Toddlers' Wellbeing



Toddlers' Meal Times

Manual

Disclaimer:

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Introduction

The different chapters of this manual make contributions for the reflection of early childhood educators and educational services. All the contributions are designed to improve education and well-being opportunities for disadvantaged children. The aim of this chapter is to contribute to improving the welfare of all children and educators who share time and space in an educational setting, in this case more specifically for the improvement of the well-being during meal times. It is based on the premise that eating is not just a nutritional moment, but it is also a time for socializing and establishing links, developing autonomy and self-knowledge. This chapter of the manual explains and questions the importance of spaces and materials, the possibilities of autonomy and communication among people in meals.

Objectives of the manual

- Provide tools for reflection on the educational value of meals during early childhood.
- Describe and approach the theoretical referents from the fields of psychology, sociology and pedagogy which contribute to understanding the educational value of meal times.
- Provide tools for the reflection, assessment and evaluation of meal times in child care services.

Introduction

Lunchtime is part of what we call the noon break. This break also includes what the children do after eating and before starting their afternoon classes. In this research, we focus our attention only on the purpose of lunchtime for children aged 2 to 3 years old, which will stimulate us to expand and complete the task we have started in the future.

Q1. How do you organize lunchtime at your settings?

Preschool routines for children aged 2 to 3

Everything that happens every day is a learning experience, so everything that happens at school is also a learning opportunity. In this section, we shall focus on the pedagogy of everyday life, meaning that which revolves around the importance and high educational potential of situations that commonly take place during any day, situations in which there are both children and adults. These actions range from classroom situations to playtime, washing up, outings, mealtimes, entering and leaving school and rest times.

In the latest literature, we can find many referents that defend the high educational value of everyday moments at preschool (Bassedas, Huguet & Solé, 1996; Bondioli & Nigito, 2011; Bosch, 2003; Casals & Defis (coord.), 1999; Domènech, 2009; Duarte, 1999; Goldschmied, 1998; Hoyuelos, 2004; Hoyuelos & Cabanellas, 1996; Jubete (ed.), 2007; Malaguzzi, 2001; Palacions & Paniagua, 2005; Falk (ed.), 2004; Ritscher, 2011; Ritscher & Staccioli, 2006; Santos Guerra, 1990; Silveira, 2002, 2013; Van Manen, 1998, 2003). What is clear in all of these references is the desire to assess all the moments which children spend together at school (all the situations and places in which they wash up, eat meals, rest, play and enter and leave school) as situations that are equally educationally important as those that the educator prepares as specific situations to work on the curriculum (stations, projects, corners, programming units, workshops, etc.). In the literature, therefore, benchmark authors in the field of education have shown us how details, minor interactions and everyday actions have educational importance. Some of these authors speak about educational routines. In this sense, we particularly wish to highlight Silveira,⁹ who makes an etymological search of the word *routine*. She defines it thus: “Routines can be considered the cultural products created, produced and reproduced in day-to-day life whose goal is to organise everyday life” (2002, p. 13). Even though the author makes no explicit reference to lunchtime at school or in the lunchroom, she claims that all everyday actions are permeated with culture and that these actions become routines by automating them. Routines allow us to organise our lives, our day-to-day existences, without the need to constantly be reflecting on how each action should be done. In this sense, each school should reflect on what sociocultural meanings it wishes to attribute to each routine so that they become pedagogical routines. These pedagogical routines should become the backbone around which the remaining activities should be organised. In our view, pedagogical routines are situations involving washing-up, meals (breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack), classroom or outdoor play, breaks, entrances and exits.

⁹ M. Carmen Silveira Barbosa’s doctoral thesis revolves around an etymological search of routines. *Por amor & por força. Rotinas na educação infantil* (2000). The thesis can be found in the virtual archive of theses at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas. Faculdade de Educação.

The school is a place brimming with opportunities to learn how to do, how to be, how to learn and how to live together (Delors, 1996). It is difficult to believe that only classroom situations or those that have previously been planned by the teacher or educator are educational situations. Any exchange among the children themselves, with adults (be they family, teachers, lunchroom monitors, extracurricular activities, neighbours, etc.) or with objects are full of educational content.

Q2. What are the educational aspects for lunchtime at your settings?

School lunchrooms viewed as educational spaces

Not only thinking about what is being eaten, but also how it is eaten.

Penny Ritscher (2011, p. 120)

All the time a child spends at school is educational, and the time in the lunchroom is an important moment in children's everyday lives.

Eating not only contributes to ensuring that children grow physiologically; rather it also helps them to grow socially and affectively, culturally and intellectually. Anthropologists claim that in almost all societies, the act of eating is a social activity. In fact, every culture has its own eating patterns, and thus we can talk about food cultures. According to Contreras and Gracia Arnaiz (2005), the eating behaviour of the majority of people can be predicted according to their cultural patterns (technological resources, social organisation, activities, timetables, professions, family relations, responsibilities, etc.). The fact that eating is full of cultural patterns leads us to believe that we cannot apply or transplant models of how school lunchrooms operate from other countries or from one culture to another; instead, each school must clearly grasp the cultural pattern conveyed in its lunchroom. The aforementioned authors note several changes that have occurred in eating habits since the second half of the 20th century, namely: the subordinating of family meals to the timetables of the different family members, called desynchronization (hours of work, school, outside work,

extracurricular activities and free time); a kind of individualisation or simplification of meals because many people eat alone, or what they call de-implantation; and finally dislocation, since the places where meals are eaten, both inside and outside the home, has expanded and diversified.

Here, anthropological studies note that staying at school for lunch means an increase in the cost of raising children, changes in the children's expectations, changes in parent and child relationships (where we see a more autonomous and less authoritarian relationship) and a transference of many lessons from the family nucleus to the schools.

If meals play such an important role in the process of acculturating people, it is justified and worthwhile to analyse what it is we are encouraging during lunchtime at school.

We should bear in mind several of the contributions from psychology, such as the ones by Vendrell (in Anguera, Geis, Vendrell, Iglésias & Cuenca, 2013),¹⁰ when she notes that bearing in mind the needs of each child, the younger ages is when we must ensure that we establish a strong affective bond and emotional stability and ensure that children acquire healthy, stable behaviour patterns grounded upon communication and peaceful coexistence. Therefore, not just any place or any way or any company works well at lunchtime. In this field, too, Di Scala¹¹ stresses the cultural and intersubjective dimension of human meals and our practices: she analyses how the processes of symbolisation and cultural transmission are carried out among preschool children and their teachers during mealtimes (in this case, breakfast).

Within the field of pedagogy and school organisation, some authors (Díez de Andino & Cusachs, 2011; Escola Municipal Arc Iris, 2001; Martínez & Matamala, 1992) note the need to establish recommendations for the optimal functioning of the school lunchroom in the respective lunchroom plans that are devised in conjunction with the school's administrative team and the coordination of the team of lunchroom monitors. Within these recommendations, what we find interesting is the authors' note of how it is important to ensure suitable ratios, the conditions that determine the atmosphere (noise, lighting, ventilation, size of the furniture), the dealings with the staff, the rules that make it possible to manage lunchtime and how to encourage children's autonomy (Antón (coord.), 2007; Falk (ed.), 2004; Heras, 1997; Tinajas, 2002).

¹⁰ The author spends an entire chapter of the book *Com han de menjar els infants i els adolescents. Aspectes psicosocials i nutricionals de l'alimentació* on analysing and discussing the importance of mealtimes in establishing bonds and in socialising children.

¹¹ Maria di Scala is an educational psychologist with a PhD in Psychology from the University of Buenos Aires. Her thesis, *Procesos de simbolización y prácticas alimentarias en la escuela*, stresses the socialising and communicative potential offered by *merienda* time (morning snack in the classroom) in preschool. We had the chance to meet with her and share research materials on the 22nd of April 2013, when she came to Barcelona on invitation to deliver a lecture at the FPCEE Blanquerna.

Within the sphere of pedagogy, we can find publications that show the desire to include the content on school meals within the school's overall objectives or the reference objectives of the cycle (Quer, 2000; Villaescusa, 2002). Likewise, some of them note the need to bear diversity in mind in the lunchroom as well (Geis, Miret & Pavón, 2001). If we focus specifically on preschool education, few authors speak holistically about the meal times, that is, considering all of the aforementioned factors bearing in mind a vision of the child's growth that encompasses nutritional, social, cognitive, motor and affective aspects. Despite this, we have found that educators like Goldschmied (1998), Falk (ed.) (2001), Martínez & Matamala (1992), Ritscher (2011) and Ritscher & Staccioli (2006) respond to what this time should be like and what we can do at school to improve it. Specifically, Ritscher and Saccioli talk about reviving the culture of the table, and they list a few items to take into account when organising the school lunchroom.

- *First of all, we must be convinced that mealtime at school is an important time that requires our full professional attention.*
- *Soundproofing. This is expensive, but it is an investment in mental health.*
- *Subdivide the children into manageable and self-manageable units. If they cannot eat in the classrooms, at least subdivide the lunchroom into sub-spaces. Subdivide classes into groups of seven children per table at most.*
- *Take advantage of the presence of teachers so that there is an adult eating with the children at each table.*
- *Set the table properly. Cloth serviettes also help with acoustics. Real cloth serviettes should be used, not throwaway paper ones.*
- *Serve the food on the dishes directly at the table to try to satisfy different preferences. If this is not possible, it is good to leave at least a little margin for personal choice (bread, water, condiments, fruit). Ritscher and Saccioli (2006, p. 51)*

A Quality lunchroom for children aged 2 to 3

Nursery schools should be offered as places full of educational intentionality, especially because they are framed as places of everyday life where children experience the different times of the day together, and where adults attribute meaning not only to activities that are somehow structured but to other times such as lunch, breaks and other routines. These are the times that make the school day predictable for children and allow for special relationships of intimacy, friendship and coexistence, helping to keep children feeling safe and assured, which they need in order to feel good and to express an interest in new experiences.

Anna Lia Galardini (2010, p. 25)

Lunchtime should be a pleasant, calm time for everyone (diners and monitors), and we believe that for this to happen certain conditions are needed, as explained above. We shall now outline these conditions with the desire of their becoming a vantage point or horizon towards which we should channel our efforts to improve. The requirements¹² that should be considered are varied in nature: some of them refer to the place where children eat, the furniture or the eating utensils used, or to the atmosphere (noise, light or ventilation). Others refer to the way the diners are treated, that is, how their requests are dealt with, how their pace or communicative needs are respected. And the third group refers to the possibilities that the lunch break offers children to grow by developing their autonomy, how they are allowed to participate or make decisions about whom they eat with or how much food they want. These indicators, organised into three categories, have served as the basis from which we have organised and designed the instruments in the protocol to evaluate and improve the educational quality of preschool lunchrooms: the category of communication with adults and between children, the category of children's autonomy during mealtimes and the category of the characteristics of the physical and material spaces of the lunchroom.

- **The lunchroom: Place and time of communication**


One does not age at the table because time stops there.

Penny Ritscher (2011, p. 121)

Children take advantage of downtime with their classmates to share experiences. We believe that during lunchtime children must have room to interact with whomever they want and therefore to decide with whom to talk and with whom to sit to eat, to play games or to share experiences. Surprisingly, this does not happen in all schools, where the place and the classmate with whom children sit during their lunchtime is decided by the adult. The lunch hour, even for a child, is best experienced in company, with calmness, with the assurance that the adult(s) with them will help meet their needs, speaking with whomever they want, cordially and without the need to yell, and receiving encouraging messages from adults or classmates. Lunchtime is preceded by an explanation and *bon appétit*; it is a time when adults became the touchstones of good tone of voice and polite behaviour,¹³ and where no one is humiliated for eating at a different pace. It should be a pleasant time with no uproar. These are the requirements needed to ensure that the school lunchroom fosters good communication among peers and with adults. According to Goldschmied (1998), we can

¹² You can check the guidelines for schools at Anguera, Geis, Vendrell, Iglésias & Cuenca (2009).

¹³ We are referring to the concept of good tone of voice and polite behaviour which Van Manen (1998, 2003) defines as the virtues of good teachers in that they know how and when to draw closer to children, they know how to express wonder, and most importantly they know the importance of their presence (gestures, looks, tone of voice).




protest or leave if we are not pleased with our meal somewhere, but children do not have this choice.

Whether or not the communication during lunchtime is positively educational depends large on the role of the adult – in our case, the monitors. As Palou (2004) explains, adults have to know how to listen empathetically, establishing dialogues that make affective relationships possible, dialogues that should be accompanied by attentive eye contact, taking advantage of the importance of meal times as times to draw closer. Nor should we forget that the way we deal with children, our body language, can either help us to establish even better bonds with children or create distance. The educator's role or style is key, especially their communicative style. This is also asserted by Palacios and Paniagua: "This is an aspect that not only influences the relationship with the children and the classroom atmosphere but also serves as a model at key ages in language development" (2005, p. 179). When analysing the factors that influence communicative style, both authors say that the following must be borne in mind: voice expressiveness or appropriate modulation, the time given to the child so that he or she is the one speaking, the stimulation of expression over correction, and the kind of messages conveyed (greetings, descriptions, orders, punishments, encouragement, etc.). For this reason, the items that we include the observation guideline refer to the kinds of explanations offered by the adults, how they address the children, how they place limits or react to disruptive situations, what kind of messages they use to speak to children and the kind of non-verbal communication in which they engage.

Regarding peer communication, we believe that the conditions must be in place for children to be able to talk to each other. First of all, they must be allowed to do so, but they must also be next to a peer with whom they want to talk, which translates into being able to choose where to sit and with whom they sit, as mentioned above. Ultimately, the noise level must also allow conversation to take place. This communication is essential to the development of all children. Malaguzzi reminds us of this when he says:

Interaction among children has a fundamental value in the experience in the first few years of life. It is a demand that springs from a desire, from a need that all children have which they want to meet in suitable situations that foster this interaction. Malaguzzi (2001, p. 58)

Thus, the lunchroom becomes a space of interactions, a time that "can become an optimal situation for sharing and speaking with others in brief conversations between two or more children or more in groups" (Ferrer, 2012). Communication is not possible without the other, but nor is it possible without time. Day-to-day life at school should have a well-structured pace designed around the needs of children, not adults. It is also important to be flexible enough so that children can gather with their classmates without rushing, a daily routine that allows them to experience their childhood time.



During lunchtime, adults must respect children's pace without this in any way meaning unnecessarily extending the amount of time allocated for lunch. Properly regulating the paces also requires adults to avoid unnecessary wait times for children, either because they have to wait for the food, or because they have to wait until all or almost all their peers have finished eating. In their analysis of the organisation of a preschool, Bondiloi, Nigito and Abbo (2011) and Hoyuelos (2004) stress that adults are the ones that should organise children's social experience, an adult who serves as a mediator and who organises spaces and times. The adult becomes a stable emotional point of reference, while also providing each child with the safety they need. We could say that these authors follow Malaguzzi's line (2001), which he calls relational pedagogy, a kind of pedagogy that starts with the principle that regardless of where they are, children ask about and develop thinking strategies and that they weave emotions and construct their own principles.

Therefore, lunchtime must make dialogue and communication possible; it should become a place where adults listen, explain whatever is needed, follow models of good manners (greetings, *bon appétit*, asking for things politely, etc.) and ensure an organisation that allows – albeit not necessarily every day – children to be able to choose with whom they sit. It should be a lunchtime without yelling, a time that helps children get to know themselves, become secure in their environment, establish strong ties with adults and peers, a lunch room where they can experience and practise respect for others. In short a time for living with wellbeing and enjoyment.


- **Educating for the child's autonomy in the lunchroom**

To become autonomous, children at preschools must meet both affective and physical needs. But they must also fulfil the epistemological need to understand, because only constructing and sharing an understanding of ourselves and the world around us makes us active members of the culture into which we were born.

Carlos Gallego Lázaro (2001, p. 87)

Gallego taught us that the school should become a space of culture, of challenges that make it possible for children to grow, and that we must trust children and give them autonomy so that they can construct their own cognitive processes. This process has no timetables, nor can it be limited to interest centres or specific topics; instead, children gradually develop them through experiences, challenges and everyday actions.

We have referred to authors who, as we have said, view mealtimes as spaces of learning and especially as spaces of child autonomy, such as Alzola and Otaño (2007), Goldschmied (1998), Martínez and Matamala (1992), Molina (2007), Ritscher and Staccioli (2006), Tardos and Szanto-



Feder (2007) and Wettich (2007). In concurrence with these authors, we believe that mealtimes and the washing-up times just before and after lunch should be times of child participation. This means being able to help in placing the serviettes, dishes, glasses, cutlery and other items, such as water pitchers or the bread, on the table. It also includes actions like soaping, rinsing and drying their hands or going to the bathroom. When lunch is over, each child should be able to put their own dishes, cutlery, serviettes and glasses into the bins, as well as to place any rubbish in the right place. It is clear that the equipment should make it possible to do whatever they are capable of doing to the extent possible.

By this we mean that all children should feel useful, but more importantly they should know that there are everyday actions that they have to do on their own because they can and because they are learning that they have to be responsible for the things that they use. These actions – setting and clearing the table or taking care of their own washing-up – not only trains children to be more autonomous but also helps them to grow in their self-esteem. Obviously, enabling this kind of participation requires organisation of the space, requirements of certain materials or equipment, and organisation of time and tasks. Clearly it is important to think about in what strategic place the rubbish bins for equipment should be placed, what kind of supervision the adult must provide in each situation and how the table setting should be organised.

In the process of growing and acquiring autonomy, mealtimes are also times when each child gets to know themselves, learns about their tastes, whether they like to eat a lot or a little, and what they need to care for their bodies. This learning is intrinsically associated with adults' respect for children, which translates into the fact that each child eats as much as they want and that each can serve their own food or, if this is impossible, some additional item such as bread, water, salad or dessert.


In order for the lunchroom to become a place that educates children in the acquisition of autonomy, the children must be allowed to participate in the different tasks, to ask about them and to be dealt with according to their needs, and to have adults who are capable of listening, observing and respecting the children's paces.

- **The lunchroom: Educational space and materials**

Eating well is not only a question of food; it is also a question of the setting.

Penny Ritscher and Gianfranco Staccioli (2006, p. 51)

In our culture, meals, and especially lunch, have certain connotations and rituals which are easily identifiable: we like to set the table with a cloth tablecloth; give each diner dishes, cutlery and cups; have the drink, bread and condiments on the table; use cloth serviettes; and eat with others. What is



more, all celebrations revolve around the table, including birthdays, weddings, gatherings of friends or Christmas. Still, the act of eating is nonetheless a private time. In contrast, at school it becomes an act that takes place publicly, in a space designed for this purpose.

We have already explained the changes in eating habits that can be seen today as the result of changes in lifestyle and new work situations. These changes are the main reason why children remain at school for lunch. We have also mentioned that the fact that eating habits vary does not prevent the school from doing everything possible to ensure that lunchtime is a comfortable place, with age-appropriate furniture and equipment that make the break pleasant and encourage autonomy. The place where children eat is important; the conditions of the place, the furniture and the table settings express the specific culture of the lunchroom and, in short, a specific culture of the school and childhood.

The school is also a place of encounters and relationships in which children have to find pleasant spaces with engaging materials and documentation that show how things are done at school and to understand the spaces, learning and life that occurs there. The spaces should act as generators of good relations and friendliness; it should be a place that, as Cabanellas and Eslava (coord., 2005) say, is liveable and open to the multiple possibilities of the actions of those who coexist there. We believe that all spaces, specifically the lunchroom or the place where the children eat, should not only meet physiological needs but also make the overall development of those who use it possible; they should convey the culture of the milieu and provide affective security. In regards to the place where lunch is eaten, Goldschmied (1998) comments that we all want it to smell pleasant, for the food to be attractively presented, for people to pay attention to us and for the atmosphere to be relaxed, with neither pressure nor noise. Ultimately, it should have a *familiar* feel.¹⁴ We have also mentioned in the previous sections the lines Ritscher and Staccioli (2006) that defend, which should be borne in mind when organising the lunchroom, many of which refer to spatial issues.

But in addition to thinking about what is being eaten, we must also pay attention to how it is being eaten... and with whom one is eating!

¹⁴ Claus Jensen, a Danish pedagogue, explains that the school space becomes *familiar* if it incorporates elements like those found at home. For the lunchroom, this would include serviettes, tablecloths, dishes, cups, etc. This information was gathered at the lecture entitled “Les relations i l’ambient físic” (Relationships and the Physical Environment), delivered by the pedagogue on the 2nd of March 2013 at the Teatre Municipal in Sant Feliu de Guíxols.

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Audit tool

The audit (observation) tool below is an instrument for collecting data regarding how lunchtime develops at the setting. Assessment is made based on an estimate scale which can be used for direct observation technique.

Q3.Look at the audit tool and identify the main categories.

Q4.Watch the video and assess it using the audit tool. Discuss.

ToWe Project

Enhancing Opportunities for Toddlers' Wellbeing



Toddlers' Meal Times

Audit Tool

Name of Setting:

Date.....

Completed by:

Reviewed.....

Disclaimer:

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Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
INTERACTION BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND CHILDREN	Verbal communication	- The children are told about the menu and what is going to happen, anticipating all the actions, even the smallest children who do not yet express themselves verbally.	- The children are told what is going to happen. The menu is not explained.	- Some adult provides the children with prior explanations.	- No adult provides the children with prior explanations.
		- When dealing with any difficulty, an adult always provides dialogue and understanding.	- When dealing with any difficulty, one of the adults always provides dialogue and understanding.	- One of the adults occasionally talks with some child and shows understanding.	- Dialogue or understanding of children is not shown.
		- All adults constantly show an attitude of listening to all children. All children's requests are heard and the adults participate in the conversations that the children start.	- Some adults constantly show an attitude of listening to all children	- Attention to children is occasional, only if there is a request.	- Children's demands are not listened to or paid attention to.
		- Most messages from the adults are positive (providing encouragement, reinforcing an action, etc.).	- Messages of encouragement alternate with instructions (Very good! How's it going? Almost finished? It's good, isn't it?).	- Most messages involve getting children to hurry or pushing them (Come on, finish already! Who'll finish first? Come on, swallow!).	- The messages are clearly rule-oriented, encouraging children to hurry or pushing them (You can't get up if you don't finish! You have to try everything! Hurry up!).
		- The messages from the adults are clear and coherent. The adults respond to questions and requests.	- The messages from the adults are clear but sometimes incoherent with each other.	- The messages from the adults are not very clear and sometimes incoherent with each other.	- There are no messages from the adults.

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
INTERACTION BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND CHILDREN	Communication	- Lunchtime is a time of communication, when children can talk about whatever they want or whatever topic arises. There is dialogue among children and between children and adults.	- Sporadically or only some children talk about what they feel or whatever topic arises during the meal. Children talk to each other but the adult doesn't pay attention to this dialogue.	- The dialogue with children is rules-driven, not about what they feel or whatever topic arises during the meal. Adults do not attach importance to dialogues that might arise among children.	- There is no dialogue or listening from the adults to the children. Adults do not attach importance to dialogues that might arise among children.
	Attention to needs	- Children's requests are met and the adults are attentive to them.	- Children's requests are met but not all the adults are attentive to them.	- Children's requests are not always met and the adults are distracted or talking with each other.	- None of the children's requests are met and the adults are talking with each other or distracted.
		- All the adults seek contact with all the children, even with those who do not make a specific request.	- There is only one adult who seeks contact with all the children, even with those who do not make a specific request.	- No contact is sought with the children; attention is only paid to them when they make a specific request.	- No contact is sought with the children and attention is not paid to their demands.
		- Children are gently encouraged to eat with physical interaction from the adult that helps them if the child needs or requests it, always encouraging actions that allow the children to act autonomously.	- Children are gently encouraged to eat and are given physical assistance by helping them to start the motion to scrape off their plate, even if the child does not request it. The child does most of the action.	- Almost all the children are helped as they scrape off their plate with insistent actions by the adult without giving the children the option of doing it themselves.	- The children are helped mechanically, without prior warning and brusquely (grabbing their head, pushing them from behind, etc.).

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
INTERACTION BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND CHILDREN	Nonverbal communication	- Calm attitude (posture) among the adults.	- Not all the adults have a calm attitude.	- Excessive movement by the adults, entering and leaving or walking back and forth.	- Nervousness among the adults (excessive rushing, a lot of movement around the room, not paying attention to the children, etc.).
		- Proximity to the children; all the adults are seated at the tables where the children eat.	- Only one of the adults remains seated near the children.	- Only one of the adults remains seated near the children at times, but at their level and sometimes with their back to the group in order to prepare the food to be served.	- None of the adults sits with the children during lunchtime.

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
INTERACTION BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND CHILDREN	Nonverbal communication	- Looks and gestures of complicity or understanding from all the adults.	- Looks of complicity by one of the adults.	- Little eye contact with the children.	- Eye contact is used to ask for respect or to punish.
	Regulation of time	- Each child's pace is respected. There is a set time to finish, but the children are politely asked to continue or stop eating.	- Each child's pace is respected, but at a given time all the dishes are collected, without punishing those children who did not finish.	- Each child's pace is respected until a given time, when those who have not finished are somehow punished or receive a punitive verbal comment.	- There is a set time to finish and the children are pressed to hurry from the start. The slowest ones are punished.
		- The time after lunch is quiet, so children can go wash up and rest a bit before taking a nap. One of the adults tends to the children who have finished and the other tends to those who have not finished. The children do not have to wait any longer than needed until they have all finished eating.	- The time after lunch is quiet, so children can go wash up and rest a bit before taking a nap but there is not good coordination among the adults when tending to the children who have finished their meal and those who have not finished yet. Some children have to wait longer than needed until they have all finished	- The time after lunch is rushed so children can go wash up and go to sleep, although there might be good coordination among the adults when tending to the children who have finished and those who haven't finished yet. Some children have to wait longer than needed until they have all finished eating.	- The time after lunch is rushed so children can go wash up and go to sleep, without coordination among the adults when tending to the children who have finished and who haven't finished yet. The children have to wait longer than needed until they have all finished eating.

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Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
INTERACTION BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND CHILDREN	Punishment	- When faced with a difficulty or with disruptive behaviour, understanding, dialogue and consensus can be seen among all the adults.	- When faced with a difficulty or with disruptive behaviour, understanding, dialogue and consensus can be seen from some adults.	- When faced with a difficulty or with disruptive behaviour, there is a tendency to yell or punish the children (keeping a dish from them or ridiculing them).	- When faced with a difficulty or with disruptive behaviour, the children are punished in front of the others or drastic measures are taken (they are punished outside the lunchroom, their lunch is saved for afternoon snack).

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
PEER COMMUNICATION (child – child)	Verbal communication	- There is a quiet atmosphere which allows children to express their opinions.	- There is a quiet atmosphere which allows children to express their opinions, even if the adult voice is heard more.	- There is not a quiet atmosphere which allows children to express their opinions and the adult voice is heard more. Children are often asked to be quiet or speak more softly.	- There is not a quiet atmosphere which allows children to express their opinions and the adult voice is heard more. The children are not allowed to speak with each other.
	Grouping possibilities	- When the children use cutlery and eat solid food (after approximately 18 months old), they sit at tables of 4 to 6 children.	- When the children use cutlery and eat solid food (after approximately 18 months old), they sit at tables of 7 to 8 children.	- When the children use cutlery and eat solid food (after approximately 18 months old), they sit at tables of 9 to 10 children.	- When the children use cutlery and eat solid food (after approximately 18 months old), they sit at tables of more than 10 children.

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
DEGREE OF COOPERATION AMONG CHILDREN	Cleanliness habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The adult ensures that all the children wash their hands before and after eating. This action is assisted or supervised by the adult, who is located nearby, at the same height, and is accessible. - The children's autonomy in this action is encouraged (providing access to soap, the faucet, paper or a towel to dry their hands), bearing in mind each child's developmental stage. - The older children express the need to wash their hands when they are dirty and can do so by themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The adult ensures that all the children wash their hands before and after eating. This action is assisted or supervised by the adult. - The children's autonomy in this action is encouraged (soap, the faucet, paper or a towel to dry their hands) only at some times before or after eating, but the adult provides access or not to water, turns on the faucet and gives out the soap. - Each child's developmental stage is not taken into account. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The adult does not check whether all the children wash their hands before and after eating. The action is assisted or heavily directed by the adult. - The children's autonomy in this action is encouraged (soap, the faucet, paper or a towel to dry their hands) only at some times before or after eating. - Each child's developmental stage is not taken into account. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The adult does not check whether all the children wash their hands before and after eating. The action is assisted or heavily directed by the adult. - The children's autonomy in this action is not encouraged (soap, the faucet, paper or a towel to dry their hands) at any time before or after eating. - Each child's developmental stage is not taken into account.

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
DEGREE OF COOPERATION AMONG CHILDREN	Cleanliness habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Care is taken to ensure that children have a clean nappy at lunchtime and that those who can already walk can actively participate in removing their own nappy. - The children who no longer wear a nappy can tend to their own needs when they have to and the adult supervises them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Care is taken to ensure that children have a clean nappy at lunchtime. - The children who no longer wear a nappy can tend to their own needs when they have to and the adult supervises them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Care is not taken to ensure that children have a clean nappy at lunchtime. - The children who no longer wear a nappy can tend to their own needs but they have to wait until an adult can supervise them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Care is not taken to ensure that children have a clean nappy at lunchtime. - The children who no longer wear a nappy cannot tend to their own needs when they want but have to wait until an adult tells them they can, or there is no adult supervision.
	Cooperation in setting and clearing the table	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The children's capacities are borne in mind when participating daily in setting and clearing the table. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only the groups of older children (over age 2) can participate daily in setting and clearing the table. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only the groups of older children (over age 2) can participate occasionally in setting and clearing the table. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is no chance for children to participate in setting and clearing the table.

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
DEGREE OF COOPERATION AMONG CHILDREN	Spatial location during mealtime	- Each child chooses where they sit.	- Each child chooses where they sit at an assigned table.	- The places are assigned but occasionally children can decide or choose where they sit.	- The places are assigned and the adults assign them.
	Use of cutlery	- The use of the spoon is introduced as soon as the child can hold it. - When the menu includes little bits of food, the use of the fork is introduced.	- The use of the spoon is introduced as soon as the child can hold it. - When the menu includes little bits of food, the use of the fork is introduced.	- The use of the spoon is introduced as soon as the child can hold it. - When the menu includes little bits of food, the use of the fork is introduced.	- The use of the spoon is introduced as soon as the child can hold it. - When the menu includes little bits of food, children continue to only use spoons.
		- Children can begin to use cutlery to serve themselves food when they have the motor skills to do so. - Children are given plenty of help to use cutlery properly.	- Children cannot use cutlery to serve food. - Children are given plenty of help to use cutlery properly.	- Children cannot use cutlery to serve food. - Children are sometimes given help to use cutlery properly	- Children cannot use cutlery to serve food. - Children are not given any help to use cutlery properly.

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
DEGREE OF COOPERATION AMONG CHILDREN	Serving their own food	- Adults respect the amount of food that each child needs, either through knowledge of the child or because the child requests it.	- The adult respects the amount of food that each child needs depending on the need that the adult thinks the child has, although they do not ask the child.	- The adult serves the same amount of food to each child, but respects the child if they do not want more.	- The adult serves the same amount of food to each child. The children are pressured to finish the food they have been served.
		- The children, who already have good motor coordination or comprehension, making it possible to serve themselves, are allowed to serve themselves one of the side or main dishes.	- The children, who already have good motor coordination or comprehension, making it possible to serve themselves, are allowed to hold their plates which have already been served.	- Occasionally the children who already have good motor coordination or comprehension, making it possible to serve themselves, are allowed to serve themselves one of the side dishes	- The adult performs all actions and does not allow children to serve themselves any side or main dish.

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ASPECTS	Lunchroom	- The groups of children aged 2-3 eat in the classroom or a nearby place which is easy to reach from the classroom and near the wash-up area.	- The groups of children aged 2-3 eat in the classroom or a nearby place which is easy to reach from the classroom.	- The group of children aged 1-2 and those aged 2-3 eat in the same room, either the classroom or a nearby place which is easy to reach from the classroom.	- The group of children aged 1-2 and those aged 2-3 eat together in the same room, either in the classroom or a nearby place, but one that is not easily accessible from the classroom.
		- Space with 8-12 children eating.	- Space with 13-20 children eating.	- Space with 21-30 children eating.	- Space with more than 30 children of all ages and class groups eating at the same time.
	Ratios	- There are two adults per group or class. The ratio is between 4 and 6 children per adult in all age groups.	- There is one adult per group or class and one support assistant shared between two classrooms. The ratio is around 4 children for the classroom of children aged 0 to 1 and between 7 and 10 children per adult in the other age groups.	- There is one adult per group or class. The ratio is around 4 children for the classroom of children aged 0 to 1 and between 10 and 15 children per adult in the other age groups.	- There is one adult for each group or class. The ratio is around 6 children for the classroom of children aged 0 to 1 and more than 15 children per adult in the other age groups.

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ASPECTS	Furniture and equipment in the meal room	- Tables, chairs and auxiliary furniture of different sizes depending on the age or size and needs of the children.	- Tables and chairs suitable for the age or size and needs of the children.	- Not all the tables and chairs are suitable for the age or size and needs of the children.	- None of the furniture respects the size of the children.
		- All the adults have chairs with wheels so they can easily reach all the children.	- Only one of the adults has a chair with wheels so they can easily reach all the children.	- There are chairs for adults, but they do not have wheels. Some adults sit in child-sized chairs.	- There are no chairs for adults or, if there are at school, they are stored away and unused.
		- Sinks, soap dispensers and hand towels are easily accessible from the meal room and can be reached by all the children.	- Sinks, soap dispensers and hand towels are easily accessible from the meal room, but not all the children can reach them.	- There is a sink near the meal room but it is adult-sized.	- There is no sink near the meal room.
		- In the classrooms or rooms where children eat, the food and equipment come on a kitchen cart that has everything needed. Everything is accessible and therefore no adult has to get up.	- In the classrooms or rooms where children eat, there is a piece of furniture or shelf at least 1.2 m tall specifically used to leave the trays or food that does not have to be served yet.	- In the classrooms or rooms where children eat, there is a piece of furniture or shelf at least 1.2 m tall where the trays or food that does not have to be served yet can be left.	- In the classrooms or rooms where children eat there is no furniture or shelf at least 1.2 m tall where the trays or food that does not have to be served yet can be left.

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ASPECTS	Ventilation and lighting	- Windows facing outdoors which allow air to flow, along with automatic ventilation devices (adjustable grilles incorporated into the window).	- Windows facing outdoors which allow for good ventilation, or artificial ventilation that provides fresh air.	- The windows are small or face interior spaces and the atmosphere is noticeably not ventilated. - There is artificial ventilation but the air is clearly not fresh.	- There is no exterior ventilation, nor any artificial ventilation device, and the air is clearly not fresh.
		- There are curtains, blinds or awnings that allow the space to be properly lit with natural light, and they are used to regulate the light.	- There are curtains, blinds or awnings that allow the space to be properly lit with natural light, but they are not used.	- Even though there is natural light, artificial illumination is used.	- There is no natural light, and artificial illumination is always needed.
	Equipment	- The shelves or tables where the food is left or where the children eat are covered with cloth or plastic protectors used specifically for meals. - There are guarantees that the tablecloths do not slip from the table to prevent dishes from falling unnecessarily. The tables are cleaned before eating.	- The shelves or tables where the food is left or where the children eat are covered with cloth or plastic protectors used specifically for meals. - Tablecloths are only used with larger groups and there are attempts to secure them to prevent dishes from falling unnecessarily The tables are cleaned before eating.	- The shelves or tables where the food is left or where the children eat are not covered with cloth or plastic protectors. - Tablecloths are not used in any group. The tables are cleaned before eating.	- The shelves or tables where the food is left or where the children eat are not covered with cloth or plastic protectors. - The tables do not seem to be cleaned before eating.

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ASPECTS	Equipment	- Cloth bibs are used and changed for each meal. For children that do not bring bibs, the school attempts to provide them with a spare one.	- Cloth bibs are changed for each meal. Children that do not bring bibs are given a piece of paper towel or similar.	- Not all groups use bibs. Paper towels are used.	- Bibs are not used at any age.
		- There is cutlery adapted to the children's age (3 sizes). Each child uses the right size cutlery depending on their skills.	- There is cutlery adapted to the children's age (2 sizes). Each child uses the right size cutlery depending on their skills.	- There is cutlery adapted to the children's age (2 sizes). The children are assigned the cutlery size by class group, not depending on each child's skills.	- The cutlery size is the same for all ages.
		- Different kinds of cups are used depending on the age or the children's motor skills.	- Different kinds of cups are used depending on the children's age.	- Each age group is assigned a kind of cup regardless of the children's needs.	- There is no criterion on which kind of cup to use.
		- There are porcelain or plastic dishes, and the dish is changed for each course (first, second or dessert).	- There are plastic dishes, and the dish is only changed for dessert.	- Plastic dishes and, the dish are not changed. The dessert is eaten without a dish.	- Use of dishes or trays to hold the food.

Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ASPECTS	Furniture in the changing table or clean-up area	- There is a soap dispenser within children's reach and it is easy to use.	- There is a soap dispenser within children's reach but they cannot use it on their own.	- There is a soap dispenser but it is not within children's reach.	- There is no soap dispenser.
		- The flush mechanism on the toilet is accessible to the children.	- The flush mechanism on the toilet is accessible to the children, but at the time of observation is it broken.	- The flush mechanism on the toilet is at adult height.	- The flush mechanism on the toilet is at adult height and in poor condition.
		- The faucets for the children are easy for all of them to use.	- The faucets for the children are easy to use only for the groups aged 2 or 3.	- Some faucets need adult help to be used.	- All of faucets need adult help to be used.
		- The hand dryer (air or paper dispenser) is within children's reach and filled with paper.	- The hand dryer (air or paper dispenser) is within children's reach but some of them don't work or do not have enough paper.	- The hand dryer (air or paper dispenser) is not within children's reach even though they work or have enough paper.	- Nor air or paper towel hand dryer can be seen, or there is a single towel for all children to use.
		- The changing table fulfils the legal measures on risk prevention (edge to prevent falling, depth of between 50 and 60 cm and sink and changing table 80 or 70 cm tall) and the children who can move by themselves can reach it independently.	- The changing table fulfils the legal measures on risk prevention (edge to prevent falling, depth of between 50 and 60 cm and sink and changing table 80 or 70 cm tall) but only the groups from two to three years old can reach it independently.	- The changing table fulfils the legal measures on risk prevention (edge to prevent falling, depth of between 50 and 60 cm and sink and changing table 80 or 70 cm tall) but no child can reach it independently	- The changing table does not fulfil the legal measures on risk prevention (edge to prevent falling, depth of between 50 and 60 cm and sink and changing table 80 or 70 cm tall) and no child can reach it independently

		- The number of toilets accessible in the lunchroom is 2 per at most 20 children.	- The number of toilets accessible in the lunchroom is 1 per 20 children.	- The number of toilets accessible in the lunchroom is lower than 2 per 31 to 40 or children.	- The number of toilets accessible in the lunchroom is lower than 2 per 41 or more children.
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Categories	Items	Degree of acceptability			
		Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable
PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ASPECTS	Furniture in the changing table or washing-up area	- The bathroom furniture (sink and toilets) is adapted to the different sizes or ages of the children. The washing-up area is accessible and visible from the classroom.	- The bathroom furniture (sink and toilets) is adapted to the size of the children, but potties are used for the smallest ones. The washing-up area is accessible and visible from the classroom.	- Of the bathroom furniture only the sink is adapted; there are potties for the smallest children. The washing-up area is accessible but not visible from the classroom.	- No bathroom furniture is adapted to the size of the children. The washing-up area is neither from the classroom.
	Appearance and maintenance of the space	- Clean walls in good condition.	- Clean walls.	- The walls are dirty.	- The walls are dirty and in poor condition.
		- Clean floor. There is constant attention if there is a spill.	- Clean floor. If there is a spill it takes a while to clean up.	- Floor dirty from morning use. It is only cleaned once a day.	- Floor dirty and appears not to have been cleaned for days.
		- Windows and furniture are clean and well-maintained.	- Windows and furniture are clean but look old.	- Windows and furniture are clean but not well-maintained.	- Windows and furniture are dirty and not well-maintained.
	Noise level during lunchtime	- No racket.	- Occasional racket (when clearing the tables, etc.).	- Constant racket.	- Excessive racket the entire time.
		- The adults do not raise their voices.	- An adult occasionally raises their voice.	- The adults can be heard raising their voices.	- The adults are constantly raising their voices.

ToWe Project

Enhancing Opportunities for Toddlers' Wellbeing



Toddlers' Meal Times Strategies

Setting Partner: Kew, Mortlake, Barnes and East Sheen Children's Centres - Achieving for Children

Dimension	What bought about the strategy	Implementation	Impact of Strategy
Meal Times Children's Centre Snack Cafe	<p>Reading the meal time manual</p> <p>Watching the videos in the training week</p> <p>Carrying out the audit from the manual</p> <p>We wanted to increase the children's independence and confidence at the snack café, and give suggestions to parents on ways they can help with this at home.</p>	<p>Large pictures were introduced to show the routine of the snack café, with the title 'I Can' at the top of each one, for example: I can choose my own plate I can wait for a place at the table I can choose what I want to eat I can cut my own fruit I can pour my own water These are all displayed at children's eye level.</p> <p>Child friendly knives were introduced to the snack café so that toddlers could independently cut up their fruit. Staff could immediately see the value in this, but we have to work with the parents on a weekly basis to reassure them that their children are safe. We talk about giving the children the 'right tools for the job' enabling them to succeed in their task and feel a sense of achievement.</p> <p>Staff cut back on asking as many questions during snack café, and focused more on giving children the opportunity to explore the food for themselves. It is tempting to talk about the qualities of the food during snack time, but we found that it's more important to be present and focused on the situation rather than what colour the apple is – being</p>	<p>Toddlers are able to see the pictures, and with support from parents and staff are able to follow the routine much more easily with the picture prompts.</p> <p>The pictures also act as a reminder to parents that the children can do these tasks themselves, and encourages them to support their children in the task, rather than doing it for them.</p> <p>Staff are spending more time explaining to parents about the benefits of letting the children have a go for themselves, and parents are becoming more comfortable in letting the children have a go with the safety knives.</p> <p>There has been an impact on wider practice, with staff giving children more independence in other areas too, including clearing up after themselves once they've finished their meal and at tidy up time.</p> <p>The menu board has been introduced, to show the children what snack is available that day. Using Velcro on the menu board means that the children can spend time exploring it, moving the pictures and asking questions if they want to.</p> <p>The transition between play and snack café is now much smoother and less chaotic, with practitioners and parents</p>

		more 'mindful'	being more mindful of the way we talk about food.
		<p>We introduced a menu board using mainly pictures so the children can see what snack is available that day.</p> <p>Snack Café Parent Survey – to gain written feedback</p>	<p>Parents filled in a snack cafe survey, which was developed by the children's centre and there was a lot of positive feedback about giving children more time and opportunity to cut the fruit themselves both when in the Children's Centre, but also during meal times at home (results can be shown).</p>

Setting Partner: Sandvedhaugen Barnehage – Sandnes Kommune

Dimension	What bought about the strategy	Implementation	Impact of Strategy
Meal times	<p>After reading the manual, being at Kingston for the training week, and watching the video from Barcelona about mealtimes, we decided to work to increase children`s possibility to be more independent during meals.</p> <p>This to make the children experience more participation and mastering and to maximize wellbeing</p>	<p>We`ve made «food stations» where children can get their own plates and cutlery and put it away after they`ve finished eating.</p> <p>In that way we see that the children can master it on their own. They also get to wash their own face and hands after a meal.</p> <p>It`s also well thought out where we place the children so they can sit with their friends</p> <p>During mealtimes we want children to be able to serve themselves. This is also to increase wellbeing</p>	<p>By having «food stations» we see that the children know where to find what they need and where to put it away afterwards. We see this as an opportunity to make the children independent and feel that they are contributing.</p> <p>The children express joy when they can do it themselves, and we can see that this gives the children the possibility to participate more. We mean that this increases wellbeing.</p> <p>They are also more attentive to each other, and want to help each other more</p> <p>They are more attentive to each other, and help each other. We`ve seen that they can do more than we`ve expected from them.</p> <p>There is a calmer atmosphere around the table and more room for the children to contribute. We now observe increased wellbeing both with the children and the staff.</p>

Setting Partner: Escola Bressol Mas Balmanya (SUARA)

Dimension	What brought about the strategy	Implementation	Impact of Strategy
Meal times	<p>After the entire team listened to the talk by Àngels Geis at Kingston, watched the video she gave us on mealtime and read the materials, the first thing we did was individually fill out the observation grid which we were given in the manual of good practices.</p> <p>We were surprised to see that we all had different opinions of what happened during mealtime, and that we all evaluated it differently. This is how we detected the need to record ourselves in order to analyse what our point of departure during mealtime was and be able to determine where we wanted to begin to make changes in order to improve wellbeing during this period in the day.</p>	<p>The entire team recorded and shared our point of departure, which served as the key to begin to improve mealtime, such an important time at a nursey school. So we managed to set a baseline from which many improvements came.</p>	<p>The families have noticed an improvement in the atmosphere at mealtime. When we told the families about this work we were doing with ToWe Project, we held a talk on the importance on mealtime at the request of the families. Many families were amazed at seeing the process we had set up and decided to make changes in their own mealtimes at home, and they have told us about these changes.</p> <p>By analysing the point of departure, the professionals have been able to establish our objectives for improvement and have begun to work on mealtime.</p> <p>The children have experienced changes that have enabled them to become more independent and have more power to take decisions at mealtime.</p>
Meal Times	<p>After the point of departure explained above, we changed the layout of the tables and added an auxiliary table – where all the dirty materials were left – in order to enhance the children’s possibilities of being independent when serving themselves and clearing</p>	<p>The new layout allows the children to serve themselves better, choose how much they want without all having to eat at the same speed, and choose what they want from the optional dishes, such as salad. They are also allowed to clear their dishes</p>	<p>With the new layout, the professionals have been able to observe and discover the children’s capacities to choose what they want and how much they want, serve themselves, be responsible for their utensils, etc. We have really managed to place the children at the centre.</p>

	their dishes off the table.	when they finish and move freely around the room.	With the new layout, the children can be much more independent, aware of their capacities and at the centre of mealtime.
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ToWe Project

Enhancing Opportunities for Toddlers' Wellbeing



Toddlers' Early Languages

Manual



Disclaimer:

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Introduction

Welcome to this manual which supports the practice of Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) to enhance the education and wellbeing opportunities for disadvantaged toddlers. It underpins EYPs' knowledge and understanding of the different dimensions that impact on toddlers' wellbeing as regards their languages. The manual will describe the role that languages have in toddlers' lives and how their use can be supported and promoted at the settings. It will also cover the application of three different tools to guide settings in the awareness of their linguistic realities thus helping practitioners make effective decisions. Two realities will be taken into account: settings with language and culture diversity, which may need guidance as to how to make this diversity visible and part of their daily educational tasks; and settings which aim at introducing an additional language, which may need guidance as to how this can be done in a way that is both effective and coherent with toddlers' needs.

Aims of the Manual

The aims of the early languages manual are to:

- Familiarise Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) with the theoretical background, dimensions and aspects of early language development and how these can be used to evaluate practice;
- Increase Early Years Practitioners' awareness of the complexities of the promotion of early languages;
- Provide Early Years Practitioners with tools to evaluate and help them improve the quality of their current provision and practice;
- Help Early Years Practitioners distinguish effective strategies of good practice for toddlers early languages identified by the Setting Partner EYPs through their action plans, strategies, shared practice and reflective dialogue.

Introduction

What do we mean by learning an additional language in early childhood education? “No es adquirir unas cuantas palabras, sino unas estructuras fonológicas, gramaticales, morfológicas y sintácticas que, junto al vocabulario, permitirán la comunicación” (Paniagua & Palacios, 2005, p. 82). *[It is not about acquiring a few words, but some phonological, grammatical, morphological and syntactic structures that, together with the vocabulary, will allow communication]*¹⁵.

For the introduction of an additional language to be successful in early childhood education, the teaching and learning process must be consistent with the characteristics of the stage and, therefore, respectful of the educational principles which are at the basis of the process:

“Por su interés e importancia y por la ventaja de un tratamiento temprano, merece la pena abordar algunos contenidos hacia los que inicialmente los niños no muestran interés, como es el caso de una segunda lengua. Para ello, no obstante, hay que respetar algunos principios educativos” (Paniagua & Palacios, 2005, p. 20).

["Due to its interest and importance and because of the advantages of an early treatment, it is worth addressing some contents towards which children may not initially show interest, as may be the case of a second language. To do it, however, some educational principles need to be respected"].

At the basis of these educational principles, there is the need to create an environment rich in possibilities, rich in language and which stimulates acquisition: “(...) el lenguaje, cuya adquisición no es posible sin las bases madurativas adecuadas, pero cuyo aprendizaje va a depender de la existencia de un entorno que utilice el lenguaje y que estimule su adquisición” (Paniagua & Palacios, 2005, p. 63). *[Language, whose acquisition is not possible without the appropriate maturational basis, but whose learning will depend on the existence of an environment where language is used and which promotes its acquisition]*.

There is also the need for the adult who brings the additional language to the classroom to be highly proficient in the language in all its complexity, so that language can be used fluently and accurately in any communicative opportunity. The language that will be used by the adult is not an object of study, but a means to communicate spontaneously, that is, naturally. And above all, frequently.

The role of the adult who brings the additional language to the classroom is fundamentally the role of a mediator, that is, the one who mediates (linguistically) between the actions of the child and the verbal description of the action. This is what, in the field of language teaching, is called *information talk*, which is useful and beneficial when it comes to learning a first language as well as an additional language. Using information talk effectively will allow the child to interiorise sensorial, motor and symbolic action schemes:

“Así, la estimulación de los más pequeños consistirá en darles muchas oportunidades para actuar sobre objetos formando *esquemas de acción*, así como hacerles participar de numerosas situaciones y actividades en las que su acción pueda incardinarse. Si esas situaciones y actividades van acompañadas de verbalizaciones adultas adecuadas (“¡Huy!, si la empujas, rueda. Ahora la empujo yo y luego tú) la acción que es en sí misma atractiva y significativa se convierte en ocasión para el aprendizaje de algo más, pues a la actividad sensomotriz de empujar se le añade la actividad simbólica de categorizar esa acción como “empujar”. La labor de mediación del adulto es aquí insustituible, pues si para la acción sensoriomotora es suficiente con la presencia de objetos, para su explotación y manejo simbólico hace falta lenguaje” (Paniagua & Palacios, 2005, p. 67).

¹⁵ All references in Catalan or Spanish have been left in the original language and translated by ourselves.

[Thus, stimulation of the youngest ones is to give them many opportunities to act upon objects thus creating 'action schemes' and to make them engage in many situations and activities in which their action can be incardinated. If these situations and activities are accompanied by appropriate adult utterances ("Wow!, if you push it, it rolls. Now I push it and then you"), the action which is in itself attractive and meaningful becomes a new learning opportunity, as the sensorial and motor activity is added to the the symbolic activity of categorising that action as "push". The adult mediation task is indispensable here, as if for sensory and motor actions the presence of objects is enough, for its exploitation and symbolic management, language is needed].

This mediating role requires short distance, that is, the almost individual relationship between the practitioner and the child. Clearly, this has consequences for the practitioners' role.

One more element that needs to be considered is that the linguistic input that the child will receive should be meaningful and repeated. For this reason, linking the use of additional languages to routines is extremely interesting: routines facilitate meaningful use of the language, by its very nature, as well as repetition. In this regard, we understand routines like "features of events that allow scaffolding to take place, and combine the security of the familiar with the excitement of the new" (Bruner 1983, 1990). In other words, routines are moments that allow for the combination of the security of the known with the excitement generated by new things, all provided through the naturalness and meaningfulness of learning.

Furthermore, routines can also be planned so that they include the amount of scaffolding needed at each stage and so that they allow this scaffolding gradually disappears, while the routine gains in complexity (defined from the point of view of linguistic complexity but also increased autonomy).

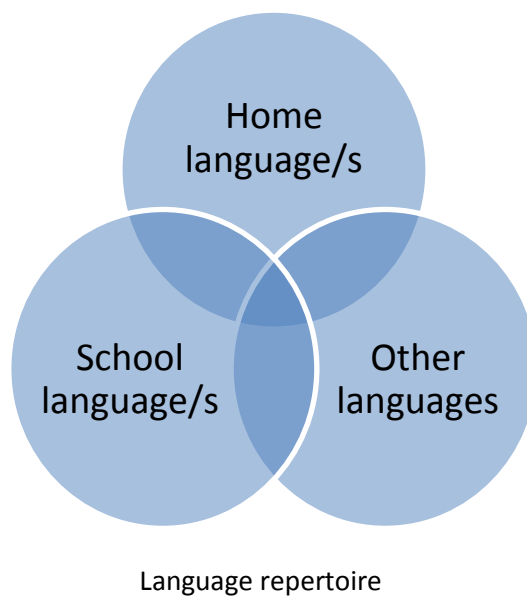
In short, "lo que los niños y niñas en las edades de educación infantil quieren no son 'unidades didácticas' de lenguaje, sino lenguaje a todas horas y en todos los contextos" (Paniagua & Palacios, 2005, p. 78). ["what children in early years setting need is not language 'didactic units', but language at all hours and in all contexts"].

Learning languages

- ❖ Learning languages is learning about new cultures, thus broadening our experience and understanding of the world.
- ❖ Learning languages benefits learners at different levels: cognitive, emotional, social.
- ❖ Learning languages is a key competence today.
- ❖ Learning languages, if done well, is never damaging to the learning process.
- ❖ ...

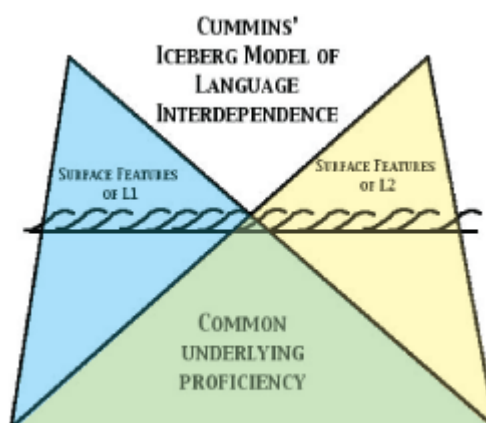
Q1. What does 'learning a new language' mean to you?

Languages in the lives of children



Q2. What is your language repertoire? Think of all the languages that you have available and list them. When, with whom and what do you use them for?

What happens when we add new languages to our repertoire?



What is the Interdependence Hypothesis?¹⁶

Cummins' interdependence or iceberg hypothesis reveals the relationship of the first language to the learning of another language. What appears to be two very different phenomena on or above the surface is actually interdependent psychologically.

What is the Common Underlying Proficiency?

The **Common Underlying Proficiency** (CUP) model or the "one balloon theory" described by Jim Cummins purports that proficiencies involving more cognitively demanding tasks (such as literacy, content learning, abstract thinking and problem-solving) are common across languages. The CUP model is represented with the "dual iceberg metaphor" and is the basis of the hypothesis called the linguistic interdependence hypothesis.

The Common Underlying Proficiency is what allows **TRANSFER** to take place. Transfer can be conscious or unconscious, but inevitable with plurilingual speakers and learners. When children are exposed to different languages, transfer will happen. The role of the practitioner is to help children notice how they can connect the languages they have available.

"In the early months of their English language learning in the nursery or school, those children with a different home language learn to tie new words to concepts learned through their first language. They must also learn to transfer knowledge of the way language has worked for them in the home setting to the new environment of the early childhood setting. These children have the potential to become bilingual if they are given opportunities to use their home languages in the new setting and to learn new names for objects and actions already learned through their first language." (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 23).

Q3. Think of the languages you know, can you think of an example (i.e. a word, an expression, etc.) where transfer is possible?

Different linguistic realities

Reality 1: Welcoming children's linguistic (and cultural) identities to the setting.

Globalisation and immigration mean that it is nowadays more and more common to find children whose home language is different from the school main language. In many settings, the number and diversity of home languages may be quite high. Welcoming children's linguistic and cultural identities to the setting means acknowledging and valuing their home languages, whilst offering children the chance to learn and use the main social language. The linguistic picture may be quite different depending on the country or the setting. One example of a Catalan setting would be the following:

¹⁶ Source: <http://www.educ.ualberta.ca/staff/olenka.bilash/best%20of%20bilash/iceberg.html>. Retrieved: February 2016.

Children's home language: Catalan, Spanish, French, Chinese, Urdu, Arabic ...

School language: Catalan

Social languages: Catalan and Spanish

Foreign language: English

For children whose home language is not the school or the social language, these would be *additional languages*. For children whose home language is the same as the school or social language, English would typically be labelled their *foreign language*. However, to place languages at the same level, we are going to refer to all of them as *additional languages*.

Q4. Think of your setting. What is the linguistic picture like?

Children's home language:

School language/s:

Social language/s:

Foreign language/s:

Why should we welcome children's linguistic realities to the setting?

"When young children who speak a home language other than English start in the nursery or pre-school setting they begin the process of learning an additional language. Some of these children already speak more than one language. However, suddenly the language that they have used for their daily lives is no longer the language that they hear around them (...) Unless early childhood educators are familiar with the children's home language, social class background and culture, and provide a supportive environment, these children are in danger of being marginalized and may experience an insecure and anxious start to their entry into nursery and schooling" (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 22)

1. To *actively* respect all identities: language is an essential part of identity: "the way children feel about themselves is not innate or inherited, it is learned" (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 3).
2. To promote children's self-esteem: "positive self-esteem depends upon whether children feel that others accept them and see them as competent and worthwhile" (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 3).
3. To improve learning atmosphere: "researchers have shown the connection between academic achievement and self-esteem" (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 3).
4. To create an inclusive culture (Mistry & Sood 2015, p. 14)

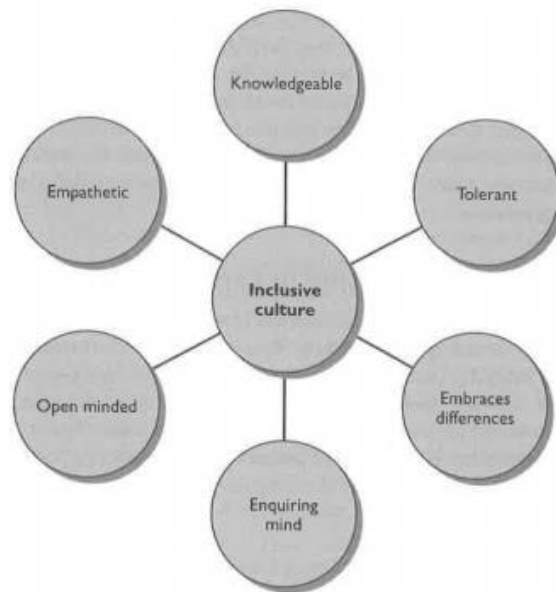


Figure 1.1 A mental map of features of an inclusive culture

Q5. Discuss the reasons listed above and think of your own setting. How would you rank them? Would you add any other reason?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. ...

How can we welcome children's linguistic realities to the setting?

1. By collecting all linguistically-relevant information from families. The questionnaire below (Figure 1) is a tool that can be helpful here.
2. By making languages visible at the setting. The rubric below (Figure 3) can be used to assess the situation in the setting.
3. By developing our own linguistic competence.
4. By giving children (and their families) opportunities to share their knowledge.
5. By creating a stressfree environment where children can use language.
6. By using relevant pedagogical strategies (some will be addressed when dealing with reality 2 below).

Reality 1: Questionnaire to gather data regarding language diversity in the setting.

Basic characteristics of the family

1. Family type (nuclear, reconstituted, lone-parent, extended family).
2. Education level (University studies, Secondary Education, Primary Education).
3. Ages of the members of the family.

Perceptions towards the home language (HL)

4. Do you feel your home language should have a place at the setting? Why?
5. How do you feel when you hear or see your home language at the setting? (proud, embarrassed, I do not feel anything...)
6. Would you like to take part in Early Childhood Education activities to learn more about the children's language acquisition process?
7. Would you like to cooperate with the setting to make your home language visible?

Use of the home language in the family

8. Are you provided with resources to support your toddlers' linguistic development at home?
9. What type of linguistic activities do you do at home with your toddler? (read stories, listen to songs, sing songs, talk, etc.)
10. Which language is used at home with the toddler?
11. Who uses each language?
12. What is each language used for?

Figure 1 – Reality 1 Questionnaire

Visibility of HLs at the setting	They are not visible.	They are visible occasionally.	They are clearly visible.
Use of resources linked to HLs: photographs, books, information in different languages, objects and artifacts of different cultures.	No resources are used.	Some resources are used.	A great diversity of resources is used.
Effectiveness of resources linked to HLs to support language learning.	They are not effectively used.	They are used occasionally.	They are effectively used.
Sufficiency of resources in terms of quality and quantity.	Insufficient	Sufficient	Excellent
Time devoted to HLs.	No time is devoted.	Some time is devoted.	A lot of time is devoted.
Activities done related to HLs: read stories in	No activities are done.	Some activities are done.	Many activities are done.

different HLs, sing songs in different HLs, give children (and their families) time to share their HLs			
Engagement of children in HLs activities: they show interest in listening to stories in HLs, they play with languages and show curiosity, they like to show what they know in other HLs.	They are not engaged.	They are engaged occasionally.	They are very engaged.
Engagement of families in HLs activities: they bring materials in HLs, they are happy to participate in school activities.	They are not engaged.	They are engaged occasionally.	They are very engaged.
In-service training related to the visibility of HLs	No training offered.	Training offered occasionally.	A lot of training offered.

Figure 2 – Internal Evaluation for Improvement Rubric

Strategies for helping babies and toddlers develop language (based on Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 43)

1. Maintain eye contact
2. Take turns in conversations and encourage replies
3. Use singing and chanting as much as possible
4. Use visual support as much as possible
5. Use physical contact as much as possible
6. Keep conversations simple, using repetition and basic Language
7. Imitate toddlers' words and sounds

Q6. Can you identify any strategy that you already use?

Strategies for helping babies and toddlers develop language (based on Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 44)

1. Read, tell and retell stories
2. Give good Language and conversation models
3. Use information talk as much as possible
4. Use songs and rhymes as much as possible
5. Use visual support as much as possible

Q7. Can you identify any strategy that you already use?

Reality 2: Bringing new languages (and cultures) to the setting.

In some European countries, learning a foreign language (English mostly) is a social demand: it has become a must for our students to have an advanced level of the language by the time they leave school. This means that children are starting to be exposed to the language at an earlier age and many settings need to find the best way to make this possible and beneficial for the children and their learning process.

“Language develops rapidly in the early years and all children, including those who come from language backgrounds other than English, benefit from good quality programmes which emphasize interaction and the development of communication skills. It is clear that the best programmes build on children’s individual needs, interests and identities” (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 20).

Why should we bring new languages to the setting?

Due to its interest and importance and due to the benefits of an early treatment, it is worth addressing some contents towards which the children may not be initially interested, such as a second language. To do this, however, some educational principles need to be respected (Paniagua & Palacios 2005).

Growing up with two languages (Paniagua & Palacios 2005, p. 82-84)

In a society in which the mastery of two or three languages is beginning to become more and more important, or at least highly valued, families are increasingly interested in the possibility of their children learning a second language at an early age. They are not wrong because, as we have just seen, language is easily learned at an early age, while later they will have to study it, sometimes with a great deal of effort. This makes it sensible to consider the possibility of early bilingualism, which is enriching from both the cognitive and linguistic standpoint. On the other hand, major language immersion efforts have been made at early ages in bilingual communities with sound results, which have taught us a great deal about second language acquisition in small children. We have also learned from the children of immigrant families who have started their schooling early and soon mastered the new language without anyone at school knowing their native tongue or anyone at home knowing the school language. Even though it is clearly recommendable, early initiation into a second language implies a series of conditions to ensure that it is both positive and productive. On the one hand, learning a language means not just acquiring a few words but instead learning phonological, grammatical, morphological and syntactic structures which,

along with vocabulary, make communication possible. On the other hand, if we introduce a second language early in order to take advantage of humans' enormous early receptivity to language, we have no choice but to follow the conditions of early language learning. Thus, the first condition is as important as it is obvious: the adults in charge must have a mastery of this language, at least orally. What would we think if a mother spoke to her small child telegraphically, with poor vocabulary, incorrect grammar and serious pronunciation difficulties? For small children, it is more important to have good conversation partners who master the language with fluency and know how to interact with children of this age than to have professionals who are experts in grammar but are unable to hold a fluent conversation in the second language. The basic rule is simple: at these early ages, the second language should be learned the same way the first one is. And we have already seen that children do not have to memorize lists of colours, nor do numbers appear in their earliest language learning, nor do they learn random words one after another. The language should be not a subject of study but a means of communication, that is, an instrument that the adult uses spontaneously to make themselves understood, to play with the children, to remind them of a rule, to greet them and say goodbye to them, to sing and tell stories, to play and to work. Thus, the new language should not be viewed as a goal in itself, nor should it be studied out of context by repeating names, songs, etc. The adult in charge of the second language should speak to the children in terms similar to those used by the classroom teacher, probably drawing from the strategies from the early years of language learning: lots of contextual support (objects, visuals, etc.), many references to the here and now, lots of support from gestures (pointing, exaggerating expressiveness, reproducing actions in a somewhat theatrical way, etc.) and every day, repetitive messages in appropriate, meaningful contexts. It should also be borne in mind that understanding precedes expression, without any expectation that they both arise simultaneously. And that expression is not correct from the very start... Likewise, affective factors should not be disregarded: an effort should be made to understand the child no matter what language they use. Invitations to use the new language should be appealing and fun, based on enjoyment of the situation instead of on impositions and demands from the adult. The child's relationship with the adult is essential for the former to want to express themselves in the language required. In addition to the aforementioned methodological considerations, in order for children to truly learn something from a new language the interaction has to be frequent and the situations repeated. It would be difficult to acquire a language when one is exposed to it twice a week for barely an hour. Likewise, the person learning has to play an active role as interlocutor by having opportunities to converse with the adult – even if they express themselves in their own language at first – and this only happens by working with small groups. The supposed group conversation, "What is this?" with 20 children answering in unison "A dooooooog!" has nothing to do with situations in which children learn a language. Poor us if we had had to learn the language we speak so fluently in this way! We would still be at the level of a four and a half-year old trying to master subject-verb agreement, learning how to construct grammatically correct questions, using our first subordinate clauses. We would barely be able to handle all the exceptions in the language... and we would clearly have a non-native accent. So learning a second language is worth promoting in early childhood education, but with the proviso that there are enough resources to do it (and maintain it) under the conditions in which early language learning really takes place. Someone who is very fluent and easily speaks the language being learned, and who also has training in early childhood education, is the right person.

"Research has shown that the first six years of life are as critical for language development as for all other development (...) contributes to their cognitive flexibility" (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 30).

How should we bring new languages to the setting?

“Children do not understand that we use language to communicate, do not want to know if a language is foreign or additional, nor are they conscious of how important it is to speak as many languages as possible. Children want to discover the world around them, want to enjoy games and pauses, want to be spoken to significantly and to experiment, want to discuss and reflect. They want to be children.

And, in a setting like this, children will play, as they should, the main role. They will show adults that the English language is not only a different language that we can use to sing songs, but a language that can also be used to learn, to discover and even to let the teacher know that, one day, Laura went to the zoo with her mum and dad.” (Flores & Corcoll, 2008)

1. In a natural way.
2. By focusing on routines and play.
3. By using information talk.
4. By using routine chants.
5. By scaffolding language.
6. By taking advantage of golden opportunities for interaction.
7. By focusing on transfer: “The early years curriculum should (...) incorporate work on children’s awareness of similarities and differences” (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2011, p. 9).

The table below can be used as a tool to assess how the additional language is brought to the setting:

O’CLILS OBSERVATION SHEET				
O’CLILS Moment				
Time of the day				
Duration				
Number of Toddlers				
Number of Early Years Practitioners and Teachers (EYPTs)	EYPTs. using Additional Language		EYPTs. using L1 (First Language)	
STRATEGIES	NEVER: Not observed	RARELY: Rarely observed	SOMETIMES: Observed but occasionally	OFTEN/ALWAYS: Regularly observed
Use of routines				
Use of information talk				

Use of scaffolding techniques				
Use of songs and routine chants				
Use of visuals (pictures, frames, realia...)				
Use of 'golden opportunities' for interaction				
Use of repetition				
Use of modelling				

Figure 3- O'CLILS Observation Sheet (Outdoor' Content Language Integrated Learning in Schools)

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ToWe Project

Enhancing Opportunities for Toddlers' Wellbeing



Toddlers' Early Languages Strategies

Setting Partner: Heathfield Children's Centre - Achieving for Children

Dimension	What brought about the strategy?	Implementation	Impact of the strategy
Early languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion and reflection with the crèche practitioners using the pre-requisite of wellbeing. • We read and discussed the early languages manual and reflected that we do not use enough visual aids in our current practice to support non- verbal and non-English speaking children or their families. • To develop visual aids to improve the way we support children to settle and play during sessions and follow routines. • To use visual aids to find out what children are interested in. • To appeal to non- verbal children and visual learners. • To use visual aids to develop children's independence and communication skills and support them to make choices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We improved our photo displays for children and adults to show the resources available for children to play with. • The children's photo displays are placed at children's eye level to help them see and choose what they want to play with by speaking or pointing (independently or with support). • We showed parents and guardians how to use the visual aids to help their child make choices. 	<p>Toddlers- Can see the resources we have and are supported to make choices which gives them a sense of control, builds confidence, aids communication and boosts self-esteem.</p> <p>Practitioners- Use the visual aids with the toddler to find out what the child likes to play with and is interested in. This improves relationships and helps the child to feel secure, bond and develop trust in the practitioner.</p> <p>Parents- Are able to see the variety of resources available and can communicate on their child's behalf and tell us what their child would like to play with and is interested in.</p> <p>Practice- Is more inclusive for everyone and appeals to non-verbal children and visual learners. The visual aids provide a sense of order, everything has a place which some toddlers find reassuring. The use of visual aids and photos help to give children a voice.</p>
Early languages in ESOL crèche (English)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We discussed the pre-requisite of wellbeing and identified that the children attending crèche are among our most disadvantaged due to them being separated from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team requested that paper work be simplified for families and accompanied with visual aids. • New visual aids were designed 	<p>Toddlers- Will be supported to settle in and get off to a better start because their parents know the settling-in procedure and can communicate this to their toddler and reassure them. Visual aids are</p>

<p>Speakers of Other Languages, ESOL)</p>	<p>their parents and guardians (who attend ESOL class). Distressed children leads to distressed parents, practitioners, children and environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We identified that our paperwork is too wordy for non-English speaking families. Without visual support parents and guardians do not understand the questions or guidelines and do not comprehend the role of the practitioners. Parents and children need to see what we are talking about. • Children do not get enough support or time to settle in the crèche before their parents leave them. We identified that a familiarisation period is needed to help children settle in the crèche, to familiarise with the environment and build relationships with practitioners. 	<p>for parents and guardians which complement the existing paperwork.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of a 'reality box' aids communication and understanding between practitioners and parents during the settling in period, for example, when talking about complex situations out of context, such as, "does your child have any lumps, bumps or bruises?" "Do you have any concerns about your child's development?" • Paperwork is waiting to be simplified. • Families are requested to attend the 'Stay and Play' sessions while on the waiting list for ESOL class. We would like this to be 'strongly requested' across all AfC Children's Centres. 	<p>instrumental in giving toddlers a voice.</p> <p>Parents- The visual aids support parents understanding of the crèche guidelines and gives them a sense of control about what is happening and are instrumental in giving parents a voice.</p> <p>The visual aids help parents understand what is required from them and they don't feel as helpless or anxious as they did.</p> <p>Parents and children are more familiar with the setting, routine, environment, practitioners etc. Families gain confidence in themselves and in the practitioners caring for their child. Adults and children will enjoy and benefit from socialisation with other families in the centre.</p> <p>Practitioners- Are able to communicate better with parents and guardians, to reassure them through the use of visual aids that their child is safe and their needs will be met in the crèche and if not the practitioner will come and get the parent or guardian.</p> <p>Practice- Practitioners reflect on the pre-requisite of wellbeing and make suggestions to their manager and colleagues about possible continued improvements to the current practice to improve the wellbeing of toddlers and all children and families who attend the crèche to minimise the distress felt and experienced by children their parents and guardians.</p>
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Setting Partner: Escola Bressol Mas Balmanya (SUARA)

Dimension	What brought about the strategy	Implementation	Impact of Strategy
Early Languages	After reading the materials, we saw the need to work more on the richness of our own language. We thought that this could be a good point of departure to engage in training that would teach us strategies for working on the richness of Catalan. The entire team took a training course which taught us how to work on strategies like poems, sayings, proverbs, riddles, etc.	Based on this training, each professional incorporated more work on the language itself into their own way of working by adding poetry readings, sayings and riddles into their daily work with their group.	With the inclusion of language work on a daily basis, the professionals have become more aware of the importance of leaving times and spaces to work on the language more richly as a source of inspiration for the children. Ever since we have started to use these strategies, we have found that the children are showing more curiosity in learning new words, finding out the meaning of the words that appear in some poems that they don't know, and paying more attention when we do more guided activities (such as reading poems, riddles, etc.).
Early Languages	After first working on our own language, we also found the need to work on better incorporating the different languages we had at the school. In order to incorporate them better, we began to translate the stories that we work on regarding the traditions – such as the <i>Castanyera</i> (Chestnut Festival), Christmas, Sant Jordi (feast day of Saint George) – in all the languages found at the school. The first story we translated into all the languages we had at school was the legend of Saint George (Catalan, Spanish, English and Russian).	We displayed this story at the entrance to the library space with the different translations. A few weeks before celebrating the feast day of Saint George, we also sent it by mail to all the families so that they could tell the story at home in their own language.	The families were very pleased to see that we bore in mind the native language of each child and thanked us for the chance to tell the story at home in their own language. The professionals have understood the importance of incorporating the different languages in school, and they continue to look for different strategies to incorporate them, such as inviting a family to tell a story in their language in the classroom... The children showed better knowledge of the tradition and story of Saint

			George, as well as more interest when we spoke about it at school.
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