

**8th report
on 'Free from Bullying'**

**Experiences of using the school suitcase and
the friendship programme 'Better Buddies'**

Stine Lindberg
Katrine Lehrmann
Jan Kampmann



Centre for Childhood, Youth and Family Life Research (CeBUFF)
Roskilde University
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Introduction

This paper is the last report from Roskilde University's follow-up research attached to the Mary Foundation's and Save the Children Denmark's anti-bullying materials and pilot project 'Free from Bullying' (Danish: *Fri for Mobberi*). The research has been financed by Save the Children Denmark and the Mary Foundation in cooperation with the Danish National Federation of Early Childhood Teachers and Youth Educators (BUPL) and the Research and Development Fund of the National Federation of Social Educators (SL).¹

Briefly about Free from Bullying

'Free from Bullying' is the title of a collection of materials aimed at preventing bullying by involving children, parents and adult professionals from preschool and early school years in efforts to create inclusive, secure and 'bullying-free' children's communities. Specifically, the materials come in a suitcase along with a number of described 'social practices', such as a consolation bear, a teacher's booklet on the project's background and another on actual activities, conversation boards for use at children's meetings, a tactile massage programme, dilemma cards to create discussion at teacher-parent meetings, and much more. Initial implementation has taken place in various selected schools and preschools in the three municipalities of Aarhus, Gentofte and Kolding, all part of the pilot project 'Free from Bullying' also followed by a group of researchers from Roskilde University. The undertaking was launched in the beginning of 2007, when it commenced in the six participant preschool centres. In August of that year – at the start of the school year 2007-08 – three schools and attendant after-school centres joined in. After the initial experiences of using the materials had been analysed during the first part of the follow-up research, Save the Children and the Mary Foundation chose to develop a suitcase *specifically* targeted at schools, since the original collection of materials was, in some respects, found to be insufficiently age-appropriate for these relatively older children.

Previous reports from the follow-up research team have covered experiences of using the original materials, now referred to as 'the preschool suitcase', and to some extent the revised materials or 'school suitcase'. However, the research has not merely focused on specific materials and practical experiences thereof, but has also homed in on issues such as implementation processes, project organisation and ownership, status of the project within the municipality and in terms of public administration, teacher-parent cooperation, staff culture, and children's perspectives on teasing and bullying more generally. From the outset, the research follow-up was scheduled to take place during three rounds of empirical data collection throughout the two years of pilot-project implementation. The previous reports present the data collected in this period.

Fourth round

In several respects, this last 8th report differs from those preceding it.

Firstly, the empirical data collection, also referred to as the 'fourth round' and the subsequent reporting fall outside the original pilot project, which was formally concluded with all participant educational institutions and municipalities in April 2009. The reason for adding this fourth round is that the Mary Foundation and Save the Children were interested in learning more about experiences of using the school materials when these had been in use for some time, i.e. since the late boreal

¹ The publications thus far stemming from the follow-up research are available at Save the Children Denmark's website – see www.redbarnet.dk/Default.aspx?ID=8514) – which also has information in English about the project 'Free from Bullying' and its materials at www.redbarnet.dk/Default.aspx?ID=7566

summer of 2008 until the end of that school year in June 2009. This later point of data collection has given the schools a longer period to try out the school suitcase, whose materials differ in many respects from what they originally received and deemed to have room for improvement by adapting it to a school context. The contents of the school suitcase will be described in a later section.

Secondly, the fourth round and this 8th report are different, because – in addition to the three schools participating in the pilot project – it encompasses two new schools, which have invested in the Mary Foundation’s and Save the Children’s materials on their own initiative. These five schools’ experiences of using the materials are presented in the chapter about the school suitcase. Thus, we shall continuously reflect upon how conditions might possibly differ between ‘old’ and ‘new’ schools.² One section will – at least primarily – refer to the situation at the new schools, namely the one concerning implementation and organisation of the project and its materials. As far as the old pilot-project schools are concerned, this issue has already been addressed in previous reports, with which we shall, to some extent, draw parallels in the course of the exposition.

The third factor setting this fourth round apart from those preceding it is that, on this occasion, we have not inquired into the children’s personal experiences of teasing and conflict, but confined our conversation with them to obtaining statements about their assessment of the materials and ‘social practices’ contained in the school suitcase of the Mary Foundation and Save the Children.

Last but not least, this fourth round differs from previous research by focusing in depth – as a special part of the inquiry – on one particular activity featured within the Free from Bullying package, namely the friendship programme ‘Better Buddies’, which is described in a separate booklet contained within the school suitcase. Better Buddies consists in ‘twinning’ a school’s class 5 with a reception class (‘class 0’ in Danish parlance, i.e. first year at school). They conduct activities together, and the pupils are ‘buddied up’ in pairs of one from each age group. In our examination of the quality of this programme, we have interviewed children and adults from both reception class and class 5. Appendix 1 presents the methodological approach and reflections in more detail.

Accordingly, the aim of this report is, firstly, to offer perspectives on the school suitcase and shed light on experiences of using it; and secondly, to investigate how Better Buddies has been implemented in practice at one of the three pilot-project schools. This dual objective has also defined the structure of the report, which basically comprises two chapters, namely ‘The school suitcase’ and ‘Better Buddies’.

The descriptions and analyses are based on qualitative interviews with a total of 56 children from reception class to class 3, as well as with 8 children from class 5. The exact format has been semi-structured group interviews, in which the children from early school years were together two at a time, while the children in class 5 took part as focus groups of four at a time. In addition, 21 adult professionals have been interviewed. Appendix 1 presents a more detailed account of the methodological foundation of the data collection and report.

² Henceforth the denominations of ‘old schools’ and ‘new schools’ are used about those entering the follow-up research process at the outset and at a later stage, respectively. The former will also be referred to as ‘pilot-project schools’.

1. The school suitcase

From preschool suitcase to school suitcase

As mentioned in the introduction, in the course of the pilot project's first year, experiences related to one type of suitcase with its attendant materials and 'social practices'. Since this was found less suitable for school-age children, another collection was prepared, referred to as the school suitcase. Here we shall briefly outline the major differences between the two versions in order to clarify, on the one hand, what the changes consist of, and, on the other, the pedagogical and practical substance that underlies our inquiries to informants. The complete school suitcase contents are listed in Appendix 2, while a qualitative presentation of materials and social practices can be found both in the 2nd report (on the preschool suitcase) and in the Appendix to the 6th report (on the school suitcase).

The main differences between the two versions of the suitcase are the following:

- The conversation boards in the school suitcase depict situations that are typical of the school context, e.g. skipping rope games or football played at breaktime, or children interacting in a classroom, while the conversation boards in the preschool suitcase (of which there are fewer) show pictures from the preschool setting and situations of greater significance to younger children.
- The stories accompanying the massage programme are different in the school and preschool suitcase.
- The preschool suitcase has, in addition to the large purple hand-puppet teddy bear, a number of small teddy bears, which each child can have as a personal 'Buddy Bear'. This idea has been left out of the version for schools, since experience showed that the cuddly toys did not appeal greatly to schoolchildren.
- The book 'Secret Friends' found in the school suitcase, to be read to the children, concerns a school context and is linked to an activity in class, where each child gets a secret friend, to whom they have to direct acts of friendship throughout the week, after which the class must guess who one's secret friend is.
- There is more reading material for the adult professionals in the school suitcase. While the preschool suitcase has one booklet, the school suitcase has split the contents in two, thus: 1) deepening the background booklet, so that it concentrates on theory and guidance regarding the professional educator's organisation, management and implementation; and 2) expanding the practical booklet with a higher number of social practices and activities to underpin work with the children/class as well as cooperation with parents. There is both a description of 'obligatory' parts and a vast series of optional possibilities and suggestions that can be taken up and applied.
- The school suitcase contains some dilemma cards intended for parental involvement, e.g. at teacher-parent meetings. This material has been added to the revised suitcase in response to the follow-up research highlighting special challenges as regards the participation of parents.
- The school suitcase also contains some dilemma cards for the adult professionals aimed at inspiring the staff group to discuss various day-to-day situations and become more aware of each other's various views and needs concerning the handling of bullying and the like. This material has been developed in response to the follow-up research exposing how matters of internal staff relations and institutional culture are a neglected, yet important field in the approach taken by Free from Bullying.

Knowledge, use and assessment of materials in the suitcase

In previous reports – from the 2nd to the 6th – we have minutely described how individual materials have been specifically utilised by participant schools and preschools in the three pilot-project municipalities. Therefore, we shall here primarily chart the overall trends and new experiences gained, while including assessments from the two new schools, which have acquired the suitcase on their own initiative without regular visits from Save the Children and Roskilde University.

Tactile massage

All schools visited and staff interviewed know the tactile massage, and have tried it out in practice. However, *how much* each school and educator have used it does vary. Some have turned it into a regular feature, e.g. as a weekly timetabled event, while others bring it in more sporadically, e.g. when they happen to sense that the children need some diversion or relaxation. A great deal of informants report having used it only a couple of times so far.

In several of the schools, it has been the custom – particularly in the start-up phase – to have two teachers introduce and arrange the massage. Here a class 1 teacher describes the practice and division of tasks:

- ♦ *We've tried the massage when our 'AKT counsellor'³ has visited the class, taking on the role, in the beginning, of reading out the story about the teddy bear arriving in Denmark. Then the pupils have sat in pairs and taken turns to massage each other, while I've stood by the wall showing them how to do it (class 1 teacher at one of the new schools).*

Thus, some schools have found it beneficial to have two to introduce the tactile massage to the children, as it can be difficult to fulfil the various functions of this activity alone, as highlighted by a reception-class teacher:

- ♦ *Well, one might say the disadvantage is I can't see how the children react. I don't have time for that, because I both have to read and do the movements (reception-class teacher at one of the new schools).*

In general, however, the interviewed teachers say that the massage works well, as it is easy to use and does not require any major preparation. This point is stressed by an educator from the after-school centre here:

- ♦ *We've primarily used the massage material, because it's so easy to get on with, and it doesn't take, like, that much preparation. And they [the children] are very fond of it (educator at pilot-project after-school centre).*

There seems to be a consensus that the massage exercises are easy and intuitive to use. A reception-class teacher who had organised massage in another class *before* Free from Bullying was implemented at her school, here recounts her experiences and preferences regarding Free from Bullying's massage programme and the accompanying teddy-bear stories:

- ♦ *I think the massage exercises are great. I've done massage in class for many, many years, but in a different way, normally just with a piece of music, and then I've made up my own*

³ Student-behaviour, child-welfare and special-needs professional attached to many schools in Denmark.

programme without a story. But I actually like this way of doing it with those little stories. They are the ones I've used. And the children are very enthusiastic about it too (reception-class teacher from one of the new schools).

Many interviewees underscore how the children take to it and massage each other keenly and attentively. As a class 1 teacher affirms:

- ♦ *We've done massage every week, and the children are crazy about it [...] It's kind of the high-point of the week, when we get to that* (class 1 teacher at a pilot-project school).

The totality of adult interviewees recount that the children intensely enjoy and immerse themselves in the massage, and they also think the activity has a beneficial effect on the contact and socialising between the children:

- ♦ *I think that this tactile massage thing is fabulous as a tool. [...] When the children massage each other, it creates a very, very pleasant and secure atmosphere. You can feel that on the children in the immediate situation, but also subsequently [...] This thing about being in physical contact with one another helps create a pleasant and secure atmosphere, which I think works in the long run as well* (educator at pilot-project after-school centre).

Thus, according to the professionals, the massage not only sets an agreeable tone in the actual situation, but also promotes the children's wellbeing in the longer term. The physical contact inherent in the massage concept is described by many interviewees as an important encounter of trust-building and empathy:

- ♦ *I think it's good that mutual trust is organised in that way. [...] When the children sit so close together and are responsible for making it nice for the other person and not making it hurt. [...] I think that builds a good foundation for talking about the class's social life* (class 1 teacher from a pilot-project school).

Thus, there is a perception that the massage situation fosters an empathic sense of responsibility among the children, as they learn to decode each other's body language. This is verbalised as an observation that the massage constitutes an important springboard towards undertaking further dialogue on social and emotional aspects in the class. Indeed, the ability to decipher the children's immediate reactions and follow up the social and emotional experiences brought about by the massage is generally perceived as a significant instrument in setting up conversations about the children's behaviour and social wellbeing:

- ♦ *The massage takes you through some emotional aspects in an entirely different manner, and it is absolutely concrete, including when it comes to having a talk about it afterwards. "Why did you make that face?" "Well, that was because it was too hard". [...] So it becomes sort of very, very concrete about the here and now* (educator at pilot-project after-school centre).

As can be seen here, the massage often serves as an opportunity to talk about the ongoing interactions playing out between the children, and it holds potential in terms of generating mutual understanding of specific emotional relations brought to the surface by the massage situation. A corresponding assessment is here phrased by a class 2 teacher:

- ♦ *When we're together in the massage, something personal takes place. I think it's learning at a deeper level (class 2 teacher at a pilot-project school).*

The fundamental perception is that the togetherness around the massage induces experience and learning at a personal and emotional level, which – as formulated in the quote – is assimilated at a deeper level. A class 3 teacher exemplifies how this more profound educational dimension is manifested in practice:

- ♦ *Well, I had two students in my class who called each other 'enemies'. They now get along better. And I firmly believe this has something to do with the massage, the fact that they were sitting there massaging each other (class 3 teacher at one of the new schools).*

Thus, the interview data tells us that the massage in particular is seen by the vast majority as effective in reducing conflicts and tendencies towards bullying. This is reflected in the children's socialising and wellbeing. The teachers' depiction of how the children experience the massage largely matches what we have been told by the children themselves. All interviewed children are able to refer to the massage sessions and to describe exactly how it is performed, and many also talk about the teddy-bear stories accompanying the programme. The vast majority of children say that it is pleasant both to give and receive massage. Here two reception-class pupils convey together their experience of the massage:

A: I think it's fun, and it's also quite nice.

B: Yeah, there's no-one who says it isn't nice. Everyone thinks it's nice.

A: Yeah, and after you become kind of... well, everyone thinks it's totally nice, and then you can hardly do anything (two reception-class pupils).

When we asked why they are in fact supposed to massage each other, one child answered:

- ♦ *It's because ... we're having a good time. And then we also learn some more about bullying by listening to those stories. Because there's something about a bear and a crab, who are very lonely (reception-class pupil).*

This view is borne out by two children from class 1:

- ♦ *B: I think it's because we have to... that it's to have a good time. [...] And then we become good friends.*
- ♦ *A: And you also have to kind of train your muscles, and it's quite pleasant.*
- ♦ *B: And you have to learn to be nice to others (two class 1 pupils).*

Nevertheless, there are a few children who are less fond of the massage. They have felt that the touching can be too hard. A child from class 3 here explains how the massage can affect the mood:

- ♦ *Say I'm really annoyed with Johan, and then I suddenly get a massage, then I start thinking nice thoughts and relax more. If I get a hard massage instead, I just get even angrier (class 3 pupil).*

In other words, it does matter if one's partner has the knack of it or not!

Dilemma cards

The dilemma cards, which come in one version for parents and another for adult professionals, have not been used to any major extent at any of the schools visited. Only a handful of interviewees reveal knowledge of the possibilities and functions of this material. However, many say that they do indeed *intend* to use the dilemma cards for parents, but merely have not done so yet, among other reasons due to lack of time:

- ♦ *I had a teacher-parent meeting where I'd actually planned to use those parental situation cards, but we never got around to it, since there was lots of other stuff which took up more time than expected at the meeting. So we left without having used them* (class teacher of a class 1 at one of the new schools).

Among the few who have used the dilemma cards is an AKT counsellor (see footnote 3) from one of the new schools, who here sums up the first experiences of using them at a teacher-parent meeting:

- ♦ *Well, on that one occasion it worked well. Especially if you have a class where the parents are different from one another, then it's something good to gather around* (AKT counsellor at one of the new schools).

A reception-class teacher, who has tried out the dilemma cards with colleagues in connection with Save the Children's and the Mary Foundation's course, offers this assessment of their potential:

- ♦ *I think it's a great opportunity to get a conversation going, where everyone has a chance to express their view without anyone else commenting on it – until the next round. Just imagine having to keep quiet when you're provoked by someone else's opinion. This did in fact step over the line for me in some respects, in a good way, that is* (reception-class teacher at one of the new schools).

Thus, the dilemma cards are seen in particular as a medium suitable for airing various views without interruption, subsequently exchanging arguments. Those relatively few interviewees, who have so far become acquainted with the cards and used them in practice, perceive them as a good tool to involve the group of parents in discussing bullying-related issues.

As mentioned, the visited schools' use of the dilemma cards has yet to really take off. However, many express that this is an area that they would like to work on in the future. For instance, the director of an after-school centre says:

- ♦ *So one could say that we've made a lot of headway in using the suitcase with the children, but we haven't got very far at all in relation to parents. [...] I'm saying this as a general assessment* (director of a pilot-project after-school centre).

As we have stressed in previous reports, parental involvement seems to be a never-ending challenge, and not just something that occurs automatically. In other words, our numerous interviews show that engaging parents has tended not to be a major priority. But at the same time, a majority emphasise the importance of getting parents more on board, pointing particularly to this as a future area of intervention for them. This is a trend observed throughout the two years of the pilot project, where the issue has been raised and debated at recurrent feedback events and the like. A couple of professionals from the pilot-project schools manifest their plan to address cooperation

with parents more systematically from the next school year onwards. Nevertheless, the fundamental overall impression from the interviews is that there is no striking difference between the pilot-project schools and the new schools as regards the approach to cooperation with parents and use of the Mary Foundation's and Save the Children's materials in this field.

Conversation boards

After the message, the conversation boards are the most frequently used practice – by old as well as new schools. There are exceptions, however, as a few report having used them sparingly or not at all, while a few others have very deliberately deselected them, considering their own material to be better.

The overall assessment of the conversation boards is positive – in regard to form as well as function. For instance, there is general satisfaction with the actual pictures. This stems from the fact that the drawings have been adapted to schoolchildren as an improvement on the original suitcase, and since this was (partly) prompted by the same interviewees' responses in the first part of the follow-up research, one reason for their contentment is precisely that they feel listened to, having influenced the product and assumed greater ownership of this material. Of course, without knowing the original suitcase, the new schools do not have this basis for comparison, and so their positive assessment cannot have anything to do with this relative improvement. On the other hand, we notice that Free from Bullying is frequently matched up to a resource called 'Step by Step' (in Danish: *Trin for Trin*), which also addresses (school)children's social relations, empathy, caring etc. This comparison is applied both to the conversation boards (as can be seen in a quote below) and to the suitcase contents as a whole.

Through the interviews with adult professionals, we have obtained various comments and assessments regarding the conversation boards. For instance, one informant says she finds that the pictures enable the children to talk about experiences at their own level. She mentions how the children are able to link their own memories of breaktimes to what goes on in the pictures:

- *There is this picture of a boy who wants to join the girls' skipping rope game. And when we get to talk about it, there are several boys – including some of those who act a little tough – who come forth and say "I like to go and play with the girls too", and that makes it sort of more okay for everybody* (class teacher of a class 1 at one of the new schools).
- *I think there are some good pictures which show what the children think and feel, right? How are they, those kids? And they have the grounding already.* [This refers to the children working in parallel with the aforementioned 'Step by Step', where one task is to decode the depicted children's facial expressions]. *Otherwise they'd probably also get it by just sitting down and talking about it, because the signs that you can see in the pictures are clear, I think. Those children on the boards show some good facial expressions and body positions* (reception-class teacher at one of the new schools).
- *They are easy, they are easily recognisable, I mean. Almost all the children have gone through something similar. [...] They constantly put themselves into it. Then again, I think they're very good at saying 'the right thing'* (educator at after-school centre of one of the new schools).

On the other hand, there is also more critical feedback about the conversation boards. This concerns the situations in the pictures and the accompanying questions being too 'far-fetched' or 'educationalising', as some put it:

- *The conversation boards, they're alright, I mean, it sometimes gets a little far-fetched, I think, because the message might as well be painted in ten-foot-high letters, right?* (assistant teacher at a pilot-project school).
- *You can easily get enough of all that 'educationalising' with the children, I think. It sounds a little blunt, right, but... I have tried those conversations boards. And the kids, you know, they talk back to you in 'education-speak'. Because they just get so linguistically stimulated with all that stuff, and I think it's fine, it's good, I don't think we should stop doing it, but it's just so easy to hear if they've used the pictures at school as well. Then it simply becomes a question of coming up with the 'correct' answer rather than learning anything from it and understanding the context and what goes on emotionally* (educator at pilot-project after-school centre).

The above comments are particularly related to the actual practice and the questions on the back of the boards, but one interviewee is more critical towards the images as such:

- *My reservation may have to do with the drawings seeming a little cartoon-like and with a little ambiguity in the facial expressions. Of course, you can build a discussion around it, but they are not that clear... compared to photographs, right? They are not unequivocal and decipherable, we think. There's room for discussion, and that's fine, but then again, is it really? Is this what the children need? And this is where I think that, say, in the facial expressions of photographed children, it can be fairly clear who's happy, annoyed, sad, that is, real situations. I mean, the children can still see it, but it doesn't go as deep as a photo would, because a photo is reality* (educator at after-school centre of one of the new schools).

It is also mentioned as a disadvantage that the conversation-board pictures turn everyday situations and conflicts into dilemmas and problems:

- *And that's when I think: should this be turned into a dilemma, or what? [...] All play situations involve a certain casting of roles and that's every day. It's constant. So then everything can be turned into a dilemma* (educator at after-school centre of one of the new schools).
- *It's kind of very problem-oriented, and when there's kind of no problem, it bothers me. I mean, in that case I'd prefer to see a more positive approach to it* (reception-class teacher from one of the new schools).

According to the adult professionals, the children react to the conversation boards, on the one hand, by exhibiting great concentration and attention – a reception-class teacher, for instance, says that *the children can really feel how those in the pictures feel* – and, on the other, by perceiving the questions as if they formed part of the school curriculum and came with a 'correct' answer.

Nonetheless, beyond these various views, the vast majority see the conversation boards as a good foundation to set up a conversation on particular subjects along with the pupils. Many also highlight the advantage of addressing situations that are, in fact, not personal to the pupils, but general and hence separate from ongoing and acute conflicts within the group of children.

It is clear that the conversation boards are used in a wide variety of ways, which can most certainly be characterised as a strength. At the same time, however, it may be important to emphasise that the pictures are not intended solely as a springboard for solving specific conflicts or problems, but just as much as an aid for the children, along with the adult professional, to be able to talk about day-to-day experiences of social relations within the group of children, just as the first interview quotes clearly reflect. Consequently, what matters is not whether they depict emotions more or less unequivocally or if they present a dilemma, but rather if they are fruitful in triggering important conversations with the children about associations that the pictures evoke in relation to the children's own universe of experience. This more open approach to the use of the conversation boards might also contribute to lessening the perception that the children relate 'instrumentally' to this tool in terms of coming to believe that there are 'correct' and 'incorrect' answers.

We have also asked the children directly about their knowledge and experience of the conversation boards. Their feedback was somewhat less detailed and evaluative than what the adults expressed above. For instance, we inquired into how the pictures were used in class. Some told us that they had to come up with a good and a bad end to the issues portrayed.

In the main, their opinion was along the lines of 'it's alright'. However, it might be more illustrative of how the children have perceived the conversation boards to reproduce a few quotes. These are statements of class 3 pupils at one of the new schools:

- *They also showed a picture of football, where they were teasing him just because they lost, because... no, he's upset with them just because they lost, because he says he's so bad. It touches you deep in your heart!*
- *You can feel what they feel in the picture, the one who's getting bullied.*
- *It's because we have to learn something about 'Free from Bullying', and it helps if she shows us those pictures... how sad you can become if someone bullies you.*
- *Well, yes, our teacher shows them to us, and then we have to make some stories that fit. What we think it's about maybe.*
(Children from class 3 at one of the new schools.)

A high number of interviewed children refer to the conversation boards as a kind of task that they have to solve together, i.e. where the teacher knows the answer. This in line with the point also made by several adult professionals as quoted above.

Background booklet and activity booklet

It appears that the amount of reading matter for adult professionals is, for a great deal of them, too overwhelming and time-consuming. Many say that they do not have the time to read it, which is why they start out with the materials with which they are familiar, for instance from the introduction at the Mary Foundation's and Save the Children's course. Accordingly, only a handful of the interviewed educators have actually read through the entire booklets. However, most have read *something* in them, while a few have avoided them altogether. Clearly, interest in the written materials depends on whether the teachers feel they have the time and energy. However, it may also have to do with (lack of) knowledge of what they will find in the booklets and their assessment of how important it is to study their contents.

Children's meeting

This activity is not referred to by the interviewed staff as 'children's meeting' or 'pupils' meeting', but it is clear that it is practised. For example, it is often on such an occasion that the conversation boards, massage and perhaps the teddy bear are used. A class 3 pupil at one of the new schools here recounts how the children's meeting works:

- ♦ *I think it's nice that we can sit and talk about things, about what happens at breaktime and stuff like that. And then instead of spending lessons the whole week talking about the conflicts, we can talk about them on the day when we've got this thing. And that's often late on in the week, because by then there have certainly been the most quarrels. And then we can talk it through, about how it started, and when, and who... (class 3 pupils at one of the new schools).*

Buddy Bear

Not everybody actively uses the actual teddy bear, but there is clearly *knowledge* of 'Buddy Bear' among everybody, children as well as adults. On the one hand, it is a symbol of Free from Bullying depicted on the suitcase and booklets; on the other, it features in the stories accompanying the tactile massage, which every school has tried out.

A typical way of using the cuddly toy, first and foremost in the pilot-project schools, is to let the children take it home. A reception-class teacher, for instance, tells how they use their little teddy bear (i.e. one of those from the original suitcase, which they had received at the beginning) as a visiting friend, while the large purple one is used as a consolation bear in class, a function that is typical, including in the new schools. A general characteristic of the new schools, however, is that they struggle somewhat to figure out how to use the bear more actively. An educator from an after-school centre recounts, for instance, that the staff group has been much in doubt about how to bring the small teddy bears into play (they had thus far invested in the preschool suitcase), and had yet to arrive at an answer. The confusion arising from not knowing how exactly to utilise a resource has, at best, the advantage of provoking discussion among the personnel. At worst, they lose patience and cast it aside.

A reception-class teacher at one of the new schools explains that she has used Buddy Bear very little, because she has not really *taken to it*. However, this stems from a very practical concern. In the beginning, a single suitcase was bought for both reception classes, hence obliging them to share the teddy bear, which had to 'live' outside in the corridor. This is obviously contrary to establishing ownership and familiarity with the material, which is what the same reception-class teacher has achieved with the figures from the aforementioned 'Step by Step', namely a snail and a dog (*Stop-op-sneglen* and *Hurtighunden*), which – according to her – offer greater interaction and dynamics:

- ♦ *In 'Step by Step' it has just worked wonders with those two. But they've had a kind of function. One always says the right thing, thinks everything through, and makes all the right reflections, whereas the other is naughty and horrible. This creates more interaction. You can't do that with the teddy bear (reception-class teacher at one of the new schools).*
- ♦ *The snail and the dog, included as puppets with the 'Step by Step' teaching aid, come with these little role plays. And you might consider making this for Buddy Bear. So that he's really involved, and isn't just a nice chap supposed to give comfort. Yeah, I mean, I don't think we've really taken to him that much (reception-class teacher at one of the new schools).*

In addition to the above reservations – and that she and her colleague find the purple colour to be silly – the teachers applaud the idea of using a teddy bear. This is echoed by the principal from one of the new schools:

- *I've only heard the odd remark here and there. That it's good, that it captivates the kids. And that this caring thing with the teddy bear is a brilliant idea. So I've only heard positive comments about the materials (principal from one of the new schools).*

Several children also talk about a teddy bear and how they use it, but they don't offer an assessment on a par with, for instance, the massage and the conversation boards. It seems to play a more peripheral role, probably because it does not feature as an actual 'activity'. The children, however, refer a great deal to the stories from the massage featuring Buddy Bear. These clearly sink deeper into the children's minds than the actual cuddly toy. This might have to do with children's memories being particularly affected by bodily experience. Accordingly, the bodily or kinaesthetic sense plays a far from trivial role, and incorporating work at this level might well – as presumed – have a preventative effect against bullying.

The following quotes are from a pair of reception-class pupils from one of the new schools, whose teacher has told us of her difficulties in integrating the use of the teddy bear, which she has not used a great deal. Nevertheless, as revealed in the statements of the two children, it has made a certain impression:

A: *We have a teddy bear, which our teacher uses with her hand, saying "hello" with it, when we sit down for our morning song.*

B: *Yeah, it's really funny.*

A: *That was after the morning song.*

B: *Yeah, and then we were allowed to touch it and say hello to it.*

(Two reception-class pupils from one of the new schools.)

... And we've also had that teddy bear, which flies away [reference to massage story] [...] It makes you happy. It makes you happy, because the children really like to try and touch it and all kinds of stuff (boy from reception-class at one of the new schools).

B: *Yes, she speaks for it.*

A: *She does like this (imitates a high-pitched voice).*

B: *And then she puts her hand into it.*

A: *(Continues to squeak.)*

B: *No, she really talks.*

A: *Yes, I know that, of course, I'm just saying that thing.*

B: *It was just sort of... It almost sounded like a sea lion.*

(Reception-class pupils from one of the new schools.)

B: *Then you can take it up, and then we can squeeze it a bit, or we put it on our hands. I squeeze it and put it on my hand as well.*

A: *Yeah, every time it comes, we can hug it and say hello, but it's up to us. Either say hello either hug, either both things!*

(Reception-class pupils from one of the new schools.)

Postcards and stickers

The postcards and stickers inside the suitcase have been used by few, and these are all staff from the pilot-project schools (as described in previous reports). A major disadvantage of these is that they are ‘one-off’ materials, which need to be re-ordered if running out. Anyway, thus far, the personnel at the new school are slightly puzzled as to how they should use it, or they express outright opposition, as in the words of this reception-class teacher:

- *I don't think the stickers and postcards are very relevant. No, I really don't. It's just some kind of PR stuff. [...] It's not something that I'm keen on at all. It's just some kind of filling* (reception-class teacher at one of the new schools).

The less-than-clear purpose of the stickers is also expressed in this quote from a class 1 pupil in one of the pilot-project schools. She narrates an episode which earned her a sticker:

A: We haven't used those. Only in reception class, when we went with the parallel reception class to the sports centre. We were supposed to sit together one from reception class A with another from reception class B, and not two from class A together, and not two from class B, that wasn't allowed. [...] And then someone came and said something to us. And there she was bullied by a girl. And then we got a sticker.

Interviewer: *Why did you get a sticker?*

A: We don't know (girl from class 1 at a pilot-project school).

However, in the reception classes of the pilot-project schools, some children have tried to get a sticker and be fully aware why:

- *It's if we help someone out there at breaktimes, if someone cries, then you go up and comfort them, and then you get a sticker* (reception-class pupil from a pilot-project school).

This way of using the stickers – as a system of rewards – has been described in a previous report, and is not a novelty. In short, this round of data collection finds no additional experiences involving the stickers and postcards, and among the adult professionals who did not form part of the pilot project, there is a degree of uncertainty as regards their use. This might be partly due to staff not having carefully read the guiding booklet, but in some cases outright reluctance is also a factor.

CD with anti-bullying song

The reception of the CD and song material is mixed. Most interviewees have no experience of this part of the suitcase, and if they do, it is first and foremost something used by the children on their own, i.e. without being scheduled by the adults. A reception-class teacher at one of the new schools is positive towards the song material, and would like to see more of its kind in the suitcase, especially if it is ‘singable’, she stresses:

- *The children love the song. I don't. But the children do. And that's what they ask about: "Shouldn't we listen to it?" Spontaneously, right?! You have to say that's giving it top marks, don't you think?* (reception-class teacher at one of the new schools).
- *More songs could be composed. Because songs, I think, work well, and it's a good way to learn. Kind of songs with lyrics where the children can sing along, that is, along with a*

teacher aged over 25 (slight laughter). No, that's not fair, I don't mind a little rap music. But I mean, I don't find it very singable, apart from the refrain. So more songs would have been good (reception-class teacher at one of the new schools).

Other assessments of the school suitcase and of Free from Bullying

The interviews with children and adults not only reveal experiences of individual materials as examined above, but also bring up myriad aspects of Free from Bullying in general. Some of these will be briefly outlined here.

In the introductory part of our interviews with children, we have inquired into what Free from Bullying really is. In their responses, the children have not described a project or set of materials – which is what we would instinctively associate with the Free from Bullying – but rather a code of conduct. They recount – almost every single one of them – that it is about how to behave towards one another: that you should not bully (a conclusion rather evident from the title), that you should be good to others, that you should tell an adult if there is a conflict you cannot solve on your own, that you should not mock others, point fingers at them, etc. It is clear that the children's statements spring from conversations in class with their teacher.

- *You have to be good to one another and to those you keep out of the game. Then you have to say: "Come here, it's okay if you play with us"* (reception-class pupil at a pilot-project school).

Interestingly, several children were at first unable to describe the materials, as they did not associate the suitcase and its contents with Free from Bullying. The connection did not occur to them until we asked about their knowledge of the message or whether they had seen the special suitcase and conversation boards. Otherwise, they did not necessarily link the materials to the title of 'Free from Bullying'.

An aspect related to the perceived purpose of Free from Bullying, which surfaced in an interview with some class 3 pupils from one of the new schools, was their feeling that it was first and foremost the teacher's desire that the children in the class should get along. We asked what the point of the suitcase materials was, and they answered:

B: It's because sometimes we have conflicts in the class, and then [our teacher] Tina tries to...

A (interrupts): Sometimes? We have got a lot!

B: Yeah (laughs). And then Tina tries to put a stop to it. Because she wants us to get along in our class, and not continue to quarrel and spend most of the time in every lesson on that.

(Class 3 pupils from one of the new schools.)

In the interview with their class teacher, it transpired that this class was considered to have a problematic social atmosphere. This perception has clearly been passed on to the children, who reproduced it when referring repeatedly to troubles in their class, and hence to a great need for Free from Bullying. However, on a final note, they found – in contrast to their teacher – that the mood in class had already improved after they had started to work systematically on the atmosphere, social manners and mutual tolerance using the materials of Free from Bullying.

One of the two children quoted above also says:

- *Yes, it has actually helped a little bit since we began. I mean, I remember there were lots of conflicts back then. There were some who didn't show concern for others and just didn't care and all kinds of stuff. But when it [Free from Bullying] began, and we got to know what was actually going on and stuff like that, and talked about it properly, and talked about how it could be stopped, then it actually started to improve, because people... I won't mention any names, but there were some who'd stop to think once more sometimes, and that would end it so that no conflict would break out anymore (class 3 pupil from one of the new schools).*

Another prominent issue in the abundant interview data is the children's focus on Crown Princess Mary. This is particularly the case at the pilot-project schools, which have been paid a royal visit, sending the whole school into frenzied excitement, but a couple of reception-class pupils from one of the new schools were also aware of the connection between the materials and the royal family:

B: Yes, Princess Mary, she has also been helping to make that suitcase.

A: Yeah, and Queen Margaret, she helped to make that rule, you know, called 'Free from Bullying' (reception-class pupils from one of the new schools).

Implementation, organisation and ownership at the new schools

At the two schools which had requested participation in Free from Bullying on their own initiative, it was clear that a few individuals had been – or still were – the driving force in implementing, organising and assuming ownership of the materials. At both schools, the principal's role was confined to approving that a number of teachers attended the Mary Foundation's and Save the Children's course, and that the school invested in the materials.

School A

At one of the new schools, the materials had been in use since the boreal autumn of 2008. The process of procurement and implementation took place in the following manner:

One of the school's AKT counsellors (see footnote 3) first picked up the scent of Free from Bullying via a Google search, reading about it on Save the Children's website. Subsequently, along with his AKT colleague, he ordered the suitcase. After finding that the materials worked well, they asked their principal for permission to attend a course held by the Mary Foundation and Save the Children. This was back in October, long before the realisation of a municipality-wide meeting of school principals, at which a representative of one of the pilot-project schools promoted the materials. On this the AKT counsellor says:

- *No, it was long before that. At that time I didn't know that [the pilot-project school] took part in the pilot project. So it was sheer intuition (laughs) (AKT counsellor).*

After this leaders' meeting, the school's management was truly alerted to the materials. Combined with the AKT counsellors' encouragement, it prompted the school to invest in more suitcases and courses for the staff responsible for early school years. From the principal's perspective, this is how it went:

- ♦ *This material that we used to use – ‘Step by Step’ and various circle-time methods – was seeming somehow worn out. So the sudden arrival of something new came at a convenient time. And the people who’d checked it out a bit and read about this thing [a reference to the AKT counsellors] thought the materials were great. And the principal from the [pilot-project school] took it along to a meeting of school managers, going through everything from the moment they started to consider it and explaining what it was... until the time when it really makes an impact. [...] Yes, this gave us the push to think that we had to try it out too (school principal).*

Another management perspective has been concern for the school’s public image, wishing to raise the profile of the institution by jumping on this latest bandwagon:

- ♦ *I think it’s good to advertise to teachers, pupils as well as parents that when we have a policy saying “we do not tolerate bullying”, then we also have to try to take part in some of those new ideas. And then this thing is such an obvious choice (principal).*

After taking the decision, a suitcase was bought for each of the three reception classes. Training was provided for all three reception-class teachers and for one teacher from each of the other early school years (i.e. class 1, class 2 and class 3). Furthermore, the after-school centre was also involved, receiving one preschool suitcase.

- ♦ *They’re running a process prior to early school years [this is a reference to the municipality’s ‘Smooth Transition’ programme, which deals with starting school, carried out in cooperation between preschools, after-school centres and schools], and then the intention is that the reception-class teacher should continue this way of thinking (principal).*

In consideration of young children’s ‘Smooth Transition’ and to avoid repetition when the materials were to be used in school, the preschool rather than the school suitcase was chosen for the after-school centre. Nevertheless, an educator from the centre expressed certain misgivings with this decision, explaining that the staff group would like to invest in the school suitcase as well.

At school A, the management has played the role of approving in-service training, but has otherwise not acquired major knowledge of the materials. It is the school’s AKT counsellors and – gradually over time – also representatives of staff responsible for early school years who sustain Free from Bullying.

School B

At school B, it was one of the two reception-class teachers who took the initiative to obtain the Free from Bullying suitcase. The other reception-class teacher recounts the process here:

- ♦ *It’s because we’d decided to dedicate some weeks to the pupils’ interpersonal skills to improve our social life, so to speak. So this includes the whole school in the autumn when we hold this interpersonal-skills week. It started last year when all classes worked on it. And then [my colleague] Jeanne, who is good at checking out stuff on her computer, had discovered that there was something called ‘Free from Bullying’. They let us attend a course in Jutland, because... otherwise there wouldn’t be time for it before our week. So in this sense our principal is quite open-minded. So we went there and got an introduction to the suitcase. Before that we’d worked with ‘Step by Step’ for several years too (reception-class teacher).*

As stated, a special theme week had been scheduled for October 2008, and it seemed an obvious idea to involve Free from Bullying. During that week, the reception classes worked together with the classes 1 in mixed groups, i.e. a total of four classes used the materials. However, since then, the suitcase has only been opened in the reception classes, and this is why we have only interviewed children and adults from this year level at the school. Apart from approving course participation, the management has not exerted any influence, and has only heard about the materials from the two reception-class teachers. Accordingly, the principal has no practical knowledge of, or any significant commitment to, Free from Bullying which, at this school, is sustained exclusively by the two reception-class teachers. They explain that they would like to see more staff getting involved, but they have not reflected deeply on organisational concerns in this regard, and have only talked informally with colleagues about it. However, one interviewee mentions that it would be valuable if other school employees *also* attended the course, instead of its substance being disseminated internally:

- *I've suggested that those from the after-school centre should do the course as well. And I've also suggested that the class 1 teacher go on it too. Because we can't pass it on in the same manner as when you arrive in a group somewhere else. And we don't have a forum either, where you can say stuff like: "we know a lot that you don't" (laughs). Perhaps we could teach the others if we spent a whole day on it, but it would be better if they did the course themselves (reception-class teacher).*

It is hardly surprising that there is a difference between the new and the old schools precisely as regards implementation and ownership of Free from Bullying. While the pilot-project schools were selected to use the Free from Bullying suitcase, the new schools have obtained it on their own initiative, because one or two persons discovered the materials, studied its contents and made an effort to get the school to buy suitcases and send people on the course. However, the tendency of particular individuals to act as the driving force is not unique to the new schools. It is also a pronounced characteristic of the organisation at the pilot-project schools, where more or less voluntary 'coordinators' took charge of a major part of the process of assuming ownership, attended the recurrent 'relay meetings' (municipalities taking turns to host the event), etc. We have previously problematised the fact that certain individuals – the 'activists' or 'torchbearers' – end up with sole responsibility for continuing the work undertaken, since it makes the project's institutional foundation more vulnerable.

One of the differences that we noticed between the new and old schools was the degree of commitment and familiarity with the materials. Since knowledge of Free from Bullying materials might be expected to be significantly greater at the pilot-project schools, it was surprising to discover that this was far from always the case. On the contrary, we noticed that several staff members at the new schools had read the teacher's booklets in considerably greater detail and signalled stronger commitment, despite having worked less time with Free from Bullying.

This could precisely have to do with the procurement of the Free from Bullying materials taking place on these schools' own initiative and in response to their own decision and desire to embark on work with this resource. This was less straightforward when the pilot project was initially launched by three schools and six preschools, since it came about through mediation of the local municipalities and similar types of pressure. Accordingly, while the new schools have assumed ownership of the initiative from the outset, expressing a rather unreserved interest in getting

involved and in using the materials, this was a more complex process for several of the pilot-project schools, where ownership was, in several places, only genuinely felt far into the implementation period.

However, at both types of school, it is considered to be difficult to spread ownership to colleagues who have not been on the course and who have not been designated any particular coordinating function.

Noticing the effects

Virtually all the adult professionals interviewed attest that they have a feeling and a belief that Free from Bullying works, though many hesitate to flesh out the actual effects and highlight specific examples from day-to-day school life:

- ♦ *It's a difficult thing to measure, right? [...] But I do believe that it works. I just can't say "this and that has just worked"* (class 1 teacher at pilot-project school).

Responding to our question of whether Free from Bullying has an effect in the day-to-day, an educator at an after-school centre answers along the same lines:

- ♦ *It surely has a contributory effect, but it forms part of a hundred other things that you do already. [...] It's one piece in a big game, and it's a strong piece... but again, there's nothing that can stand alone* (educator at a pilot-project after-school centre).

A colleague from another school supplements this:

- ♦ *I can't put it down to that particular suitcase from Free from Bullying, because we've focused a lot on this whole issue. I mean, where Free from Bullying has been one part of the palette* (assistant teacher at a pilot-project school).

As illustrated by these quotes, it is generally difficult to pinpoint specific effects of these particular materials, not least because Free from Bullying exists enmeshed in many other day-to-day measures taken at the schools. Nevertheless, everybody presumes that it works both in the short and the long term. There are also a great deal of interviewees who stress the word 'hope' in this respect. Some point to the need for more organisational measures for the effect to be truly realised. Thus, many professionals insist that Free from Bullying needs to be even more systematised (at the individual school), so that its principles and specific usage become second nature to as many people as possible. An AKT counsellor (see footnote 3) at one of the new schools put it this way:

- ♦ *They need to have it as a ritual, every single week at the same hour they need a dose of it. [...] It has to be on all the time to make an impact, no doubt about it* (AKT counsellor at one of the new schools).

Keeping a continuous focus on efforts to improve the children's social wellbeing is significant not just for the children's interaction, but also as a means of enhancing the adult professionals' reflections and knowledge. A class 1 teacher at a pilot-project school says:

- ♦ *I think it bears fruit all the time. It has exploded a lot of myths for us and we've seen things with much more professional eyes. This has probably been the greatest 'aha!' experience for*

me and for us. It's that knowledge about bullying and teasing which has been really good to get in this way (class 1 teacher at a pilot-project school).

Similarly, an after-school centre manager here reflects on the effect which she finds that Free from Bullying has had on her and the colleagues:

- *We have been more alert to what really goes on. Is it teasing for fun or is it with serious intent? And is it systematic? [...] So it has drawn our attention towards questions such as: What's going on right there? And what exactly is it that we accept at this place? [...] So I reckon we're one step ahead. The leash may have become shorter, and we can intervene somewhat earlier. So yes! It's certainly my hope that it reduces conflicts. I also believe that it does (director of a pilot-project after-school centre).*

This director finds that Free from Bullying has triggered some important reflections in the staff group, and she is one of many who, as mentioned, both hope and believe that the materials work. When the adults talk about a factor as uncertain as 'hope', this is obviously because they have yet to see the long-term effect, and they cannot substantiate their intuitive beliefs with documented facts.

Thus, on the face of it, it is not easy to discern the direct effect of the work with Free from Bullying. Nevertheless, numerous interviewed adult professionals point out that the children have become more self-reliant as regards conflict resolution, seeing this as a result of using the materials. An assistant teacher at one of the pilot-project schools explains how she notices this effect in the children's social life:

- *What I observe is that the children have acquired a tool both to say "stop" to each other and to help each other to say: "that's crossing the line" or "that wasn't quite alright". I think so. And after the massage sessions and the picture talks they feel much more like a community. The practical situations mean that some barriers are broken down. And this is where I notice a difference between now and when we began one year ago. [...] They've got more room for each other. They've got some tools to talk about the situations themselves when they enter into conflict (assistant teacher at a pilot-project school).*

As recounted by this interviewee, and as highlighted in a previous report, the staff first and foremost notice the effect of Free from Bullying in terms of the children commanding an array of tools to handle conflicts. This does not necessarily entail fewer conflicts. In this connection, a class 1 teacher from a pilot-project school reflects on the value of conflicts. Asked whether she believes Free from Bullying can minimise or reduce those, she answers:

- *But fundamentally I believe that conflict is something positive. I mean, bullying should not be tolerated, but conflict is just a part of human beings interacting with each other, and I think that if you look at conflict as an opportunity to learn from each other, then you come out of it a better person. So I don't know... I actually hope not. [...] No, I don't think it can reduce the number of conflicts, but I do believe it can improve their quality (class 1 teacher at a pilot-project school).*

The effect of Free from Bullying is perceived, on the one hand, as a tool at the children's disposal, and, on the other, as a theoretical foundation for essential and capacity-developing reflections among the professionals.

Summing up

There seems to be great variation in how often and thoroughly the three pilot-project schools and two new schools work on the materials from the school suitcase. At one school, where normal schedules are frequently suspended to make room for project weeks, the use of Free from Bullying appears to be especially sporadic or ad hoc, though this feature is not *exclusively* confined to that particular school. At another school, for instance, a teacher mentions that she prefers to use the suitcase as a situational tool rather than as a fixed event. This view of the suitcase contents (no need for regular usage) is at odds with the staff's other point that the materials have to be used continuously and systematically for them to make an impact, i.e. there is a mismatch between practice on the ground and well-intentioned thinking about the long-term nature of such materials and their effect. Part of the problem is ascribed by the staff to a lack of time and resources.

Our interviews with educational staff indicate that they still have poor knowledge of the materials targeted at adults rather than children, whether it be the parents or the professionals themselves. However, most of them are positive towards measures to improve cooperation with parents, whereas they have limited desire and little immediate intention to work with internal aspects of staff relations and institutional culture. This trend is hardly novel, but has been observed throughout the pilot project. Accordingly, the issue has been addressed in previous reports.

Our overall impression of the children's perception is clearly that the materials have succeeded in targeting the intended age group. On this point the adult professionals speak in unison, affirming that the children participate keenly and attentively, which is borne out by the interviews with children. It applies particularly to the massage, but – according to the vast majority – the conversation boards appeal to schoolchildren too.

The general perception is that these are good materials. As reasons for this, the adult professionals state that they are practical, concrete and easy to use. This manifestation coincides with the recognition that the educators first and foremost use the most tangible parts of the materials. Conversely, we notice that those activities which are more complicated and require more thorough reading of the booklets have thus far been tried out only minimally. This applies primarily to the new schools. The old schools have evidently gained experience of a wider array of materials by virtue of their participation in the pilot project.

Moreover, many interviewees refer to the advantage of being able to fit the materials into any given context, stressing that each professional can mould and refine the suitcase contents at will. This must be considered as praise for the Mary Foundation's and Save the Children's proposition, which one reception-class leader describes as: *Take what you can use, and feel free to change it to suit your needs!*

Reflections and recommendations concerning use of the school suitcase

Against the background of extensive empirical data collected during the fourth round and analysed in this report, we may point to a series of overall issues regarding how the school suitcase is used in practice. We believe that the schools as well as the Mary Foundation and Save the Children can benefit from discussing and reflecting on these concerns in connection with Free from Bullying's continued existence in educational institutions across the country, as well as in the design of preparatory courses held by the Mary Foundation and Save the Children.

1) By involving two new schools in this round of empirical data collection, we have become aware of a significant aspect of Free from Bullying, which we would have run the risk of overlooking, had we continued to only interview staff from pilot-project schools about the school suitcase contents. This is because informants from the new schools talked widely about the teaching aid ‘Step by Step’ (*Trin for Trin*) as analogous to Free from Bullying, for example by affirming that this was a convenient time to try out the new materials from Free from Bullying, since they now – having worked on ‘Step by Step’ for a while – felt that this was ‘worn out’. This entails a tendency to perceive Free from Bullying as a model tool on a par with other pedagogical model designs. Although it could, at first glance, sound encouraging that Free from Bullying is able to ‘displace’ its alternative ‘Step by Step’, by the same logic it is only a question of time before Free from Bullying will, in turn, be replaced by a subsequent pedagogical model tool. From the outset, the basic idea was that the Free from Bullying initiative – rather than becoming an educational fad of short-lived fame soon consigned to oblivion – should serve as a more fundamental contribution to profound processes of change taking root in the institutional culture with a view to establishing an anti-bullying culture. This makes it important that the materials, introduction and other work regarding Free from Bullying seek to avoid being reduced to such model-based logic. To this effect it may be relevant to assert and clarify the fundamental ideas and thinking rather than just presenting the various tools. The Mary Foundation and Save the Children can contribute to such a more dynamic and open process by assuming an active role, for instance in terms of coordinating an exchange of views and experiences aimed at developing the schools’ own ideas, so that Free from Bullying is not so much thought of as a ready-made package of teaching aids, but more as a continuous development process based on a set of understandings and intentions, thus maintaining an interactive approach to underscore that the materials can be constantly refined and expanded with new practices.

2) In continuation of this, the Mary Foundation and Save the Children could consider conducting their course over two days instead of one. This would not only allow them to delve deeper into the materials as well as the principles, thinking, views and intentions behind them, but also enable more active involvement of participant institutions in terms of exchange of experiences and joint capacity development after working with Free from Bullying for a while. Finally, this might give rise to the option of dividing the course more clearly into two parts. The first part could focus on how to use the materials and social practices in relation to the children, which would lay the groundwork for a second part involving a deliberate attempt to change to the adults’ perspective, concentrating more on the work with parents and among the staff.

3) Examining the interview data, it is striking that so few materials have been used. There are several reasons for this, but one seems to be that many have not properly read the accompanying texts. This problem is obviously partly related to constraints on time and resources required to become familiar with the materials and use them more widely, which might seem to be beyond the scope of the Mary Foundation and Save the Children. Nevertheless, one suggestion could be to task the participants in the Mary Foundation’s and Save the Children’s course with preparatory reading or ‘homework’, so that, for example, the elements related to social practices with the children are expected to be read prior to the first part of the course, while the text pertaining to the work with adults – parents and professionals – features as background knowledge for the second part of the course. This would ensure that that teacher’s booklets are read.

4) In this report, we have referred to several adult professionals reacting somewhat negatively to the perception that the conversation boards – according to their interpretation – make a problem out of

common day-to-day situations. Furthermore, some regret that the title focuses on the negative (as in 'bullying'), which could also be said about resources such as the dilemma cards, as the word 'dilemma' seems to have a negative connotation for some people. Changing their name to 'situation cards' or the like could be considered. What matters, however, is probably to signal unmistakably that this material is the basis for an open conversation, which does not necessarily have to produce a solution. It may also have to be spelt out more clearly in the background information that the conversation boards etc. are intended to enable the children to express and exchange their day-to-day experiences on their own terms.

2. Better Buddies

What is ‘Better Buddies’?

Better Buddies⁴ is a friendship programme. It is described in a Better Buddies booklet, which is included in the school suitcase. Although it can thus be viewed as part of the general Free from Bullying package, we have chosen to deal with it separately here, firstly, because it is an independent and rather extensive ‘activity’, and secondly, because it has only been implemented at one of the visited schools (a pilot-project participant). Consequently, Better Buddies has not formed part of the discussion of other materials and practices from the suitcase, which we – as a point of departure – have presumed that every school has used.

As mentioned, the friendship programme has been set out in detail elsewhere, including background information as well as specific directions and suggestions for action. We shall here only briefly outline the overall framework for the initiative, instead concentrating on conveying the impressions of its implementation obtained by interviewing involved adult professionals and children.

The programme is based on a class of older students – say, a class 5 or 6 – being twinned with a reception class (‘class 0’ in Danish parlance, i.e. prior to class 1) and ‘buddied up’ in pairs of one younger and one older student⁵. The basic aim is to create a secure setting for the new school starters, but the arrangement also brings a series of ‘spin-offs’. As spelt out in the Mary Foundation’s and Save the Children’s booklet, other declared purposes are to prevent bullying, support the pupils’ wellbeing at school, develop positive relationships across age, foster a sense of responsibility, build self-confidence, promote participation of all and involve parents. In addition, the Mary Foundation and Save the Children write that focus is on “caring for others, being friendly, respecting one another, taking on responsibility, valuing differences and including others” (from p. 3 in the Better Buddies booklet).

The school implementing the programme has built upon a pre-existing twinning arrangement, which had been carried out for many years previously. This has to some extent been adapted to Better Buddies, so that the friendship programme has become more nuanced and better systematised. We have attached the school’s own description of the intentions and practices of the designed concept in Appendix 3. As can be seen, each reception class is twinned with a class 5 (0A with 5A, 0B with 5B etc.). This system, however, begins already *before* the children start in reception class in connection with a scheme which this municipality calls ‘Smooth Transition’ (in Danish: *glidende overgang*). It means that the school starters begin to attend the after-school centre as early as spring, thus giving them a few months to get a taste of the school setting before they join reception class with the onset of a new school year after the summer vacations. The implications for the twinning arrangement is that the ‘big buddies’ begin as early as class 4 to spend a short time with their ‘little buddies’, after which they conduct a host of activities together, when they move up to class 5 and reception class, respectively. Subsequently, the extent and intensity of socialising between the younger and older students gradually diminishes as they grow up, although it is constantly maintained until the children attend class 9 and 4, respectively. By then the youngest have become old enough to assume the role of ‘big buddies’ for a coming reception class, and when

⁴ The term in Danish is *Bedre Venner*, which could also be translated into ‘Better Friends’. However, the initiative in Denmark has been inspired by an Australian version whose title has been reproduced in this translation into English.

⁵ Just as programme ‘buddies’ are distinguished from real-life ‘friends’ in the English-language version, in Danish the former are called ‘*venskabsvenner*’, i.e. ‘twinning-arrangement friends’

this friendly relationship begins in earnest as they move up to class 5, their ‘big buddies’ will have left the school after class 9 (the end of compulsory education in Denmark and the usual time to move on to another educational institution, though an optional class 10 also exists). Then the cycle begins anew.

Practical experiences of Better Buddies

Through interviews with the class teacher and 8 pupils from class 5B, as well as with 4 pupils from class 0A (reception class A), we have learned how the friendship programme has generated a series of reflections. Some of these are inspired by the material from the Mary Foundation and Save the Children, while others are personal and have arisen through practice. In particular the interviews with the children have provided interesting insights into how a twinning arrangement can be perceived – the pros as well as the cons. The informants’ experiences are reproduced below, structured into a series of topics on which both adults and children get to have their say.

Benefits

Interviewer: *What do you think about getting a friend from class 5?*

Olivia: *I think it’s great!*

This succinct excerpt of an interview with a reception-class girl reveals a positive view of the friendship programme, which is indeed characteristic of what most of the children express. The adults also highlight the children’s joy of visiting or being visited by their buddies, noticing that they willingly seek each other out and enjoy each other’s company immensely despite the five-year age gap. We can only present a tiny proportion of the numerous statements from children as well as adults who manifest this. However, in an attempt to make room for the most telling, we have mainly concentrated on the children’s reaction to the friendship programme.

It is clear that both younger and older pupils gain from Better Buddies. For the younger, getting off to a secure start in school life is foremost in their minds. On this point, we asked the reception-class pupils if they did not think the older children in class 5 were a little scary. At first, they answered in the negative, but after a brief pause for thought, they added:

A: *Sometimes I’m a little shy, because my sister has been teased by one of the big boys, by Joakim’s buddy [...] Because we were little. I mean, some of them think we’re much smaller than them, and we are, you know. And then we might get a little scared of them sometimes... a little shy.*

Interviewer: *Can you get that now as well, when your classes have been twinned?*

A: *Of the buddies? No, we’re not as scared of them, because we know them!*

Initial shyness towards the older children is clearly an issue for the younger ones, because later on in the same interview they recount:

- ♦ *I got a little shy talking to the others the first time, but then I just thought that now I’ve got to sort it out. Perhaps I can get some friends.*

- *I mean, when we get to talk to them more, then you don't become so shy anymore. And then, I mean, when we'd just started in the 'Smooth Transition' [programme], I was a little shy too, because then there weren't that many children I knew.*
- *We went to school for a little while before we got a buddy. It was just when we were about to do this Free from Bullying thing, then we got a buddy just like that.⁶*

We also asked the reception-class pupils: *What's the good thing about having a buddy from class 5?*

- *That she's nice... and that I know her.*

The aspect of knowing and recognising the older children is attributed major importance by the younger children, which is not surprising, since they are newcomers to the school, and almost all other children are bigger, unknown and perhaps slightly scary. The younger pupils express enthusiasm and joy at catching sight of their big buddy in the school landscape, whether it be as actors in a theatre play or in the schoolyard:

- *I know where our buddies hang out at breaktime. Sometimes they go to the little playground, and other times they go to the big playground. But not very often. Lots of times I know where they are, then they are on the bouncer or at the sports square.*

The physical location of the older children seems to be highly relevant to the younger ones. A couple of the reception-class pupils thus refer to a visit which they paid *over there in the big ones' classroom*, and they have also received visits in return. The opportunity to see where class 5 is housed has made an impression. The early-years classrooms are situated relatively far away from the rest of this school, and the younger children usually never see the older children's section. From what we have learned from many previous interviews with children of that age, the school's physical space and associations related to the various places play an enormous role for the whole experience of going to school. Therefore, gaining legitimate access to spending time in areas other than one's own contributes to opening the school to the children in a manner completely different from what they are capable of achieving on their own.

We also asked children from both age groups why they thought that they had been given a buddy. These are some of their replies:

- *I just think it's because you're supposed to have more friends. Or they [the reception classes] need to get more friends, since they've just started at school (girl from class 5).*
- *Because what if we just sat there and thought: "Shouldn't we soon get a friend from class 5B?" Or what if "aha, there is one from class 5" (boy from reception class).*
- *Because we're meant to have fun together and all that stuff... and perhaps to make us work together too (girl from reception class).*

⁶ What the children refer to in the last part of the interview excerpt is the visit to the school by Crown Princess Mary, which prompted the pairing up of children as buddies. "Then we got a buddy just like that" indicates that this happened more or less suddenly, which is confirmed in an interview with the reception-class teacher (see further below: "We had to pair them up rather quickly with their first buddy").

The girl quoted last emphasises that the programme is intended for them to have fun together. Most interviewed children, regardless of their age group, stress that it is fun to be together with the buddies. It may seem surprising that the older children express such enthusiasm about spending time with the younger:

- *Every time I'm told we're going to visit them, I just shout: "yes!" Because I really enjoy being with them. [...] And then we're always going to do some really nice things. And that's how I can almost figure out for sure that every time they say it's something with them, it means we're going to play or something. It's much better than sitting inside doing homework (girl from class 5).*

What matters most to this girl is impossible to say, but it is clear that the other interviewed class 5 pupils are also fond of the relationship with the younger children. This is expressed, for instance, as great joy at being allowed to 'play' again:

- *It's kind of funny when we play together class 5 and reception class. Because you can play other games than we usually play at breaktime. Some of us have grown out of playing tag and fruit mix and games like that. But then we can play that when we're together with the little ones.*

As the quote indicates, the friendship programme offers a justification for playing again – without showing yourself up. On the contrary, it has now become a part of being 'big' and of having been entrusted with an important task, which requires maturity and responsibility. In this manner, they can express themselves in play and 'regress' a little into earlier childhood, yet at the same time feel 'big'.

Thus, there is full consensus among the interviewed class 5 pupils that it is wholly legitimate to play with the younger children. It is neither strange nor taboo, not even when it occurs on the children's own initiative without being scheduled by the adults. It seems to be quite alright to seek out the little buddies in order to play with them. This transpires from the statement of a boy from class 5, who responded to what the older children can gain from the programme:

- *If you walk around alone, looking for someone to play with and feeling sad, then you can just go and play with one of them [the younger children]. They think it's fun, and so do we.*

When this is not perceived as a taboo, it may precisely be because of participation in this friendship programme organised by adults, which has not only formalised, but also legitimised play – even with significantly younger playmates.

In the preceding reports, we have briefly addressed how Free from Bullying can be seen as an intervention in the children's 'own' culture. Similarly, Better Buddies can be perceived as an adult-defined framework, which intervenes in the children's own play culture. However, there appears to be room for the children to express themselves within this framework and thus, in a sense, simultaneously establish a new play culture and new play relationships on their own terms.

The question is, nevertheless, if this (new) legitimacy of playing across the age divide is confined to the buddies from the twin class, or if it is extended beyond this. If the intention of Better Buddies as

well as Free from Bullying (i.e. to prevent bullying) is to be fulfilled, it is, of course, a good start to forge a relationship based on care, helpfulness, tolerance and a sense of security between two classes. However, one would hope that these values will not be confined to what has been formally established, but will spread and take root more generally. This leaves the question of whether Better Buddies in itself creates such a collective school culture, or if that will require additional measures.

Other reactions to the question of what a 'big buddy' gains from the programme are expressed in the following quotes:

- ♦ *I mean, it's good for me to see how they get along, and then it makes me happy too when they're feeling good (girl from class 5).*
- ♦ *Well, in a way you make a good friend that way. I mean, you can't really call them 'best friend' and all that stuff. But you can call them 'good friends', yes, really good friends. For example, there was a little girl I had just met down there. She didn't get me as a buddy though, so she felt really sad. And then once when we were leaving our twin class, she didn't get to say goodbye to me, so she began to cry. Then I kind of had to go to her at breaktime and say goodbye to her there. So I actually got a rather good friend that way, even if I didn't get her as my buddy (girl from class 5).*

This quote also denotes the importance of being popular among the younger children. It is, of course, a comforting feeling for the girl to find that she is sought after – which almost seems to be the very reason for the mutual friendship – but there are some older children who do not experience this. We shall return to this point in connection with the topic of challenges and dilemmas.

In addition to the friendship and the joy of being together, which the children widely appreciate, a twinning arrangement like this one brings other benefits as well. The older children agree, for instance, that the younger children clearly look up to and respect them:

- ♦ *It's like they respect us if we say we don't want to do something. And if it becomes too rough, if we say stop, then they stop (boy from class 5).*

This quote points to an important focus of Better Buddies, namely older children's right to set boundaries, and the younger children's obligation to respect these. This is not, however, something that occurs automatically. In interviews with the teachers of the classes concerned it transpires that setting boundaries is one of the major challenges, which the older children will have to practise extensively throughout the friendship programme, and of which they have indeed already gained some meaningful experience. Learning to set boundaries, manage conflict and take responsibility is what the adults emphasise in particular as benefits for the older students. It is a good way to equip the older children to handle their relations with the younger ones, their teacher says, because *it is something else when they have to solve conflicts within their own age group*. As mentioned, we shall return to this subject when we focus on challenges and dilemmas related to the friendship programme.

'Buddying up' the children

The twinning arrangement pairs up the pupils with one 'big buddy' to one 'little buddy'. However, since the classes do not have exactly the same amount of pupils, a few of the older children have

had to ‘buddy up’ with two younger children, or the other way around, two older children have sometimes had to share one little buddy:

- ♦ *For example, I share my buddy with someone called: [...] That’s fine. That makes for less that I have to do. Then you can share out the tasks (girl from class 5).*

The entire logistics puzzle of pairing up the buddies is carefully explained by the two adult professionals in the interviews. While the Mary Foundation’s and Save the Children’s descriptions suggest that this should take place on the first day when the children are introduced to the arrangement, this school has chosen a slightly different approach. Here the classes spend some time together before the children are paired up. During this initial period, the two classes conduct a host of activities in each other’s company in order for the children to get to know each other and for the adults to assess who might get along well as buddies. The class 5 teacher explains:

- ♦ *We don’t pair them up until around September-October, when we’ve had a chance to see who is capable, who is quiet, who needs this and who needs that. [...] If any of the younger children are acting out aggressive tendencies and needs someone to intervene and draw the line, then we find a pupil who knows how to do that (class teacher of a class 5).*

This teacher also recounts how some ‘weak’ children from class 5 have grown stronger with the task, *and have in fact managed to be a good support*. It is important to keep in mind that precisely the not-so-strong (either socially or academically) children can gain an experience of being good at something by receiving responsibility for taking care of a little buddy. To achieve this effect, however, the teacher warns against pairing up such an older child with a very capable younger child, as she has seen how this can easily get the older child to feel inferior – despite the vast age difference. She has observed, for instance, that some reception-class children are already rather good at reading, and in some cases even significantly better than some class 5 pupils. Conversely, if the big buddy with reading difficulties gets to feel that he/she reads well by comparison, and can even read a story to the little buddy, then both will gain from being paired up. Thus, the teacher points out how two children with less-than-average skills can usefully be associated, although it depends on what resources they have and do not have.

However, the adults do not reign supreme in deciding who should be with whom. The children have also been widely involved. Among the younger children, the reception-class teacher asked who they knew and who they would like to have as their buddy, after which she wrote it down and said: “I’ll have a look at it”, she recounts. Meanwhile, the class 5 pupils had the opportunity to express their preferences by writing down three names of children from the reception class who they would like to have as their little buddy. An account of this prioritisation exercise is given by class 5 pupils here:

- ♦ *You make your wishes! Just like a wish list for Santa Claus (boy from class 5).*
- ♦ *We write down the one we like the most and play the most with (boy from class 5).*
- ♦ *It was also kind of funny, because there was a big quarrel about who would get that little boy Morten. First it was Søren, then it was Jesper, then a whole bunch arrived going “no, I want him!” and all kinds of stuff. [...] But they didn’t get him then (boy from class 5).*

Based on the wishes expressed by younger as well as older children, and after adding in practical as well as pedagogical considerations, the adult professionals from reception class and class 5 met up and tried to find an elegant solution to the puzzle.

When explaining the educators' reflections on the pairing-up process, the reception-class teacher stresses that she knows the class 5 children from the time when they were in reception class, which has had some bearing on how the children have been put together. In her words:

- ♦ *I used to teach them when they were reception-class children, and I have followed them, I know their tempers and interests. [...] That's why it was obviously a great advantage that I knew both these classes and was able to help by saying who I thought would be good together. But of course, some wanted each other because, in some way or another, they had just the right chemistry. After they'd played together a couple of times, some came together naturally. And then there have been some that we've put together, and there have also been a few who didn't work out, so we simply had to change it. For instance, we paired up two girls, thinking they would get along well. But then we found out that it just didn't work at all. Because the little girl was very serious, and the big girl was far too silly. And the little one couldn't handle that at all. The big girl couldn't handle it, and the little one... well, she just didn't feel right and withdrew (reception-class teacher).*

Adjustments in the course of implementation are also reported by the class 5 teacher, who represents the other track, i.e. the B classes. In her formulation, there are certain problems which they have *tried to organise away*, for instance:

- ♦ *If one of the older children really feels in a tight corner, finding that the little buddy is just not interested, then [...] we've swapped around the buddy pairs and tried to build something else. [...] And then it has worked better after that rearrangement (class 5 teacher).*

In one track, the teachers decided to completely reshuffle the buddy pairs after about six months, while the other track has yet to take a decision on that. However, the reception-class teacher has made some reflections on this half-yearly change, just as she also addresses what to do when some buddies are absent:

- ♦ *We had to pair them up rather quickly with their first buddy. And now this is how we have decided to do it. You change after slightly more than half a year. After Christmas everyone got another one, their buddy number two, and this can be difficult, because, you know, they have become really fond of their first buddy. [...] In this class, we had been visited by class 5 before we did the pairing up. But we also found out that some had to go off to a Christmas Seal Home [charities taking in children with overweight and other problems for a few months], and some were often absent. So we've introduced these groups of 'understudy buddies' that were suggested [in *Save the Children's* and the *Mary Foundation's* booklet] (reception-class teacher).*

The quotes selected here are but a small extract of a host of specific and detailed statements about reflections behind the composition of buddy pairs. It shows that the programme has triggered many fruitful discussions between the adult professionals.

Activities: ‘fun and games’ as well as learning

Before the children are ‘buddied up’ in September-October, the children of the two classes have already conducted numerous activities together, and this carries on throughout reception class and class 1, after which these events become gradually rarer. The activities take place in an enjoyable atmosphere, but can also be more learning-oriented and serious, which is – not surprisingly – stressed mainly by the professional educators.

For instance, one of them recounts how, on a day in the beginning of the school year, the older children had to show the younger children how to log on to the school’s computers, just as the big buddies also had to write short stories for their little buddies. Furthermore, the teachers have invented something novel, an idea not presented in the booklet, they emphasise. They call it a ‘game of values’:

- ♦ ... *It’s something we came up with ourselves. A game of values, where you have to sort perhaps 50 statements about a good friend. Should a good friend be rich? Should a good friend give presents? Is a good friend forthcoming? Is a good friend someone who can keep a secret? [...] And then you have to select the three most important ones and draw them on paper. And write about it* (reception-class teacher).

After that, she explains how this was in fact a rather difficult task for the older children, *because how do you draw the quality of being forthcoming?* Indeed, it was highly challenging for the class 5 pupils both to draw the concepts and to explain them to the younger children. In this effort, it was important that adults were available for help.

Among other serious, learning-oriented assignments, the class 5 teacher mentions a ‘cosy activity’, in which the older children have to read a story for their little buddy:

- ♦ *There is some learning in that too. It’s not just social. Because it not just fun and games, when we’re together with the reception class. There’s some substance in it as well. For example, they had to write some books with their little buddies. And they had to read for them and things like that. But precisely this thing about: “Hey, how do you do that, reading for a little child?” I mean, for some of the class 5 pupils it was a bit like: “Oh, now I can read. Wow, then it’s all about reading very, very fast, and then...” (makes the sound of a race car). And the little kid sits there going: “What happened?” (laughs). But they have to learn how important it is to pause and talk about what’s in the pictures, and to go “what happens then?” and “ooh, it’s getting dangerous now, hah?” and so on. That it’s a different way of reading aloud to what they do in class. And there are plenty of examples that what they have learned is not the same when it needs to be passed on or used in practice* (class 5 teacher).

However, when this teacher points out that it has not all been ‘fun and games’, it is precisely because many of the activities carried out by the children together *have* indeed been amusing, which is borne out by the interviews with the children. There has been a lot of play, ballgames and trust-and-cooperation exercises.

Here a class 5 pupil reports on some of what they have been doing with the reception class:

- ♦ *We played this game of dodgeball, where they had to learn to throw properly, like, easy does it* (boy from class 5).

The boy's statement shows that the older children are aware of their teaching role towards the younger children, as it is not just a question of playing ball together, but of the big buddies showing the little buddies how to do it.

The younger pupils do not reflect on learning potentials to the same extent, but are mostly interested in talking about the practical activities performed alongside their big buddies, and whether it was fun or boring, easy or difficult. For instance, they remember pleating Christmas hearts together, which was difficult. They also report having danced, played hospital games, written assignments together, played chair games and thrown a dice, where they had to do various things, e.g. hug their buddy or a teacher. The younger children found all this to be great fun, while the older had some reservations about some of it. In the words of two of them:

A: Yeah, we did a kind of activity box.

C: A dice box.

A: Yeah, a dice box. Then some stuff had been written down. Then you had to throw it, and whatever it landed on, we had to do. [...] It was only the little buddies who thought that was fun. Nobody from our class thought so. [...] I mean, it was fun to do the activities, but the box was boring, and our whole class thought so. But [reception class] OB, they thought it was the funniest part of it all.

B: They also think it's fun to howl like a monkey, or jump on one leg round the whole class, and stuff like that (class 5 pupils).

As the quote indicates, the clear age difference occasionally makes itself known. However, as also shown above, the lion's share of activities have been both enjoyable and challenging for all the children.

Training and 'big-buddy groups'

Before the friendship programme takes off in earnest, much effort goes into preparing the older children for the highly responsible task of being a big buddy. For example, they have been trained in handling some difficult situations with their little buddy by means of role plays about dilemmas that resemble what they might have to face in reality. The Better Buddies booklet from the Mary Foundation and Save the Children sets out a series of instructions as to how the older pupils can be 'trained' before being dropped in the deep end.

Once underway, after the children have become buddies, they still have constant access to support and advice, including from each other. The adult professionals explain how 'big-buddy groups' (*basisgrupper*) have been set up, where class 5 students can exchange views and talk through specific experiences:

- ♦ *It's great how they support each other in the groups, if anything has happened, and how they get to talk about it together. And then there are those generalities, like "how do you get the attention of a little child?" right? (Laughs.) It's quite annoying if you've prepared yourself for reading a book for your little buddy, and then the little buddy sits there paying more attention to the others. So there are lots of things in this, and this is where we've tried out those things, so this educational aspect is involved too. So I think it combines quite well (reception-class teacher).*

The class 5 teacher also explains that their ‘Class Time’ (a weekly session dedicated to the class talking about its social life, events and initiatives) has a fixed item on the agenda entitled ‘Better Buddies’. This is where the pupils use each other for support, but the time may also be spent on relating if something has been fun, surprising, difficult or less-than-optimal. A few may gather in the corridor – for example a big-buddy group – to discuss a problem in depth. In this setting, the class 5 teacher reports that she sees herself as a kind of consultant who lends support when the children get stuck trying to solve a problem. However, it is also important for her to stress that they do not invent problems where there are none.

In the interviews, several class 5 pupils recount how they provide mutual backup and cover for each other, as narrated in these quotes from two children:

- *If he [my little buddy] can't be bothered to listen to me, I can just get Victor to say like this: "Cut it out now!"*
- *Johanne has got that little buddy, and if she gets tired of doing something, I can say something to her. She often listens to me, at least, because I think I was the one she would have preferred... So then we can help each other. If she can't be bothered to listen to Johanne, I can help out, or someone else can help out.*

This last quote briefly touches on a problem faced by some big buddies, which will be addressed in the following section, namely being ignored by one's little buddy.

Difficulties and dilemmas

Apart from the fact that the children clearly enjoy each other's company, seek each other out, and look up to one another, the friendship programme also brings some challenges and dilemmas, particularly for the older children. Something not anticipated by the adults, the reception-class teacher reports, was the older children's discomfort in having to confront a younger child with his/her poor hygiene:

- *We've had some who wouldn't hold each other's hands, because, for example, some of the younger children were a little unhygienic, picking their nose and stuff. And then the older children don't feel like holding their hand. But why can't they just say to their little buddy: "I think that's disgusting. I don't want to hold your hand"? [...] This was something we had to talk with the big buddies about, so we pulled them aside and said: "You know what? It's okay to say to your little buddy: "Would you please go and wash your hands? Because I've seen you picking your nose, and I think that's disgusting. But I will be happy to hold your hand after that" (reception-class teacher).*

Likewise, there has been a dilemma as to how much and what types of tasks the older children should take on. For example, some of the younger children seemed to have an expectation that they could shout for their big buddy when sitting on the toilet and needing to be wiped. Once again, it was important to instruct the older children to say: "No, that's not my job. You're at school now, so you have to manage that yourself."

Another dilemma reported by the adult professionals arose when a girl from class 5 wanted to make her little buddy happy and went to buy her some food and sweets at the school shop, subsequently hoping that the little buddy would give something in return. Here the adults also had to intervene and help out by setting some guidelines.

There have also been dilemmas of a somewhat more serious nature, as when a group of reception-class boys, and one in particular, failed to register a class 5 boy's boundaries. The incident ended up making the older boy very sad.

- ♦ *It's precisely this thing about the older children who have to learn to set their own boundaries, and they also have to learn to respect the boundaries of the younger children. [...] This applies especially to some of the boys, when the play has become far too rough. It starts off very nice, then they do something, and suddenly it hurts. We've even had a boy who had to go see the AKT counsellor [see footnote 3]. He'd become so distressed about what happened in the breaktime. [...] It was a big boy who couldn't get a little boy to stop. The little boy had just been too violent, and didn't mean to hurt in that way, but it did hurt, it hurt way too much. [...] He was a boy, so he kept a straight face until he could be left in peace a bit, right? I mean, he cried and what not... But it was talked through in a good way. [...] He needed to talk it through properly with the AKT counsellor. Because it had to be resolved right there and then, when the class teacher wasn't around (reception-class teacher).*

When the boy reacted so strongly by crying and feeling distressed, it might also have to do with the taboo associated with not being able to handle a little boy. The five-year age gap makes for a very clear division of roles in principle. There is not supposed to be any doubt as to who is 'the big boy' with all that it entails in terms of, for instance, authority, asymmetrical balance of power, academic abilities and physical strength. However, the older boy found himself unable to control the younger boy, who thus indirectly shifted the balance of power. This unquestionably made him even more shocked and dejected.

The age difference between the children brings a certain expectation to the relationship. In this regard, we were surprised to hear how the class 5 pupils voluntarily sought out the reception-class pupils, and genuinely felt like spending time with them. However, this highlights yet another challenge which took the adults aback, namely the vulnerability associated with not being 'preferred' by the younger children. This is explained by the class 5 teacher in connection with the big-buddy groups into which the older children are divided to assist each other in confronting various dilemmas:

- ♦ *And then there are those groups, where they help each other when something is up, and they come up with solutions after talking about it, all that is great. But there is also some less legitimate stuff. Some of the older children become jealous of each other, if their little buddy prefers to be with another. The teacher doesn't get to decide that, you know, for example at breaktime, they might well form relationships crisscrossing whatever buddy pairs have been planned. And then how do you tackle that? No longer being the number one (class 5 class teacher).*

The vulnerability associated with being downgraded or deselected, perhaps even in favour of one's own friend, is an issue addressed by the children themselves. In fact, we managed to shed light on this problem through interviews with pupils from both classes 5, two teachers and even with a

couple of reception-class pupils. The little buddies illustrate the issue by talking about who has chosen and been given whom as their buddy, while the class 5 pupils see it from the perspective of all parties directly involved, even when they are not among them. The first quote is from a little buddy, the second from a big buddy:

- *I was originally going to get Pernille, who is Frederikke's now, but she doesn't really do it like that with Johanne, but now she does, but it was strange, because at first she liked her, then she didn't like her, and now she does like her. So next year I'd like to get her (girl from reception class).*
- *I mean, there was one from [reception class] OB, she got someone she didn't want at all. So she got... actually I think she felt sad. And Johanne might have known it. I felt a little sorry, I mean, for both of them (girl from class 5).*

The class 5 girl exhibits a good sense of what is at stake, empathising with those affected by the situation. The following quote is from the interview with a girl who has been particularly affected by the problem herself. Towards the end of the focus-group interview (with four children), we ask if there is anything else they feel like talking about, after which this girl opens up and says:

- *Johanne: I mean, it's not a matter of life and death or anything, but I don't get on very well with my little buddy. But I try to make the best of it. But it's not something she wants, because she likes Pernille, who has got the one Mille would have liked to get.*

Johanne: But then there's Maja's buddy, she thinks I'm really sweet, so when my buddy can't be bothered to be with me in the breaktime, I'm often together with Maja's little buddy.

Interviewer: But... it's not nice if your buddy would actually rather be with someone else.

Johanne: No, it often makes me sad [...] And I've told our class teacher as well, but she just says like "we'll see when the time's up" and "next time we're going to be with them". And it's a bit annoying because she says that almost every time we're together.

Interviewer: What does it actually mean for your relationship right now that your buddy from reception class would rather have had another?

Johanne: It means a lot, because she always walks over to her and to some others and stuff like that. And that makes me even more sad. Once in a while I just feel like saying: "No way, that's enough, I've had it!" and like that, right? And "I won't take it!" That's what I feel like saying sometimes, but on the other hand, I always give her a chance. But it's just like she doesn't give me a chance, so...

This quote clearly illustrates the aforementioned vulnerability associated with feeling obliged to be popular among the younger children, and perhaps being ignored. It seems that a subtle selection process is taking place, which may cast a shadow over the numerous other potentially positive experiences for the person in question. This pupil spends more energy on worrying about the relationship and on feeling obliged to be the 'big girl' showing maturity and reserves of strength, even if she is actually very sad about it. The issue surfacing here points to a danger that any pre-existing roles and positions among the older children are merely reinforced in connection with an

implicit selection process. Those older children who are already popular among their peers, radiating self-confidence and vitality, might also be the most popular among the younger children.

However, the opposite problem is also manifested, when a younger child feels that an older child fails to pay enough attention. A girl in reception class tells how disappointed she is that her big buddy plays too little with her at breaktime. Apparently, she is comparing with her classmates' big buddies, who visit the reception-class pupils more often during breaktime. The children say:

B: *Yeah, but she never comes to play with me (sad look).*

A: *No, she didn't come today either.*

B: *That's way I didn't get to tell her that they'd teased me.*

(Two reception-class peers.)

This clearly expresses an unmet need and wish for the big buddy to be available. However, in the light of the type of experiences reflected in this quote, it has been systematised how much breaktime the older children can and must spend with the younger children. Precisely because some buddy pairs became really close friends and others much less so, some expectations arose, particularly among the reception-class pupils, which could not be fulfilled. Consequently, the adults decided that a big buddy had to pay his or her little buddy a visit at least one breaktime and at most two breaktimes per week. This framework was established not least to take account of the older children's need for their own time to do whatever you do when you are in class 5.

Big buddies as educators

Several quotes from the reception-class and class 5 pupils indicate that they do not see the twinning arrangement as confined to the creation of friendship and a chance to have fun together, but also as serving a certain educational function. It shows how children of both age groups are aware of their positions in relation to each other, and that the programme also meets, or pursues, other goals. This boy presents a concrete example of an observed practical effect:

- *When Morten has his buddy around, well, then there's no trouble. But when she's not around, when there are only grown-ups, then it's not that easy to get everyone to behave, and then he can be a little badly behaved (boy from reception class).*

Here Morten's big buddy gets the credit for Morten being able to conduct himself. It is no coincidence that this little troublemaker's buddy is a girl. She has been carefully selected by the teachers, as they consider her to be sufficiently mature and capable of handling a demanding boy like Morten, they report. The younger children thus attribute an educational function to the older children as the ones able to maintain some discipline.

It is also clear that the older children react with indignation when the younger children disobey unwritten rules and behave unacceptably. This can be seen in the following quote:

A: *He's very difficult to control and stuff.*

B: *Particularly in the Play Patrol.⁷*

⁷ The 'Play Patrol' is a scheme for which children in middle school years (class 4, 5 and 6) can volunteer, taking on responsibility for administering a container full of toys (such as skipping ropes, balls, stilts, etc.), starting up games among the younger children,

A: *Yeah, it gets on your nerves in the end, and you get a little annoyed.*
C: *I think some people have said that he has said some really nasty stuff.*
D: *Yeah, and he grabs your leg and then he hits you.*
(Class 5 pupils.)

It is clearly an issue for the older children to have to set boundaries and take on an educating role. The above quote gives an impression of how class 5 pupils are shocked by the younger children's behaviour, which can be difficult to handle.

The function as educator is accompanied by awareness of the need to act as a role model. The class 5 pupils' attention to this aspect surfaces regularly, not least in this quote:

- ♦ *The little ones, they think it's fun to be with the big ones. Because they look up to us. So we've got to behave. Then they look up to you* (boy from class 5).

From little to big buddy: a milestone in school life

In the interviews with class 5 pupils, we encouraged the children to reflect on their own role as big buddies in view of their experience of being school starters themselves some years ago. This input to the conversation gave rise to discussing, among other topics, the children's memories of their own big buddies⁸ and the relationships with them compared to what they had now with the reception-class pupils. A girl talks about this here:

- ♦ *We actually didn't see them very often at all, our buddies. I couldn't use my buddy. I had one called Jens. I didn't know him at all. I never felt like I could tell him anything at all* (girl from class 5).

A sense of disappointment and injustice can be read between the lines of this statement. What the girl seems to express indirectly is the value of her present buddy relationship, to which she thinks the little buddy is entitled. The quote also indicates that the twinning arrangement has undergone major changes since then. However, some class 5 pupils recall more positive experiences of having a big buddy, such as this girl:

- ♦ *Yeah, for example, say my big sister wasn't at school at that time, then I could go find my buddy. [...] If I was afraid of something or feeling sad, I could go to her. Then she could comfort or help me [...] so I felt more secure* (girl from class 5).

This matches the kind of experience the aforementioned girl had really hoped for, and which is also the aim and intention behind the friendship programme. A boy from the same focus-group reports that he sometimes meets his old big buddy, even though he has now left the school:

- ♦ *I actually still see my buddy. He's kind of a bricklayer or a carpenter or something. [...] He often walks around by the sports centre and that area. [...] Then I just open the window and have a little chat with him* (boy from class 5).

helping to solve conflicts in relation to play, etc. Apparently some of its functions coincide with those of Better Buddies, though the class 5 pupils explain that the Play Patrol has a slightly more controlling function towards the younger children.

⁸As mentioned, the friendship programme has existed at the school for many years, though in a form different from Better Buddies.

The experience of ‘the cycle starting anew’, i.e. the move from being little to big buddy, happens relatively suddenly – from one year to another, from class 4 to class 5. For five years, the pupil has been in the position of the little buddy, but with the prospect of taking on the big-buddy role after crossing the magical line at the transition to class 5. This shift can be viewed as a milestone in school life, which is verbalised in the following manner by a boy from class 5:

- *It’s weird. [...] I first had to get used to being ‘the big one’ now. Because I’d just seen my big buddy leave school after class 9. And then... that’s when I think: “Hey! Now we’re the big ones. Okay!”* (boy from class 5).

The statement expresses a certain pride, enthusiasm and possibly expectation regarding this new position. When we inquired further into what this shift meant to them, one of the girls answered:

- *Well, I thought it was good. It’s good that we learn to take responsibility for the little ones now* (girl from class 5).

Here the fun and games, the good friendship and socialising, which the twinning arrangement also embodies for the children, have been replaced by the value of responsibility. This is what the girl highlights, because it is associated in particular with the shift from ‘little’ to ‘big’. She has now been entrusted with an important task characterised precisely by shouldering responsibility.

The milestone represented by the shift from little to big buddy also pops up here and there in an interview with two reception-class children. It transpires that they already have their own hazy image of the turning point that will take place when they become class 5 pupils some day. Thus, during a conversation about some older buddies acting in a theatre play, a girl from reception class suddenly declares:

- *Oh, I look forward so much to when I become a ‘class 5’er’!*

Reflections and recommendations concerning Better Buddies

While the Mary Foundation’s and Save the Children’s ‘Better Buddies’ is a new initiative in the context of the pilot project Free from Bullying, the pilot-project school which has now implemented Better Buddies has a long-standing record of carrying out a similar programme. However, empirical data has not previously been collected to look systematically into pros and cons, nor the associated experiences of the involved parties, children as well as adults. Substantiated by quotations, we have here dealt with a series of issues and points, which provide insights into the challenges that also crop up when setting out to ‘systematise’ friendship between children and school classes with a large age gap. Here we shall briefly point out some reflections which could improve the programme if taken into account. Accordingly, the following has been conceived chiefly as a contribution to the Mary Foundation’s and Save the Children’s continued development and possible revision of the Better Buddies booklet, as well as to school employees considering implementation of the Better Buddies programme.

- 1) We have described how the adult professionals have reflected at length on the pairing up of younger and older pupils as buddies. The children themselves also refer to this repeatedly, and are indeed keenly aware of who has got whom on the basis of considerations about who likes whom, who can handle whom, and who is seen as popular. This highlights an issue,

which we have previously discussed, namely the direct and not least the *indirect*, non-adult-controlled selection of friends taking place between the children in reception class and class 5. As we have described, it is particularly the older children who have felt vulnerable and/or hurt in this process. We here see how an existing casting of roles – of popular and less popular children – can be reinforced through this focus on ‘choosing each other’. There is unlikely to be an unequivocally ideal solution to this, but it is important to reflect on how to prevent a scheme aimed at strengthening cohesion and inclusion from producing an excluding side effect. It could also be considered whether this issue should feature in the Better Buddies booklet.

- 2) We have seen how the twinning arrangement indeed seems to cause the children in the classes involved to develop a high degree of close bonding based on values such as caring for others, friendliness, closeness, tolerance, interest in each other, as well as joy and enthusiasm over getting a new friend and – from the viewpoint of the older pupils – serving an important function. This observation brings us back to the programme’s grand goal, namely to create a secure setting for school starters and also, from a wider perspective, to prevent bullying and build a secure and positive framework for *all* children. We find it significant to look more closely at how the latter dimension can be incorporated into the concept, i.e. working to ensure that the children’s positive interaction and socialising not be confined to the two classes, but is extended to include all children and adults. Conversely, one might also – as an addition, not an alternative – look at each class in itself, considering how its social life may benefit from the positive community and values being cultivated with the twin class. For instance, the interviewees in one focus group of class 5 pupils hinted at a widespread feeling that a good atmosphere was spreading internally among the classmates. The sense of togetherness and mutual support which arises within ‘big-buddy groups’ may rub off on the class’s social wellbeing in general. A consideration might also be to insert this into the booklet as recommendations or reflections worth making within the classes and the schools planning to introduce similar programmes.
- 3) A third observation made mainly in connection the children’s statements about the friendship programme concerns the play culture that is established between the two classes. Perhaps the centrepiece of the arrangement is to pair up the children based on an adult-controlled agenda (although the children have some influence). In this way, the adults do in fact set the stage for ‘friendships’, since this is indeed the end result for many of the children, and would not have been so otherwise, certainly not in the school context, which has plenty of opportunities for seeking out friends of one’s own age. Among the aspects that catch our attention is that this intervention and administration of the children’s play relations, which can/should also be seen as interference in the children’s own space, seems to be developed and taken further by the children themselves. We see this when the older pupils voluntarily seek out the younger as legitimate playmates. This does not, however, negate the obvious fact that this is a balancing act, which it may at least be important to draw attention to. The fundamental question is to what extent and in what ways the adults have a *right* to organise play relations, both when they think it is fine that the children are together across the age groups and when, on the other hand, they find that the younger and older pupils, respectively, need to be on their own, etc.
- 4) In our presentation of the interviewed children’s reflections on Better Buddies, we have also looked at how many older as well as younger pupils see the programme as partly driven by

an educational element. In this regard, the older pupils' role is, in some contexts, seen as 'representatives' of the school and its culture. They are expected to say 'stop' when the little buddies 'make trouble', and to generally hold sway over their younger peers. Accordingly, it could be relevant to ask whether this friendship programme to some extent has such a hidden agenda, and if so, how the adult professional should react to this. It is certainly worth discussing to what degree and upon what foundation the older children (aged 11 upwards) should be 'burdened' with responsibility for educating younger children. On the other hand, one might say that older children have 'always' educated, say, their younger siblings. But what is the significance of this being inserted into an institutional context such as the school, based on particular pedagogical principles, etc.? In fact, the interviewed adults address this in part when pointing out that the older children do not, for instance, have to wipe the younger children's behind. In general, it is not the adults who express a wish or understanding that Better Buddies has an educational function. It is only the children themselves who stress this. Among the older children, there is undoubtedly a measure of pride or the like associated with this. Furthermore, some of the older children explicitly describe how their role is associated with a certain authority and asymmetry, relishing the chance to demonstrate that they are 'big' and indeed often knowing better and wanting to pass it on. At the same time, many of the younger children also seem to express a wish for the older children to help and guide them in various ways, thus contributing to their education.

In continuation of the above, it could also be discussed whether it is reasonable to give 11-12-year old children responsibility for the relatively high number of systematised and organised tasks pertaining to Better Buddies. Could this be seen as conforming to the general contemporary trend towards expecting children at an ever-younger age to take responsibility – for their own learning, for self-evaluation, for conflict resolution, for making the right choices and decisions, and now for taking properly care of younger children? Does this denote a pressure on children at an ever-younger age to abandon their child's nature by acting maturely and thoughtfully? We cannot offer a straightforward recommendation as to what is the right understanding and solution to these issues – there probably is none. However, by raising these questions, we want to point out the possible importance of inducing the adult professional to address such considerations before and during the work with Better Buddies.

Appendix 1: Methodological approach and reflections in the fourth round of empirical data collection

The empirical data on which the present report is built consists of semi-structured interviews⁹. In this fourth round of the follow-up research project, interviews have been conducted with a total of 85 persons from five schools working with Free from Bullying. Three schools have taken part in the pilot project, while two schools are ‘new’ in the sense that they have not previously been visited by the follow-up research team. One of the three pilot-project schools has implemented the Better Buddies programme, which is an optional part of Free from Bullying’s suitcase of materials for schools. At this particular school, we have interviewed informants about experiences of *both* the suitcase *and* Better Buddies.

Out of 85 interviewees, 64 have been children. At all five schools, these have been pupils from early school years (i.e. reception class and classes 1, 2 and 3), and at the school implementing Better Buddies also from class 5. The other 21 interviewees have been members of staff at the five schools, including the attendant after-school centres.

The following table shows how the number of interviewees is distributed according to year level:

School	Number of interviews with children					Number of interviews with adult professionals							
	Cl. 0	Cl. 1	Cl. 2	Cl. 3	Cl. 5	Cl. 0	Cl. 1	Cl. 2	Cl. 3	Cl. 5	Manager	After-school centre	AKT counsellor
Vonsild	2	2			2	1	1			1		1	
Hellerup	3	2	2			1	1	1				1	
Skjoldhøj	3	2	2			1	1	1				1	
Bramdrup	2	2		2		1	1		1		1	1	1
Ådalens	4					2					1		

Class 0: reception class

AKT counsellor: student-behaviour, child-welfare and special-needs professional attached to many schools in Denmark.

To clarify the above table, two children were involved in each interview with pupils from reception class to class 3, while four children took part in each interview with pupils from class 5. This is how the higher number of interviewed persons mentioned above tallies with the lower number of interviews indicated in the table.

Interviewees were selected in order to represent different levels of early school years as well as a variety of staff groups expected to have been involved in procuring or working with the Mary Foundation’s and Save the Children’s suitcase of materials. While we had followed the use of Free from Bullying materials from the pilot project’s infancy up to the present in the three schools listed in the top of the table, at the two new schools we were interested in learning about the implementation process since its inception. Consequently, at these two places we have chosen to interview not only the teachers, who have used the materials in practice, but also the management,

⁹ For a more detailed presentation of considerations and theoretical reflections regarding the empirical foundation and methodology of the follow-up research, see the 5th report.

and at one school also an AKT counsellor (see explanation below the above table), who – we were told – was the driving force behind the procurement of the Free from Bullying suitcase in that place.

Free from Bullying is the title of a collection of materials targeting, on the one hand, preschool children aged 3-6 and, on the other, children in early school years aged about 5-9. In the course of the pilot project Free from Bullying, the Mary Foundation's and Save the Children's original materials were divided into two versions in the form of a preschool suitcase and a school suitcase with their corresponding materials and 'social practices'. Accordingly, the schools started off with what was later to become the preschool suitcase, receiving the special school suitcase only halfway through the pilot project. This gave them limited time to try out these latest resources by the time the pilot project and the follow-up research were formally concluded at the end of 2008. In response to this situation, it was decided to return to these schools after they had been in possession of the school materials for almost a full school year. Therefore, in this fourth round of data collection we have concentrated on the experiences of using the materials from the school suitcase. It means that, this time around, we have only interviewed schoolchildren and school staff, and not preschool children and staff.

All adults have been interviewed individually and – as with the children – using a semi-structured interview guide. With the informants' approval, all interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

As can be seen from the table above, we have interviewed a small number of children from each early-years class. We initially assumed that this would cover up to class 2, since the materials target children up to this age group. However, since Vonsild Parish School had decided, in 2007, to start off Free from Bullying with the youngest children and let it run its course with the same pupils, they had yet to use the materials with a class 2. Though for different reasons, this was also the case of Bramdrup School, which had, however, used the materials in a class 3, from which we interviewed some pupils and their teacher instead.

The aim of choosing a cross-section of all early school years was to gain broad insights into how the school suitcase is used at the various levels and age groups at which it is targeted. The children – all of whom were keen to be interviewed – were selected by their teacher adhering to our wish for a more or less even number of boys and girls. This criterion also applied to the selection of class 5 pupils for interviews about their experiences of the programme Better Buddies.

In the interviews with children, we used two different approaches for pupils in early school years and in class 5, respectively. This stems partly from an assessment of the most appropriate interview setting (in view of the topic and age group), and partly from the separate intention of the follow-up research to explore varying ways of interviewing children. Thus, in earlier rounds of empirical data collection, we have tried out several methodological approaches, which is described in the 5th report entitled 'Experiences of interviewing children in a research context'.

The children from early school years were interviewed two at a time. The initial idea¹⁰ was to select four children from each class, interviewing two of the same gender plus two of different genders,

¹⁰ As the table above will reveal, we had to change plans for practical reasons. For instance, we chose to conduct an additional interview in a class, if we considered the first to yield insufficient data (e.g. if the children were too unfocused), and we doubled the number of interviews with reception-class pupils at the school where the materials had *only* been used at this level.

while we ensured, as mentioned, that the overall distribution of boys and girls remained approximately even.

The choice of interviewing the children from early school years two at a time in this fourth round was based on the intention to let them find support and security in having a classmate by their side. It has been absolutely crucial for these relatively young children to count on someone of their own age for support and exchange of views in the actual interview situation. Partly because they could help each other remember more specific incidents and activities which had occurred in the class, partly because they were able to supplement and respond to each other's statements. This makes for a highly dynamic and versatile exchange of knowledge. At times, the interviewer withdrew into an onlooker role in order not to break up the flow of the children's narrations.

Conversely, one challenging aspect was that the children would sometimes get off-topic and interrupt each other, finding it hard to stay focused on the current interview subject, which occasionally led the conversation to be slightly sidetracked. Another difficulty was that some children would at times find it hard to allow space for the other to speak. In this manner, the interview constellation can expose the children's current positions and roles, thus revealing who has a more 'dominant' social presence, and who might be shy or tend to sit on the fence.

Fundamentally, it has been highly beneficial to apply this form of interview, and it has been both remarkable and fascinating how the children's mutual responses and associations often resulted in a consensus regarding the issues and experiences which were verbalised.

Nevertheless, we occasionally had a feeling that our questions would generate a certain 'pleasing effect', i.e. that some children sought to fit their answers to what they expected the interviewer to want to hear. This problem was, in various ways, an unavoidable premise which we partly had to accept and partly sought to mitigate by asking more inquisitive and open-ended questions.

Sometimes we also found that children could not at first answer our questions directly (which were mainly about the contents and usage of the school suitcase). This could be due to their limited familiarity with Free from Bullying and the school suitcase, or because the activities concerned took place such a long time ago, making it hard for them to recall what it was really about. This problem is largely related to the children's age, since younger children are less grounded in their sense of time and memory than older children, tending to remember mainly the most recent events. In particular when, on a final note, we inquired into their assessment of the materials, it could be difficult to formulate a reply, especially for the reception-class pupils. Therefore, it often resulted in a simple 'yes' or 'no' or 'it's fine'.

The class 5 pupils were interviewed in focus groups of two girls and two boys in each, along with two researchers, of whom one was the primary interviewer, while the other asked supplementary questions and made observations regarding body language, speaking sequence, etc.

It was the first time this method was used in the follow-up research project. It was tried out with a view to fostering exchange of experiences and joint creation of knowledge among the children in the course of the conversation. As in the interviews with children from early school years, the focus groups of class 5 pupils were characterised by great dynamics and interaction. The interviewees were able to reason at a high level of reflection regarding the statements 'thrown on the table', and they reacted constructively and attentively to what their classmates had to say.

These older children were – unlike the rest – only interviewed about the concept of Better Buddies. This was a topic which they were very keen and able to talk about, and we got the impression that they found it both relevant and close to their heart to discuss experiences of it. In contrast to the younger children, interviewees from this age group were very good at allowing space for each other, and their conversation was imbued with remarkable seriousness and authenticity. As mentioned, we had estimated that four participants in each focus-group interview would be best, and this proved to be an appropriate number, since it enabled everybody to have their say and to make up their mind about the statements made.

Appendix 2: Contents of the school suitcase

Conversation boards
Pupils' meeting
Massage programme
Better Buddies
Two booklets: one on the background to the project, another on social practices and activities
Buddy Bear: for the pupils' meeting and to take on visits home
Song of friends – borrowed from Skjoldhøj School
Dilemma cards for parents
Dilemma cards for professionals
Folder and poster with 'Five Tips for Parents'
Stickers
Postcards
The storybook 'Secret Friends' (including the activity with the same name)

Other social practices

'Boss for an hour'
'The good mate'
'Children draw the line'

Friendship and cooperation exercises:

Values board
Painting-and-drawing event
Role-play based on conversation boards
Hand-puppet theatre
Traditional team sports
Free from Bullying chair game
Two children and one balloon
New in class
My way to school
The birthday present – birthday card with something sweet about the birthday boy/girl
What can we play?
Wellness rules of the class – to be formulated together by all classmates
Play rules – dialogue about what is alright
Children on teams: reflections on choosing players

School-subject activities:

'Play writing and reading'
'Play writing and reading' based on conversation boards
Make words with your bodies
Compose a song
Two tongues: things that make you happy or sad to hear
Children talk about friendship – with a series of accompanying questions for the teacher
Children's literature: list at the end of the booklet

Suggestions for books to be read aloud: '*Pigen i træet*' [The girl in the tree], '*Karl K. dagen lang*' [Karl K. all day long]

Activities with parents

Letter to parents

First teacher-parent meeting (presentation, parental contributions, tips for parents, dilemma cards, questions)

Second teacher-parent meeting (stories about experiences of Free from Bullying, the class's own tips for parents – formal session, tactile massage)

Teacher-parent meetings in general

Newsletters

Parents draw up a birthday policy: 1) birthday groups, 2) invitations, 3) participation, 4) being a good guest, 5) coffee for parents

Dilemma cards

Tips for parents

Week of attention

Memory game with cards showing the children's faces and names

Dinner groups

Class meal

Pupils involve their parents

Weekend with parents

Other paths to parental involvement...

Social practices for adult professionals

Coordination meetings

Dialogue on values and culture at staff or team meetings (dialogue on values, team cooperation, teacher-parent cooperation, conflict management, the school's sanctions policy, adult professionals as role models, adult professionals views of children and parents, interaction in class)

Dilemma cards for adult professionals

Listen to the parents

Relationship charts

Redefining pupils (in continuation of relationship charts)

Everyone has value – group work about 'belonging'

Tolerance in group of children

Appendix 3: Better Buddies – this is how we do it at Vonsild

Background

Friendship programmes in the form of class-twinning arrangements have been carried out at Vonsild Parish School for many years with plenty of examples of success, including before 2008. Our participation in Save the Children's and the Mary Foundation's pilot project 'Free from Bullying' has provided a unique opportunity to expand and formalise our work in this area. In the school year 2008/09, our classes 0 (reception classes) and 5 have tried out several measures suggested in the inspirational 'Better Buddies' booklet, culminating in Crown Princess Mary's visit in October 2008. These experiences are the basis of this report on the Better Buddies programme at Vonsild Parish School, which combines previous practice with new ideas from the Better Buddies booklet and was first put into practice during the school year 2008/09.

How it comes full circle

Better Buddies at Vonsild is based on each class 0 and each class 5 being twinned. The arrangement is a cycle encompassing the following phases

- 1) Even before the children arrive at class 0 (reception class) contact is established between class 4 pupils and children from 'class minus 1' as part of the municipality's 'Smooth Transition' scheme.
- 2) After the summer vacations, cooperation is intensified, so that each class 0 and class 5 spend time together on several occasions – more on this further below.
- 3) Then the twinning arrangement carries on with diminishing intensity until the older students finish class 9, their least year at this educational institution (class 1 with class 6, class 2 with class 7, class 3 with class 8, and class 4 with class 9). After that, as the former 'little buddies' near the end of class 4, they become the new 'big buddies'.

Objective

The overall objective of Better Buddies is very well described in the inspirational booklet from Save the Children and the Mary Foundation (*Better Buddies 3-7*). Fundamentally, the idea is to create relations characterised by a sense of trust and security between younger and older schoolchildren, including the following significant aims:

For the younger:

- To feel more secure as they start school, when they are new and very little, having to find their place in a big school.
- To know the names and faces of the older students they can turn to if there is a need for help in the school setting.
- To receive social support and have social role models to look up to among the older students.
- To counteract bullying, harassment and other types of negative social interaction.
- To get academic support from a non-professional.

For the older:

- To experience being a valuable person entrusted with responsibility at school.
- To attend a course in how to be a 'Better Big Buddy'.
- To take responsibility and convey knowledge, experience and attitudes to younger peers, thus growing in maturity.
- To see the effects of one's own and one's mates' attitudes and actions in the course of passing on experience to younger students, thus becoming more aware of social mechanisms within the peer group.
- To become aware of personal boundaries, integrity and authority.

- To put forward and test one's own knowledge by imparting academic subject matter to others, as teaching creates learning.

Scope

'Smooth Transition' children + class 4

When the preschool children enter the 'Smooth Transition' programme from around April 1 to the summer vacations in June, they spend **2-3 get-togethers with all classes 4**. Since the classes 0 (reception classes) have yet to be formed, there cannot be any twinning arrangement or 'buddy pairs'. In this spring, the classes 4 begin the course series 'Better Big Buddies'. (*Better Buddies 10-17*)

Class 0 + class 5

This is the culmination of the programme – in terms of contents and scope.

- Autumn: in the weekly session known in Denmark as 'Class Time' every 3-4 weeks.
- Autumn: 1-2 academic theme days (or parts of these).
- Spring: during 'Class Time' once a month.
- Spring: 1-2 academic theme days (or parts of these)
- Throughout the year: special occasions – see the section 'Contents', subsection 'Ideas for annual get-togethers'.
- Selected number of breaktimes, though at least one breaktime per week, diminishing after Christmas.

Class 1/2 + class 6/7

- 3-4 times every six months (could use 'Class Time' or other scheduled subjects).
- 1 academic theme day every six months.
- Special occasions – see the section 'Contents', subsection 'Ideas for annual get-togethers'.
- Events, projects.
- Breaktimes: on a voluntary basis only.

Class 3/4 + class 8/9

- 1-3 times every six months (the twin-class awareness is maintained).
- Special occasions: events, projects.

Transfer of experiences from class 9 to class 4: this is what it is like to be 'Better Big Buddies'

Form, structure and process

- Better Buddies comprises: twinned years (classes 0 and classes 5), twinned classes (e.g. 0A and 5A) and personal 'buddies' (e.g. Brian and Benny).
- Twinned 'year levels' initiate cooperation between 'Smooth Transition' children and all class 4 pupils; particular school classes are twinned at the start of class 0 and class 5, and buddies are paired up as soon as possible thereafter.
- 'Class Time' is primarily used for activities, preparation and evaluation.
- Older buddies MUST be trained by means of a course from late class 4 to early class 5. A catalogue of ideas is available in the booklet (*Better Buddies 10-17*).
- A Better Buddies Coordinator is designated to provide advice and guidance, in addition to:
 - a) preparing a suitcase with booklet and useful materials;
 - b) preparing a collection of ideas in a directory on the Intranet.
- Better Buddies features as a fixed item on the agenda of joint meetings for early school years etc.

Recommendations:

- Use the numerous great ideas from the Better Buddies booklet ([Better Buddies 18-42](#))
- In the choice of activities, try to alternate between considering what is most interesting for the younger and for the older students.
- Keep a logbook and feature this as a fixed item on the agenda of 'Class Time'.
- Schedule dates for cooperation between class teachers of class 0 and class 5
- Take account of different learning styles
- Other teachers and their subjects can join in after Christmas (halfway through class 0 and class 5).
- Set out a clear framework for breaktime socialising. Conduct frequent follow-up to this free interaction.
- Make sure the younger students do not become the older students' playthings or cuddly toys.
- Make sure the older students are allowed to just be older students.
- Use the Buddy Bear as a symbol.
- Change buddy constellations, either in pairs or total reshuffles, as required.

Contents

In general, there are plenty of superb activity suggestions in the Better Buddies booklet ([Better Buddies 18-42](#)). Here you will find it all laid out for you: contents, objectives, timeframe, number of participants, materials etc. In addition, it is important to maintain good practice at school, building upon existing procedures, traditions, day-to-day school life etc.

Remember to vary between social/wellness-oriented activities, play activities and learning activities.

Ideas for annual get-togethers:

- Going to church on Christmas.
- Older students prepare name signs for future class 0 pupils' first school day.
- Class 0 visits class 5 during drama practice.
- Walking the fitness route before fitness day.
- Academic theme days (play day, reading day, spreadsheet day, language day etc.).
- Visiting each other's projects (vertical reading, project assignments, newspaper week, etc.).

Other ideas for 'Class Time':

- See [Better Buddies p. 18-42](#)
- Contact BE, ST, ALK, KS from Vonsild Parish School.
- Come up with more good ideas yourself – ideally based on the students' day-to-day school life.