

## Resource guide

### Multilingual work in kindergartens







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Based on NAFO'S competence-building project for kindergarten employees 2005–10



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## Preface

From 2005 to 2010, Norway's Nasjonalt senter for flerkulturell oppl ering (National Centre for Multicultural Education, NAFO) has been responsible for a competence-building project<sup>1</sup> for kindergarten employees nationwide, with multilingual work as a central theme. NAFO has run this project in cooperation with County governors, municipalities, university colleges and universities in all of Norway's counties. Many of the kindergartens involved in this development of competence have performed projects that incorporated a focus on linguistic diversity. This resource guide contains practical examples of how kindergartens can work with language in a multilingual environment; how different languages can be seen and heard in kindergartens; how to organise and use bilingual assistance, how parents can be a resource for children's multilingual development; and how kindergartens can survey the language proficiency of children who speak minority languages. The examples come primarily from NAFO's competence-building project, but you will see examples from other parties as well. The examples and experience accounts from the kindergartens have been anonymised. Although this guide primarily portrays practical educational projects, it is rooted in theory and research on multilingualism and multicultural education. In addition we provide references to in-depth study modules on current theory throughout.

We would like to thank the kindergartens that have shared their experience from linguistic work in kindergartens through NAFO's competence-building project, as well as our partners at university colleges and universities. Special thanks are also due to Katrine Gi ever, whose contribution on bilingual assistance is included in this guide.

The editorial staff that has contributed to this resource guide at NAFO has comprised of M lfrid Bleka, Marit Gjervan and Gro Svolsbru.

Oslo, 30 April 2010

An-Magritt Hauge

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<sup>1</sup> A project description and a report on NAFO's competence-building project for kindergarten employees can be found here: [www.hio.no/nafo](http://www.hio.no/nafo)





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Language is an important part of the kindergartens activities. The framework plan for kindergartens' educational activities and tasks emphasises the importance of early and satisfactory language development (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, henceforth KD, 2006). When it comes to children with minority language backgrounds, the kindergartens have an important job to do to encourage satisfactory multilingual development. This means that preschool teachers, in cooperation with other kindergarten staff, must be able to provide a linguistic environment that promotes linguistic diversity and encourages children to make the best possible progress in their languages.

## Children with minority language backgrounds

The designations *children with minority language backgrounds* or *minority language children* often appear in official documents and the professional literature. This refers to children with a language other than Norwegian as their mother tongue, where that language is a minority language in Norway. These children, who grow up in Norway, will in all probability be bilingual or multilingual. They learn both their parents' mother tongue and Norwegian. In many cases their parents may have different mother tongues, so that the children use several languages. What minority language children have in common is that they learn Norwegian in kindergarten. Often the mother tongue is not the only factor that distinguishes minority language children from the majority; other factors are cultural expressions, religion, values, norms and traditions (Sand 2008). Just as there are differences among majority language children, there are differences among children who speak minority languages. Therefore kindergarten staff must take each child's individual identity into consideration.

Obviously children master their multilingual situation in different ways, depending on both the child and his or her environment. The linguistic environment in the children's homes and the kindergartens are of great importance to their multilingual development. It is important for the kindergartens and parents to cooperate in supporting the children's linguistic development in both their first and second languages. Good development of the children's mother tongue may be beneficial to their mastery of their second language (Valvatne and Sandvik 2007).

Some children are exposed to several languages early and learn them simultaneously. This is known as *simultaneous multilingualism*. Other children encounter the Norwegian language when they start kindergarten, having learned their mother tongue first. These children display *successive multilingualism* (Sandvik and Spurkland 2009, Høigaard et al. 2010). In some cases it can be difficult to determine which is a child's mother tongue because he or she is equally fluent in both, or uses both just as much but in different contexts. In that case it may be correct to say that





the child's mother tongue is multilingualism, or that they have several mother tongues (Sandvik and Spurkland 2009). In other words this is not a homogeneous group of children. Kindergartens must facilitate a linguistic environment that encourages children to learn based on their different linguistic biographies.

#### **Further reading about multilingualism**

Høigård, A., Mjør, I. og Hoel, T. 2009: *Temahefte om språkmiljø og språkstimulering i barnehagen*. Oslo: KD.

Høigård, A. 2006. *Barns språkutvikling – muntlig og skriftlig*. 2. utg. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Kibsgaard, S. og Husby, O. 2009: *Norsk som andrespråk: Barnehage og barnetrinn*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Sand, S. 2008: *Ulikhet og fellesskap. Flerkulturell pedagogikk i barnehagen*. Vallset: Opplandske Bokforlag.

Sandvik, M. og Spurkland, M. 2009: *Lær meg norsk før skolestart! Språkstimulering og dokumentasjon i den flerkulturelle barnehagen*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training: *Barn i flerspråklige familier. Veiledning til foreldre og ansatte i barnehager og på helsestasjoner*. Oslo: Utdanningsdirektoratet.

Valvatne, H. og Sandvik, M. 2007: *Barn, språk og kultur. Språkutvikling fram til sjuårsalderen*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk forlag

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## Framework

Language development has become an important priority for Norwegian kindergartens and schools, and language development for children with minority language backgrounds has been of particular interest. Several studies have shown that minority language pupils achieve lower than their majority peers and that there is a high dropout rate in secondary school. Many researchers stress that the pupils' language proficiency is a decisive factor for their school success. It will therefore be necessary to take measures at an early stage in order to equalise differences and improve the language proficiency of children with minority language background. A series of Storting white papers focuses on kindergartens as a setting for good language stimulation.

Report number 16 (2006-2007) to the Storting ... *no one left behind. Early measures for lifelong learning* emphasises the importance of kindergartens as a measure to reduce social inequality in society. The report's primary objective is for all children to receive a sound foundation for lifelong learning.

Report number 23 (2007-2008) to the Storting *Language builds bridges* looks at challenges and measures to strengthen language teaching with a lifelong perspective. The report is based on a holistic language policy "with an emphasis on Norwegian-language and multilingual diversity, the Nordic language community and all-round foreign language competence" (ibid. 7).

Report number 41 (2008-2009) to the Storting, *Quality in kindergartens*, points out that "language stimulation is one of the kindergarten's most important tasks" (ibid. 68). It also pointed out that it is a governmental objective that "all children should have a good command of Norwegian before they begin school" (ibid: 67). The report emphasises that kindergartens must be able to offer children a rich linguistic environment so that they can make good progress in their languages. A rich language environment requires the staff to have solid expertise in language and multilingualism, and expertise in how to facilitate good language development for all children. One of the chief objectives of Report number 41 to the Storting is for "all children to be able to actively participate in an inclusive community" (ibid: 90).

In 2008 the government appointed a committee to review the educational provisions for minority language children, young people and adults. The committee, led by Sissel Østberg, was assigned to evaluate how speakers of minority languages are treated within existing structures of education (rules, regulations, grants and administrative responsibilities) and how this works in practice. The committee will also review how multicultural perspectives are integrated into educational institutions. The committee will deliver its report in June 2010.



## Legislation and framework plan

Kindergartens are subject to the Day Care Institutions Act (KD 2006b). The framework plan is a requirement of the Day Care Institutions Act, so kindergartens are obligated to follow it. It provides recommendations for how kindergartens should organise offerings for minority language children and multilingual and multicultural efforts in kindergartens. The framework plan recognises that there are many ways to be Norwegian, and that cultural diversity must be reflected in kindergartens (KD 2006a:7). Children with a mother tongue other than Norwegian who are learning Norwegian as their second language in kindergarten must have the opportunity to express themselves and be understood by other children and adults.

“Kindergartens must support children’s use of their mother tongue, while at the same time working actively to promote children’s Norwegian language competence” (KD 2006a:29).

The framework plan’s professional area section 3.1 *Communication, verbal and written* states that kindergartens must support children’s “use of their language to express feelings, wishes and experiences, to resolve conflicts and to create positive relationships in play and other forms of social interaction” (ibid:34). The staff must show understanding of the importance of children’s mother tongues and encourage children with multilingual backgrounds to use language actively, and provide them with experiences that strengthen their development in the Norwegian language.

The Ministry has also issued ten booklets on specialised topics that accompany the framework plan, to support kindergartens as they follow the plan. Two booklets in particular discuss multilingual efforts in kindergartens: *Booklet on linguistic and cultural diversity in kindergartens* (Gjervan (red.) 2006) and *Booklet on the linguistic environment and linguistic stimulation in kindergartens* (Høigård, Mjør and Hoel 2010). Meanwhile the other booklets may be read with a multilingual perspective as well.

The introduction of the framework plan was evaluated in 2009 (Østrem et al. 2009). A central finding was that the professional area of *Communication, verbal and written* was a high priority for the majority of the kindergartens that were interviewed. “Language” was likewise a central area where education directors and the kindergarten authorities were directing their efforts. However the report points out that measures to support multilingual children in using and developing their mother tongues have received little priority.

## Grant scheme

The government has earmarked the *Grant for measures to improve language comprehension among preschool-age minority language children*, F-02-2010 (henceforth the *grant scheme*) (KD 2010a).



“This grant will help municipalities to design measures to improve language comprehension among preschool-age minority language children.

Targeted language stimulation measures at the preschool-age, including bilingual assistance in kindergartens, will contribute to give children whose mother tongue is not Norwegian a better start in school and increase their participation in all arenas of society in the long term.

(...) The target group for the grant is preschool-age minority language children. Minority language children are defined here as children with a non-Norwegian linguistic and cultural background, except for children whose mother tongue is Sami, Swedish, Danish or English. In most cases these children can communicate with others at kindergarten and therefore they are not encompassed by the grant scheme. Both parents of the child must have a mother tongue other than Norwegian, Sami, English, Swedish or Danish” (KD 2010:18).

Sami children have their own rights through grants administered by the Sámediggi (Sami Parliament). Cf. chapter 4 of the grant scheme.

The municipality manages the grant in its capacity as the body with authority over kindergartens. Language stimulus measures must be primarily connected to the kindergartens, but municipalities can also use the grant to design holistic measures across their service offerings, for example in cooperation with health clinics, kindergartens and schools, or Norwegian instruction for parents. In addition to bilingual assistance, the grant may be used to hire extra staff to strengthen children’s development in the Norwegian language, purchase language materials and books, improve cooperation with parents and implement information measures directed at parents with the intention of recruiting children to kindergartens.

Some kindergartens have seen that in families where one parent is a native speaker of Norwegian while the other speaks a minority language, the children may be speakers of a minority language in practice. For example it may be the case that the parent with the primary responsibility for child care is a speaker of a minority language, while the child has less contact with the parent who is a native Norwegian speaker. These children do not *trigger* the grant, but they may still be *covered* by measures through the grant scheme, so that kindergartens and municipalities take responsibility for educational measures that help to improve these children’s language comprehension.

The grant scheme assumes that language stimulation measures should primarily be assigned to kindergartens. Therefore a subsidiary objective is to recruit more minority language children to kindergartens.



The County governor pays the grant to the municipalities, which in their turn allocate the grant based on applications from individual kindergartens or other applicants. The funds must be allocated according to an assessment of need, and supplement the municipality's own funds.

In 2006 Rambøll Management performed an evaluation of the grant scheme for KD (2006). According to the evaluation, the majority of the municipalities in their surveys state that they do not view themselves as having professional expertise when it comes to knowledge of multicultural education and language development among minority language children. This means that there is generally a need for improvement concerning the municipalities' knowledge of and efforts related to preschool-age minority language children. In order to achieve the grant scheme's objective, the municipalities and the kindergartens' preschool teachers must have expertise in multicultural issues and in language teaching of minority language children. This is vital if the grant is to be administered in the best way for the children it concerns.



## Multilingual work - independent of bilingual assistance

In this chapter we will look at different ways of working with language and multilingualism in kindergartens that do not necessarily depend on the kindergartens having a bilingual employee on staff. Naturally these working methods can be beneficial when cooperating with bilingual staff as well.


Multilingualism is a resource for the individual child, for the kindergarten and for society. In the future Norwegian society will have a growing need for multilingual citizens (cf. Report number 23 to the Storting), and the extent to which the kindergarten and school system nurture this resource will be of decisive importance. Therefore it is important to point out to kindergarten staff, and to the parents, which resources multilingual children possess. The kindergarten must be a setting for several languages where children's differing linguistic abilities are valued. Ensuring the visibility of more languages than Norwegian must therefore form the basis of the kindergarten's efforts. The framework plan emphasises that the kindergarten staff "must show understanding of the importance of children's mother tongues" (KD 2006a:35). That means that the adults at the kindergarten must recognise children's different mother tongues and actively support their progress in these languages. Recognition means being seen, heard and respected. Language is closely connected with children's identity and cultural affiliation. If a child's mother tongue is not recognised, the child's identity/identities and affiliation(s) cannot be recognised either.

"Multilingual children are *not* "unable to speak" even if they don't say anything in the language the majority speaks, it's just that the monolingual teacher doesn't have access to what the children are saying in the other languages" (Sandvik and Spurkland 2009: 35-36).

It's important to the children that their competence in their mother tongue is made relevant at kindergarten, even if there are not other children or adults who speak their mother tongue. Other people's interest in and positive curiosity about the mother tongue can help to provide the child with a positive self-perception and affirm their identity.

### Making multilingualism visible

In the work of developing kindergartens' linguistic environment, many kindergartens in NAFO's competence-building project have focused on ensuring that children's various languages are seen and heard in preschools. Several kindergartens saw that some children did not want to use their mother tongue at kindergarten, and that their parents were interested in having their children speak only Norwegian at kindergarten. Although the kindergarten staff had no objections to the children speaking their mother tongue in their sections, several acknowledged that they hadn't actively encouraged and highlighted the linguistic diversity among children



and adults. For example some kindergartens tried asking children what things were called in their mother tongue, but they still remained silent in the mother tongue. As part of highlighting diversity and affirming different identities, the staff of the kindergartens began taking concrete steps to ensure that there would be room for all of the children's languages in the kindergartens. The following narrative from a preschool teacher at Møllenhof kindergarten in Buskerud County shows that one of the children needed recognition and affirmation of himself as a Kurdish speaker before he perceived it as valuable to himself and the others:

The section staff is in the midst of preparations for a Kurdish week at the kindergarten. As part of this I ask Amir if he can teach me to count from one to ten in Kurdish. Amir looks at me, perplexed. I ask again, but he doesn't say anything. I try with different words, asking if he knows how to say "hello," "goodbye" and finally if he knows what "thank you" is in his mother tongue. Amir remains mute. None of the staff have ever heard him speak Kurdish at kindergarten, either with his parents or other Kurdish children. I think that my earlier assumptions that Amir doesn't speak his mother tongue are correct. Later the same day Amir's mother helps me with the numbers and words I was looking for.

The Kurdish week goes on with folktales, dancing and music from Kurdistan, and we eat Kurdish food and learn to count from one to ten in Kurdish among other things. The Monday after the Kurdish week, Amir comes up to me when I get to work. He says: "Mari, Mari, come here! Come to the playhouse corner!" I follow him expectantly, thinking that now I'm going to see something really special. When we reach the playhouse corner he says: "Do you know what this is called in Kurdish?" Amir points to lots of different things in the dollhouse and tells me what they're all called in Kurdish. His face is beaming. (Experience account from the kindergarten's project report)

In another kindergarten, the recognition and use of the mother tongue in the kindergarten was important for creating trust and good communication with one of the multilingual children (Kjelås 2009). The kindergarten relates how they were unable to establish a good relationship with one of the multilingual children. The kindergarten prepared an overview of central words and concepts in the child's mother tongue in cooperation with the bilingual assistant. When they used his mother tongue, the staff received a response from the child both verbally and through body language, and the child said something in Norwegian at kindergarten for the first time (ibid).



It is the responsibility of kindergarten staff to nurture linguistic diversity among both children and adults (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka 2006). Through facilitation grounded in multicultural perspectives, the staff can help to make kindergartens more open to diversity and create good learning environments.

Here are some ideas for specific steps for recognising and highlighting linguistic diversity that many kindergartens have had good experiences with.

- Write the children's names in different alphabets on their cloakroom spots.
- Make "Welcome signs" and "Merry Christmas" or "Id Mubarak" posters in different languages.
- Make and hang up glossaries in Norwegian and different mother tongues found in the section, in cooperation with parents or bilingual employees.
- Purchase or borrow children's books in different languages, or bilingual books.
- Use audio books in different languages.
- All children and adults learn some songs or nonsense verses in different mother tongues found in the section.
- "Word of the week": Every week everyone learns a word in the children's various mother tongues. For example this might be connected to a theme the kindergarten is working with.
- Translate information and plans for the parents into different languages.
- Make use of a notice board with information for parents in different languages.
- Hang up the "Picture of the day" of a situation or activity from today with a short caption in several languages. The picture serves as a starting point for conversations between children and their parents in their mother tongue about what happened at kindergarten that day.
- Encourage children who have experience with written languages other than Norwegian to use them at kindergarten. Either to write or "pretend write".



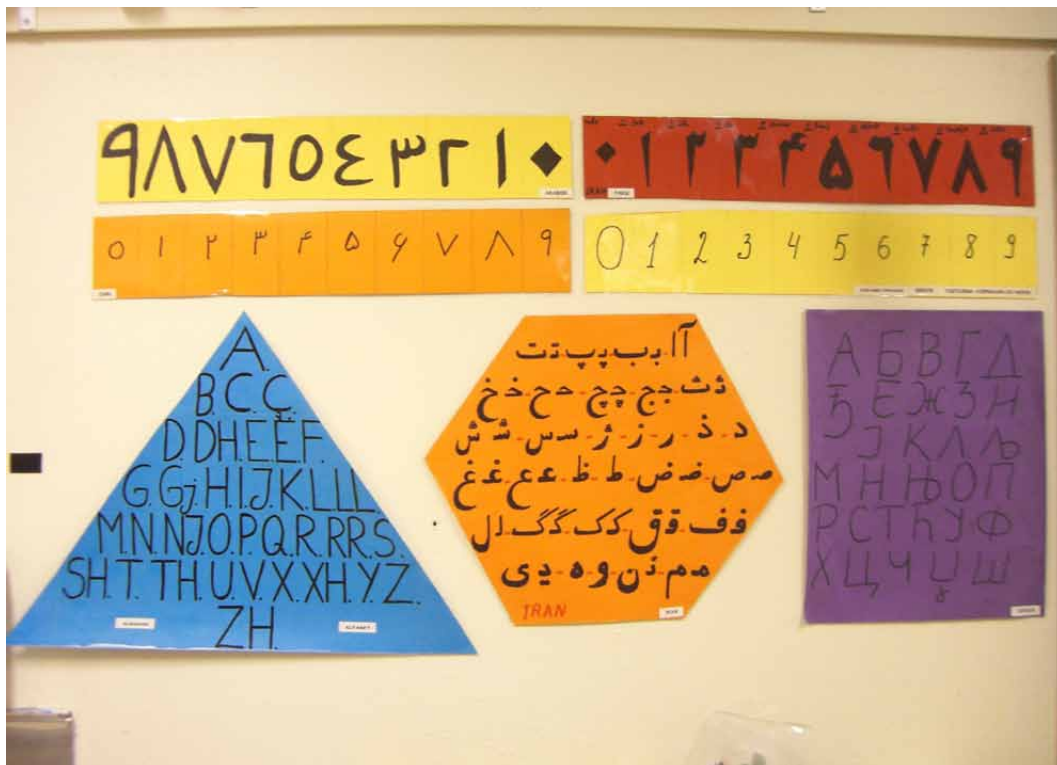


Photo: Bikuben kindergarten. Alphabets in different languages

Language cannot be viewed in isolation from identity, cultural expressions and affiliation. By making cultural and religious diversity visible, kindergartens can help to promote multilingualism in the kindergartens. Many kindergartens have emphasised the importance of creating identity-affirming environments for everyone, and have allowed their spaces and educational activities to show the influence of different cultural expressions. Many have obtained globes and hung up maps, and have purchased dolls, costumes and games that represent diversity. When children experience recognition at kindergarten, this may provide a foundation for them to share their thoughts, experiences and knowledge in both Norwegian and their mother tongue.

### **Multilingualism – a resource!**

At the **Bikuben kindergarten** in Møre og Romsdal County, all of the children have a mother tongue other than Norwegian and none of the staff are multilingual. In 2007 they initiated the project *Multilingualism – a resource!* Even if none of the children were native Norwegian speakers, the staff's perception was that the children's linguistic diversity did not have much influence on daily life at the kindergarten. Languages other than Norwegian were not seen or heard too much extent. In order to strengthen the children's progress in their mother tongues and Norwegian, the staff decided to work towards four subsidiary objectives:




- Facilitate opportunities for the children to use and maintain their mother tongue in the kindergarten.
- Make the linguistic diversity at the kindergarten visible.
- Make use of the parents' resources in the mother tongue.
- Increase the staff's knowledge of multilingualism and the importance of mother tongues.

The linguistic environment at the kindergarten has changed through better competence and awareness. There has been a significant increase in the awareness and use of different mother tongues on the part of children, staff and parents alike. To facilitate children being able to employ their multilingualism at kindergarten, the staff has taken some specific steps such as purchasing books in different languages, putting up name plates in the cloakroom in differing languages and creating glossaries in the children's mother tongues. The kindergartens have created their own *language boxes* consisting of materials visualizing folktales and songs, and have translated central words and concepts with the help of parents. Parents and outside translators have also helped to translate children's books. The kindergartens are planning to work with parents and adult education programs to obtain songs, rhymes, nonsense verses and folktales from different countries.



Photo: Bikuben kindergarten



The staff is seeing a significant change in how the children now employ their multilingual competence at kindergarten. The staff sees that their knowledge of and attitudes toward multilingualism and the importance of mother tongues have been important for the quality of the linguistic environment at kindergarten. The way the Norwegian-speaking preschool teachers and assistants discuss and show curiosity about the children's languages and encourage them to use them actively at kindergarten has had an extremely beneficial effect on the children's language use at kindergarten. Multilingualism has become a resource for children and adults in their work with language. Adults and children develop their linguistic perspectives by marvelling at languages together and discussing their differences and similarities.

An adult with five children by the jungle gym. The children are building a house together from the pillows in the room, which segues into role play. Two of the children begin meowing and walking around, while a third pretends to be dog, saying "woof, woof". All of the children are part of the game. Some say "meow", while others say "woof". Two of the children are native Chechen speakers, two speak Farsi and one speaks Serbian. The adult asks the children if they know the words for "dog" and "cat" in their mother tongues. The children eagerly interrupt one another with the answers. "In Chechnya cat is 'tjiska' and dog is 'zal,'" one of the children says. "In Farsi cat is 'pissji et gârbe' and dog is 'zægel hopa,'" says another. "In Serbia we call cats 'matza' and dogs 'kootsa'," says yet another. The children continue playing cats and dogs. After a little while the adult says: "Do cats speak the same language in Norway, Iran, Chechnya and Serbia?" There's a brief pause, and then everyone begins to meow experimentally. The children agree that cats say the same thing in every country. "And what about dogs?" asks the adult. The children repeat the experiment, with every dog barking eagerly. Oh yes, dogs say the same thing in Norway, Iran and Serbia. But one of the children who speaks Farsi shakes her head. She doesn't agree that dogs in Iran say "woof". "Iranian dogs say "vaff, vaff," she says. The other Farsi-speaking child agrees with her, and the two of them soon begin "vaffing". (Experience account from the kindergarten's project report, slightly abbreviated)

This experience account from Bikuben shows how the adult takes the initiative to get the children using their knowledge of their mother tongue. She seeks the children's knowledge of their mother tongue and gives this skill a valid place in the kindergarten. In concrete terms, she shows understanding of the importance of the children's mother tongues, in line with the framework plan (KD 2006a). Danish professor Anne Holmen<sup>2</sup> says that by using their mother tongue, children can "stretch their second

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<sup>2</sup> From Anne Holmen's speech at the NAFO conference on 23 October 2009: *Equal education in practice!*



language”. They expand their second language by using their first. Other examples of this phenomenon may be adults encouraging children with the same mother tongue to discuss their understanding of something happening at kindergarten in that language. For example, if one of the children doesn’t understand Norwegian, they can arrive at an understanding in their mother tongue. This way the mother tongue will help a child progress in the second language, while helping to stimulate cognitive development at the same time.

Having the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue is of great importance to children’s cognitive development. Minority language children who are on the path to learning Norwegian need to use their mother tongue to learn and develop their skills (Sand 2008). By activating the children’s mother tongues at kindergarten, the staff can contribute to the stimulation of their cognitive development. Naturally preschool teachers or assistants who share the children’s mother tongues are an invaluable resource for their cognitive development, but this is the staff’s responsibility even if they do not know the children’s mother tongues. Here the staff must also work together with parents regarding the importance of children’s progress in their mother tongues (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2006).

Linguistic negotiations with Norwegian-speaking children are also important for expanding and developing the system of concepts in children’s second language. This requires that the children have shared experiences around which to construct the language. Kindergartens can do a lot to create beneficial situations that provide the children with shared references, for example through activities, play, books and stories. The following small incident took place at the **Hanken kindergarten** in Telemark County:

Two boys are served porridge for lunch.  
Armand speaks only Norwegian, while Bashir is bilingual.  
Armand: “Want to have an eating contest?”  
Bashir: “No way!”  
Armand: “Yes! Don’t you remember the troll?”  
Bashir: “Okay, let’s have an eating contest!”

Here we see how Bashir does not yet know the concept of an “eating contest”, but his system of concepts is expanded through verbal negotiation with his friend. The boys were given an opportunity to negotiate verbally, because both children have the same reference: the Norwegian folktale *Askeladden som kappåt med trollet*, the story of the Ash Lad and his eating contest with the troll.

The quality of the linguistic environment in kindergarten is decisive for children who need to learn Norwegian. Therefore it is important for preschool teachers to have expertise in how children learn languages, and how they can strengthen the linguistic development of minority-language children by facilitating a beneficial linguistic environment.



### **Diversity strengthens the linguistic environment in kindergartens**

Through visibility, linguistic diversity can become a resource in the language development of all of the children in kindergartens, not only those who are multilingual. Majority language children also benefit from being in a multilingual environment. Language becomes a phenomenon, something everyone can discuss, compare and marvel at. The children learn that the things around us have different names in different languages. This strengthens their awareness of language and opportunities to reflect on language and linguistic variation (Høigård et al. 2010). Through encounters with other languages, children also become more aware of their own language. It is important for kindergartens to convey how linguistic diversity is a resource for children's linguistic development to parents, both minority and majority language speakers.

In her master's thesis (2007), Hetland saw how children may behave towards one another's multilingualism in a multicultural kindergarten. The example below shows how children naturally accept each other's varying language proficiency.

Sara, Katarina and Aurora are playing in the playhouse corner. Steffen comes over to them and approaches Katarina. Steffen: "Do you want to play with us?" Katarina looks at him, nods and follows him over to the group corner, where Elisabeth is playing. Steffen: "I was a tiger!" (he pulls out a little plastic teapot)

Steffen: "And sometimes I drank tea!" Steffen: "I spoke English!" (turns to Elisabeth) Elisabeth: "But we don't!" (about herself and Katarina) Steffen: "Ok, then you can speak Norwegian, and I'll speak English." Elisabeth: "But she doesn't speak Norwegian!" (points at Katarina). Steffen: "Then you can speak her language, okay?" (Hetland 2007:57).

#### **Further reading on making linguistic diversity visible:**

Gjervan (red.) 2006: *Temahefte om språklig og kulturelt mangfold*. Oslo: KD.  
Gjervan, M., Andersen, C.E., Bleka, M. 2006: *Se mangfold! Perspektiver på flerkulturelt arbeid i barnehagen*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.

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### **Using books**

Books and reading have always had a central place in Norwegian kindergarten education. Many kindergartens deliberately employ books as part of their language stimulation efforts. Research shows that there is a connection between early experiences with books and reading and children's language development (Aukrust 2006). It appears that children who have numerous positive experiences being read to show linguistic benefits in their school years and develop good reading comprehension. Aukrust indicates some factors in particular that support the reading proficiency of school-age minority language children: a rich vocabulary, active participation in cognitively enriching conversations, motivation and affective quality of the reading situation.



*Photo: Bikuben kindergarten*

Kindergartens must be an educational offering to children “here and now”. Still we must see kindergarten as part of lifelong learning, and contribute to providing children with good conditions on their educational journey. Among other things, kindergarten can help to provide children with a sound basis for their development in reading and writing. Aukrust (2006) refers to research on reading proficiency, which states that minority language pupils who are good readers in their second language have a holistic view of reading. They employ strategies and skills that they have acquired in one language to increase their comprehension of the other. She writes that “educational environments that include minority children can support the children's reading proficiency if they perceive that they can use their linguistic knowledge flexibly in both languages (Aukrust 2006:22). When we look at the examples above, we can see that the children in these kindergartens are encouraged to use their linguistic knowledge flexibly, and this can help to increase their total language comprehension.

Children benefit from hearing a rich vocabulary at kindergarten, and from being invited to participate in cognitively enriching conversations about something that

the child is interested in (Aukrust 2006). Aukrust draws attention to something she characterises as “a robust finding” in her study, namely that children’s vocabulary at the time they start school has consequences for later learning, reading and communication skills. “Kindergarten environments that recognise children’s bilingualism can help to support later reading comprehension” (ibid 2006:48).

The City District of **Bjerke** in Oslo has implemented a project in cooperation with the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences.<sup>3</sup> The objective of the project *Teach me Norwegian before I start school!* is to develop methods and tools for systematic work with language in kindergartens with multilingual groups of children (Sandvik and Spurkland 2009). The project has focused on the use of literature in language stimulation, and documentation and surveys of children’s language proficiency. A method of systematically working with literature in language stimulation has been developed through this project. This method is distinguished by how they work to concretise the content of selected children’s books and the organisation of teaching with a second language perspective. The kindergartens select some books that they work with over time. First the staff relates the books’ contents with the aid of tangible objects to support the narrative. The books are gradually read with less and less support, as children come to know the stories. The children actively participate and retell the stories in words and drawings, and create their own narratives.



Photo: Bikuben kindergarten

Three kindergartens **Rygge municipality** in Østfold County have tested the methods in *Teach me Norwegian before I start school!*, they have good experiences with inspiring parents to read books to their children in their mother tongue. The kindergartens inform the parents that the library has children’s books in different

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.lærmegnorskførskolestart.no/>



language, and provide information on The Multilingual Library and Internet resources. In this way parents have been able to read books that the kindergarten is using in the children's mother tongue at home, and the parents become an important resource in their children's multilingual development, in cooperation with the kindergarten.

READ MORE

**Further reading on work with literature**

Sandvik, M. og Spurkland, M. 2009: *Lær meg norsk før skolestart! Språkstimulering og dokumentasjon i den flerkulturelle barnehagen*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.

**Cooperation with libraries**

**Førresfjorden kindergarten** kindergarten in Rogaland County has worked on the project *My world – what a book!*. The kindergarten has focus on linguistic diversity and ensuring that children who are not native Norwegian speakers receive a rich linguistic environment at kindergarten and at home. Through a partnership with the local library, they've been able to borrow special book boxes to use at the kindergarten. They've collected children's books in different languages in the boxes, which children and parents can borrow to take home. They have also had books translated and have created their own audio books in different languages. They have partnered with the library to organise their own reading times in different languages. The reading times are popular with children and parents. In the kindergarten they work with the books by concretising the books' contents so that the plot is more accessible for all of the children.

Several kindergartens have cooperated with their local libraries in borrowing books in different mother tongues or bilingual books from *The Multilingual Library*, or DFB. The DFB is a resource centre for library offerings to language minorities. They advise libraries, and purchase and lend books and other media in 38 languages. Kindergartens can borrow from the DFB by going through their local library. It's also possible to purchase bilingual picture books for children (<http://www.dfb.deichman.no/>).

February 21 is the International Mother Tongue Day. In the City District of Stovner in Oslo, the kindergartens are celebrating this day with their local library. The district organises story telling courses for adults with minority language backgrounds in advance. On mother tongue day children and parents are invited to the library for reading aloud and storytelling in many different languages. This has become an extremely popular initiative for children and parents in the district.

**Reading pals**

**Solheim kindergarten** in Lørenskog municipality in Akershus County is working with Åsen school and the local library. Together they have developed the *Reading pals* project, where children in the fourth grade read to the kindergartners. The schoolchildren prepare thoroughly in advance. The librarian sets out books in



various mother tongues, and the pupils come and pick out books at the library. Then the children practise reading to each other in class before they bring the books and read aloud to the kindergartners. Minority language pupils can choose if they wish to read (or tell the story) in their mother tongue for kindergartners who speak the same mother tongue. At the kindergarten the pupils read to two or three children, and then there is a shared playtime and mealtime. *Reading pals* is a great way to work with books. Reading to younger children gives the pupils greater motivation and the joy of achievement. They are role models for younger children, take responsibility and gain a feeling of mastery associated with the reading. When they have the opportunity to use their mother tongue in the meeting with the kindergartners, this can help them feel recognition of their multilingual competence. The pupils' visits are very popular with the kindergartners. They meet young role models who can read, and this can increase their interest in books and inspire them in their own reading development. For children with minority language backgrounds, there is additional value in meeting older children who read or narrate in their mother tongue. This can help raise the status of the children's mother tongue in the kindergarten, and help them experience true recognition. This cooperation also helps to ease the transition from kindergarten to primary school. It's important to children's well-being to know some older pupils at the school when they start. At the same time the older children have an opportunity to stay in touch with the kindergarten after they've left for the primary school.



Photo: Snøball Film

**More information on reading pals can be found here:**

<http://www.skoleipraksis.no/flerkulturell-opplering/filmer/lesevenner/>

Aamodt, S. og Hauge, A. M. 2008: *Familielæring*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

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## Digital tools

The use of digital tools can provide good options for working with language, and may serve as good tools for stimulating children's multilingual development. Many kindergartens have experience with the use of digital cameras that can be connected to a PC or TV. The kindergartens can use their own pictures and videos directly in their language efforts and to document these efforts.

**Trollberget kindergarten** in Akershus County has worked on the project *Language stimulation through the Forest group method (Skoggruppemetoden)*. The forest group method is based on planning, performing and recalling an activity. An adult plans a trip in the kindergarten's local environment, together with two to four children. The destination is selected based on the children's needs, abilities and interests and could be to a little shed that the kindergarten has the use of, a nearby playground or the train station. Tangible objects, play, drawings, books, pictures etc. are used in the planning. During the trip the children and adults take digital pictures of what they see and experience, which they print out when they return to the kindergarten. The children's and adults' pictures form the basis for recollections of the trip. The staff encourages and stimulates the children to talk about their picture. The adults support the children with words and concepts. Pictures and a little report from the trip are placed into binders that the children bring home. As the kindergartens involve the parents in their language programme, the parents get an understanding of what the children have experienced at kindergarten and the opportunity to discuss it with the children in their mother tongue. In this way the kindergarten facilitates the parents strengthening their children's development in their mother tongue and broadens the children's understanding of what happens at kindergarten.

When the kindergarten has bilingual assistance, the *Forest group method* is further enriched for the minority language children. The opportunities to use both the native and the second language in the planning, performance and recollection of the trip can strengthen children's motivation, participation and feelings of mastery. This is a good method for bilingual assistants in their work in strengthening children's progress in their mother tongue.

**Globus kindergarten** in Vestfold County has worked on the project *ICT as a tool in language development*. They have used Smart Board as a tool to stimulate varied language use. With Smart Board many children or a small group can be involved. The children can use it with adults, with other children or alone. Smart Board is an interactive whiteboard that can be connected to PCs and the Internet. Children can play games, get information from the net, write, draw etc. The board provides many options for language activities, both receptive and productive. For many children this could indirectly spur their interest in books. The kindergarten saw that for some children this was an exciting way to encounter books and stories. The Globus kindergarten uses the tool to stimulate the children's language development in both their native and second language, and the entire staff is involved in the effort.

### Further reading on the use of digital tools

Bølgan, N. 2006: *Temahefte om IKT i barnehagen*. Oslo: KD

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### Aesthetic subjects

Several kindergartens employ aesthetic subjects in their language efforts. In the professional area of *Art, culture and creativity*, the framework plan emphasises that:

“Kindergartens must provide children with the opportunity to experience art and culture and to express themselves creatively. Sharing cultural experiences and making or creating something together contributes to a sense of belonging” (KD2006a:36).

The **Johannes Læringscenter** in Rogaland County operates a **kindergarten for new arrivals to Norway**. The kindergarten uses music as a form of expression in their language work with the children. Since this is a kindergarten for new arrivals, all of the children have a mother tongue other than Norwegian. What they have in common is that they have not been in Norway for very long, and their command of Norwegian is limited. The staff stimulates the children’s multilingual development through song, dance and movement, rhymes and nonsense verses. The children’s conceptual learning and vocabularies are reinforced through the songs and music. In addition the music provides happiness and shared experiences, which not only provide utilitarian linguistic benefits, but serve as a “sanctuary” and form a starting point for interaction when many of the children are struggling to express themselves in Norwegian. Both the parents and the bilingual assistants are important resources in supplying the kindergarten with songs, rhymes and nonsense verses in the children’s mother tongues. (<http://www.skoleipraksis.no/flerkulturell-opplering/filmer/>)



Photo: Snøball Film



Many kindergartens have had good experiences in using aesthetic subjects to strengthen their language programme. In addition to music as demonstrated above, various artistic and cultural expressions are an important part of children's means of expression. Kindergartens must strengthen children's cultural identity and their personal expression through these artistic and cultural efforts (KD 2006a). In a multicultural kindergarten, this can yield a wide variety of different expressions that can expand children's perspectives and reflect various identities, experiences and traditions.


### **Inclusive play environments**

Play is extremely important to children's learning and development, and it's important not to forget its significance in language programmes as well.

“Play has many forms of expression and can encourage understanding and friendship across age boundaries and linguistic and cultural differences. The foundation for children's well-being and the creation of meaning in kindergarten is laid in group play” (KD2006:26).

Through play children can develop their language in an enjoyable activity of their own choosing. There are many kinds of games that require more or less verbal communication. Simple rule-based games can work well without the children needing to use much language, while role play requires a good deal of linguistic activity. It can be extremely demanding for children who do not know much Norwegian to have to participate in games that require extensive knowledge of Norwegian. In these cases it can be important for the adults to participate and support the children and help to make the game accessible to various children. The adults should also intermittently arrange games and activities that require less language use. Naturally it is wonderful if children can play with someone who speaks their mother tongue at kindergarten. This provides the children with the opportunity to play at their level based on their interests, while at the same time being able to improve their understanding of the world and their competence in their mother tongue. Through planning and organisation, the kindergarten staff can arrange for children who speak the same mother tongue to play together, across sections as well.

**Lillehammer kindergarten** in Oppland County has been working on the project *Shall we play together?* The kindergarten's objective is for minority language children to take a more active role in play. The staff observed that the minority language children participated less in play than the majority language children. They were overlooked and ignored more often. The staff interpreted this as one of the reasons that the minority children were more restless, changed activities more often and participated less in play. This has changed through reflection on practice and raising awareness among the staff. Now the adults are more active participants, supporting the children in the play so that the minority language children become more active. Some of the minority language children did not have much experience with the kindergarten's play materials from home, and therefore the adults spent time



providing them with experience with various kinds of games at kindergarten so that they would be more accomplished playmates.

Giæver (2006) emphasises that the experiences children receive through play and interaction with others are more diverse than what they can learn through structured language learning activities. Therefore play is one of the most important language learning arenas in kindergarten.

### **Parents as a resource in linguistic efforts**

Parents are an important resource in kindergartens' work with language. Parents are especially important when the children's mother tongue is not Norwegian, and when the kindergarten has no bilingual employees. We have referred above to several kindergartens that make use of parents' linguistic resources at kindergarten, for example by obtaining songs in different languages and help in translating books and creating glossaries. This experience account from Solheim kindergarten in Oppland County portrays a kindergarten that received help with their language programme from parents:

One of the girls in one of our sections has parents from Turkey. At the beginning this girl didn't want to speak Turkish or teach us Turkish. Our theme was "numbers, space and shapes" and as part of this we had written the numbers from 1 to 10 in Norwegian and Spanish. We asked the girl's parents if they could write the numbers from 1 to 10 in Turkish. A few days later one of the assistants tried having the girl say the numbers in Turkish. The assistant said the numbers in Norwegian and Spanish and the girl said them in Turkish. The next day we were sitting together and eating, and one of the assistants asked the girl for help with counting in Turkish, and the girl counted from 1 to 10. One of the boys sitting next to her suddenly became extremely interested in her, and he asked her what various things were called in Turkish for the rest of the meal. The girl gained higher status among the children, and she helped us a great deal with translating words from Norwegian to Turkish. She no longer refuses to use her mother tongue.

For the parents to be a resource for kindergartens in their language efforts, the kindergartens must ensure that the parents receive the opportunity to participate and contribute to everyday life at the kindergarten. The more involved the parents are in their children's lives at kindergarten, the easier it is to bring about cooperation related to the children's language learning.

The **Storgaten kindergarten** in Grimstad municipality has been working on the project *The multicultural encounter*, where they arrange shared dinners at the kindergarten with the parents. Groups of parents and staff with different linguistic



and cultural backgrounds take turns preparing and cooking dinner for all of the children, parents and staff at the kindergarten. The kindergarten has seen that this produces important shared experiences for the children, the staff and the parents; they become better acquainted and their cooperation becomes closer. These kinds of shared experiences, which strengthen the relationship between the kindergarten staff and the parents, help to ensure that the children feel that the kindergarten is treating them better. Conversations before, during and after the dinners provide shared experiences that form a good basis for dialogue and close relationships.

The parents also need recognition of their mother tongue at kindergarten. When a kindergarten asks for expertise and involves the parents in the kindergarten's language programme, the parents can become active participants in their children's development at school. Parents need varying amounts of support and guidance in their parental roles, and this is the case for their children's language development as well. All parents want their children to learn Norwegian so that they can participate in kindergarten, primary school and society. Still there are some parents who have gotten the impression that if children are to learn Norwegian, they should speak Norwegian only. These parents need support and guidance from kindergartens on what it's like to learn several languages at the same time, and on the mother tongue's importance to learning and progress in the second language. NAFO has published the booklet *Children in multilingual families: Guidance for parents, guardians and kindergarten and health clinic staff* in cooperation with the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and FUG (the National Parents' Committee for Primary and Lower Secondary Education). The guide discusses current topics that parents and kindergarten staff might be interested in related to growing up in a multilingual setting.

### **Family learning**

Family learning is a concept that has been adopted in work with children and families in recent years in Norway, but this field has been very active in several countries both in Europe and beyond. Family learning is a collective term for various methods of working in and with families. The basis for family learning rests on research that points to the importance of parents in children's learning (Desforges and Abouchar 2003, Nordahl 2007, Aamodt and Hauge 2008). Family learning concerns learning between generations, where everyone has a learning outcome. Children achieve better learning outcomes when parents and other adults who are close to them guide them, show interest and have expectations. Parents learn as well by helping their children and by finding out how important they are to their children's success. For kindergartens this approach will mean more extensive work with parents, and involving them in the kindergarten's operation in a broad sense. Kindergartens represent an environment that complements the home (Report number 41 to the Storting), and can be a place where children and parents are given the opportunity for shared learning activities. Section 2 of the Day Care Institutions Act states that:

“Kindergartens shall assist households with the tasks related to care and upbringing, in this way creating a sound basis for the children’s development, lifelong learning and active participation in a democratic society.” Several kindergartens have good experiences of linking family learning to their operation, especially with families that do not have ethnic Norwegian backgrounds. These families may be unfamiliar with the Norwegian school and kindergarten system, and may have little or no education themselves in addition. It is still worth noting that family learning and work on it will be something that all families will benefit from, regardless of their social and cultural background.

In **Skien municipality** mothers who were participating in Norway’s introductory programme for new arrivals and had children in kindergarten were invited to reading groups devoted to reading books to children. The mothers became familiar with using books through these groups, including mothers who had little or no ability to read in either Norwegian or their mother tongue.



Photo: Rosetårnet kindergarten

**Rosetårnet kindergarten** in Bergen has created a project they’ve called *1,2,3, let’s go everybody*. The purpose of the project was for the kindergarten’s family learning programme to create new opportunities for shared activities at home, with an emphasis on conversation, storytelling and reading. The kindergarten invited families to activities that involved the parents in the kindergarten for a couple of hours per week. The kindergarten wanted to contribute to supporting the parents as their children’s first and most important teachers, and to seek and make use of the parents’ knowledge and resources in the kindergarten.

In **Tysvær municipality** the kindergarten, the school and adult education are collaborating on a family learning programme. Parents who receive Norwegian instruction at Tysvær education centre participate in family learning activities with their children at Førresfjorden kindergarten once a week. In addition the parents have an offer to receive Norwegian instruction in the welcome class at Førre School along with their children. An adult education teacher and a preschool teacher from the kindergarten are collaborating on the educational program for family learning. The goal of the activities is to promote Norwegian skills for both the adults and the children. There is also great emphasis on highlighting and using the various mother tongues in the teaching. A video about the project is available on the Internet:

<http://www.skoleipraksis.no/flerkulturell-opplering/filmer/familielring/>

**Further reading on family learning**

Aamodt, S. og Hauge, A. M. 2008: *Familiel ring*. Universitetsforlaget.  
Desforges, C. with Abouchaar, A. 2003: *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review*. Department for Education and Skills.  
Whalley, M. 2006: *Involving Parents in their Children’s Learning*. Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

**Concretisation materials**

Kindergarten education is based on a holistic view of learning. The framework plan emphasises that learning in kindergarten “takes place in the daily interplay with other people and the local community, and is closely interwoven with play, upbringing and care” (KD 2006a:26-27). Children’s learning takes place in both formal and informal situations in kindergarten, and the quality of the interplay between children and adults is essential to children’s learning opportunities. Good and close relationships characterised by recognition enable kindergartens to provide good conditions for learning.


It is traditional to use materials in various learning situations in kindergarten. These may be educational materials specifically developed to promote a particular type of learning and development, or they may be more ordinary materials found in our surroundings. Many kindergartens use various types of materials in their language stimulation efforts.

When we use books, folktales or songs in kindergartens, or when we need to prepare the children for an activity, concretisation enables us to make what we are teaching more accessible to the children. Sandvik and Spurkland (2009) write that the purpose of concretisation is for children to understand the concepts more easily and to receive first-hand experience with them. When we concretise the contents of a book or a folktale for example, we are employing a school of thought from language methodology known as the “direct method”.

“Typical of this school of thought is to ‘bring the world into the classroom’ so that the children can understand the concepts more easily and have first-hand experience with them. It is when words are incorporated and experienced in a context that they are best learned and understood” (ibid: 73).

Concretisation also means visualizing. We use tangible objects, figures, images, the voice, facial expressions and body language to make what we are teaching clear to the children. This helps to create meaningful contexts that facilitate the children’s language learning (Sandvik and Spurkland 2009). For minority language children who will be read to or told a fairy tale in their second language, concretisation is an important aid for them to understand the content and learn new words and concepts.





It's a matter of the staff facilitating learning and development at kindergarten based on second language perspectives. At some kindergartens bilingual assistants have told folktales in their mother tongues to the entire group of children, first without tangible objects and then with them. This makes it extremely clear to both children and adults who don't understand the language in which the tale is told how important it is to have access to tangible objects or visualisation as aids.

The tangible objects can also form the basis for a conversation beyond just the here and now. A blue car taken out of a language bag can pose linguistic challenges to a child beyond being able to say the word "car", count four tyres and know the colour "blue". The child can discuss what people can do with cars with an adult, as well as where we can go, who can drive, relate experiences from car trips etc. In this way the child and the adult can have *broadening conversations* together, which provide new words and concepts and help to improve the child's language development.

### **The chatterbox, language bags and boxes**

Kindergartens use both commercial materials and those they create themselves, as well as the things that ordinarily surround us, in their language stimulation efforts. Good deals of the commercial materials are based on Norwegian kindergarten education traditions that built on play, songs, rhymes, nonsense verses and folktales. The chatterbox, developed by Ihlen and Finnanger, is an example of language stimulation material that is widely used in kindergartens ([www.snakkepakken.no](http://www.snakkepakken.no)). It is a basic package containing language stimulation materials that can help to strengthen children's language and conceptual development. The chatterbox and accompanying resource guide is an educational tool developed for both kindergarten and early primary school. Among the contents of the chatterbox are concretisation materials, which are also found in language boxes<sup>4</sup> or language bags<sup>5</sup>.

Many kindergartens have created their own variants of the Chatterbox, language boxes or bags. What these materials have in common is the systematisation of tangible objects used in language stimulation efforts. Taking their inspiration from the Bjerke project *Teach me Norwegian before I start school!* and its leader Sigrunn Skretting, many kindergartens have developed their own collections of tangible objects associated with a folktale, book, theme, song or activity. Often the tangible objects are systematised in language boxes or language bags. Some kindergartens also systematise materials for language stimulation in separate language rooms.

It's possible to use tangible objects as tools in language efforts in many ways. In

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<sup>4</sup> *Language suitcases* as an educational material and method are associated with Sigrunn Skretting, the project supervisor of *Teach me Norwegian before I start school!*. The suitcases systematise concretisation materials associated with a book or folk tale.

<sup>5</sup> *Language bags* originated with Marie-Louise Nyberg's materials. Nyberg, M-L. 1998: *Den magiske sprogpøse. Sprogstimulering af tosprogede børn*. Haases Pædagogiske Skrifter.



one kindergarten they took out various plastic animals that represented the animals the children would see when they went to the zoological museum for the first time. Each child was given a plastic animal to bring along to the museum, where they would hunt for “their animal”. These kinds of preparations can help to reinforce children’s motivation for learning, and strengthen the learning of concepts in the activities the children participated in at kindergarten.

**The kindergarten for new arrivals to Norway at the Johannes læringscenter** in Rogaland County actively uses nature and nearby locations as a basis to investigate things large and small, where the children have adventures and experiences that are closely connected to learning words and concepts in a new language. The kindergarten arranges to employ all of the senses in their language work, and in their opinion this makes the children more receptive to the language in different ways than more traditional language activities do. Part of the point is for the children to have shared adventures and experiences that can provide inspiration for games and conversations in the kindergarten. See the video from the project here: <http://www.skoleipraksis.no/flerkulturell-opplering/filmer/flerspraklighet-som-ressurs-i-mottaksbarnehagen/>

Children learn language in formal and informal situations in daily life. We can say that a good deal of what surrounds us in daily life, both indoors and outdoors, can be used as material for learning. For example clothing, food and kitchen utensils, art supplies, games, natural objects etc. Children learn words and concepts more easily when they experience them in natural surroundings. Therefore it’s important for the kindergarten staff to see language stimulation as part of the whole of kindergarten, rather than just bundling it up with especially organized activities and formal learning situations.



Photo: Snøball Film

### **Materials that reflect diversity**

The framework plan emphasises that it is important that the diversity that surrounds us “should be reflected in kindergarten” (KD 2006a:7). This must also be shown in the materials used in kindergartens. The booklet *Guide to linguistic and cultural diversity* goes into detail about the framework plan’s recommendations that diversity must be visible in kindergartens through identity affirmation.

“In other words children must encounter something familiar in daily life at kindergarten: the languages spoken, the stories told, the songs that are sung, the books on the bookshelf, the dress-up things in the playhouse corner, the pictures on the walls, the letters on the walls or the holidays that are celebrated” (Gjervan (ed.) 2006:29).



Photo: Mantra Lingua and DFB

It can be a challenge for kindergartens to find materials that reflect linguistic and cultural diversity. Nevertheless it is important to be aware of using materials that can create recognition and affirmation for various children. For example it’s difficult to find children’s books, games, puzzles or other educational materials that reflect diversity when it comes to skin colour, family life, activities and traditions. It is still the case that majority children have the best

prospects of finding recognition and identity affirmation in kindergarten materials. Therefore kindergarten staff must be aware of which identities and experiences they are affirming as they plan language stimulation work and select concretisation materials. For example; can Little Red Riding Hood and Goldilocks appear with brown skin and black hair? Can the Norwegian folktale about the Pancake take place in Somalia? At the same time it’s important to be aware that not all children with the same mother tongue have the same points of reference, and they would prefer to identify with different objects and visual materials. A child who speaks Somali but has grown up in Norway might recognize completely different things than a Somali child who has just arrived in the country. When children experience connections between the domestic arena and the arena of kindergarten, their motivation for participating in the kindergarten’s various educational activities and in the social fellowship increases. When children can recognise themselves in learning situations and learning materials, they get more out of learning.

**Further reading on identity affirmation**

Gjervan, M. (red.) 2006: *Temahefte om språklig og kulturelt mangfold*. Oslo: KD.  
Gjervan, M., Andersen C. E. og Bleka, M. 2006: *Se mangfold! Perspektiver på flerkulturelt arbeid i barnehagen*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.  
Hauge, A.M. 2009: *Den felleskulturelle skolen*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

**Challenges associated with materials and working methods**

Some academic communities are critical of what they see as a growing tendency to use instrumental methods in kindergartens' language efforts. The evaluation of the framework plan (Østrem et al. 2009) points out a tendency for the framework plan's professional area *communication, verbal and written* to be directed by teaching aids more than other professional areas. Many of the kindergartens in the study say that they use various programmes and materials in their language efforts.

“There are reasons to ask whether the basis for the programmes is the framework plan's recommendations or instructions from owners and municipal kindergarten authorities, or if it is rather the case that programmes and materials determine the work” (ibid:143).


Giæver (2006) is of the opinion that educational materials such as the Chatterbox and language bags can be a useful supplement to language work in kindergartens but that this is not sufficient for the children to learn the second language. She points out that the materials do not inherently serve to stimulate language, but rather must be incorporated into a context that is motivational and creates meaning for the child.

Danish researcher Üzeyir Tireli (2003) asserts that minority language children in Danish kindergartens encounter instrumental methods more often than ethnic Danish children.

“A narrow and academic understanding of the learning concept is often employed when it is a question of the benefits that ethnic minority children receive from daycare centres, while a broad understanding of the same concept is employed when it comes to Danish children. This can create a ‘truth’ that minority children learn (and must learn) specific, measurable skills at daycare, while Danish children ‘merely’ develop and grow” (ibid:27).

Sand (2008) looks at critical factors in children's second language learning. She also points out the danger that

“the pedagogical plan for minority language children can become too *narrowly oriented to language stimulation*, and insufficiently focused on the preparation of development and activity options to encourage all-round development” (ibid:139).



This can contribute to a view of the children as deficient or problematic. There is more of a focus on the children's deficient skills in the Norwegian language than the linguistic competence they have in their mother tongue (Kjelås 2009, Sand 2008, Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka 2006). A study in Swedish preschools showed that much of the language stimulation of minority language children took place in structured, non-contextual learning situations using concretisation materials as tools, without a connection to the children's mother tongue (Sand 2008).

One of the things we know promotes good language development and eventually good reading skills is *extended conversations* or conversations outside the here and now (Sandvik and Spurkland 2009, Sand 2008, Aukrust 2008). Danish cultural sociologist Charlotte Palludan has seen through her research how Danish childhood educators employ different conversational tones when they encounter minority and majority language children (Palludan 2006, Pettersen 2004). She describes two different tones that the staff use when speaking with children: *the instructional tone* and the *interchange tone*. Typical of the *instructional tone* is that the adult asks the child about things she actually knows the answer to, and the adult directs the conversation. The child answers and is subject to the adult's teaching or instruction. This tone is used the most in conversations with minority language children. Typical of the *interchange tone* is that the child and the adult have equal status as conversation partners. They wonder at things together and exchange knowledge, thoughts and experiences. Palludan finds this tone the most in interplay between the adults and the majority language children (Palludan 2006).

Thus it's important that knowledge of what produces good language development and good linguistic environments in kindergarten determines the working methods and materials used – and not vice versa. In this way the use of different types of materials can strengthen kindergartens' work with language and multilingualism when this use is incorporated into a holistic view of children's learning.



## Multilingual work – with bilingual assistance

In chapter 2 we looked at multilingual work in kindergartens that is not necessarily dependent on bilingual assistance. In this chapter we will take a particular look at multilingual work *with* bilingual assistance. The reasoning for bilingual assistance in kindergartens is closely connected with the importance of mother tongues for children's development, both social and linguistic.

In their book *Children, language and culture* (2007), Helene Valvatne and Margareth Sandvik set out three arguments for why it is important to work with mother tongues in kindergartens. In the first place, children need to communicate with other family members; in the second place children should have the opportunity to develop based on the level that corresponds to their own age; and in the third place children should have the opportunity to find support in the language they already know when they are to learn a new language.

A family can be in a vulnerable situation if parents and children no longer have a language in common. We can ask ourselves what will happen with the relationship between children and parents if they don't entirely understand one another's way of expressing themselves. For children to be able to develop in the best way possible, they must be able to talk with their families in the language the family speaks the best. Kindergarten can be of great importance when it comes to supporting parents with this. At the same time it's important that kindergartens work actively toward children being able to develop their bilingualism and feel pride in both their mother tongue and their Norwegian.

When children get to communicate in their mother tongue they also get to express themselves, wonder about things and learn on the basis of their own conditions. In this way children can learn the most about the world around them and have good potential to develop socially and intellectually. Several kindergartens see a connection between an equal kindergarten offering and the role of the mother tongue in kindergartens. For children with little comprehension of Norwegian, it will be difficult to participate actively in a good deal of what takes place without bilingual assistance. In the framework plan we can read the following about the importance of the mother tongue to children's learning and development:

“Language is personal and forms identity and is closely connected to feelings. The mother tongue is important to the experience of one's own identity and mastery in many areas. A well-developed mother tongue is a fundamental precondition for further linguistic development, for written language and reading comprehension as well. Kindergartens must ensure that all children have varied and positive experiences in using language as a means of communication, as tools for thinking and as expression of children's own thoughts and feelings. All children must receive a rich and varied linguistic environment in kindergarten. (..) It's important for children to be

understood and have the opportunity to express themselves. Kindergartens must support children's use of their mother tongue, while at the same time working actively to promote children's Norwegian language competence" (KD 2006b:29).



*Photo: Marte Garmann Johnsen*

Even if there are a lot of new things to learn when mastering a new language, not everything has to be learned from square one. When a child has the chance to use the concepts and references they have already learned in their first language, learning a new language will be easier and faster. During the early part of NAFO's competence-building project, many kindergartens directed their attention to their linguistic environment. They wanted to work toward having minority language children develop their Norwegian. This was usually based on a sense that kindergartens could take care of children's development in Norwegian, while learning the mother tongue was the responsibility of the parents. Many of the pilot projects gradually evolved toward

seeing the potential for multilingual work in kindergartens. The knowledge that mother tongues strengthen children's progress in Norwegian changed the working methods and measures taken by many kindergartens.

All children will benefit in both linguistic and social terms from being able to express themselves to an adult at the kindergarten who shares their mother tongue. Therefore hiring staff with the same linguistic background as the children will be a great asset to kindergartens and the children. The government grant scheme will be of some help in this direction, but will be far from sufficient to meet the need for bilingual assistance in kindergartens. The conditions for this work vary widely among kindergartens. They belong to different-sized municipalities that are organised differently and where differing proportions of residents speak minority languages. As a result the authorities in individual counties and municipalities must look at the situation and their areas and find local solutions that can help to develop kindergartens' expertise in multilingual work and bilingual assistance. This chapter will describe ways of working with bilingual employees in kindergartens and look at different ways of organising the work.



## Political documents and central guidelines for bilingual support in kindergartens

In the following, some central recommendations are presented for using bilingual assistance in kindergartens to support bilingual children's development in both their native and second languages. We also go into more detail on how national political documents address mother tongues and multilingualism.

The framework plan (KDb 2006) establishes that the staff must have an active relationship with children's learning processes and awaken an interest in learning in all children. Report number 41 to the Storting (KD 2008-2009) points out that "one of the report's primary objectives is for all children to be able to actively participate in an inclusive community" (ibid:90). It is necessary for kindergarten employees to stop and ask themselves: All children – who is that? Who are the children in our kindergarten? What are their needs? What does this mean for our objectives and working methods? What does it mean for the sort of competence that our staff should have? Kindergartens include children with differing linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds where everyone must have good opportunities for play and learning, and the foundation for good development must be made possible.

In an evaluation of the introduction of the framework plan in 2009 (Østrem et al. 2009), one of the findings was that language efforts in kindergartens focus to a great extent on surveying and stimulating Norwegian language skills. The framework plan emphasises that a well-developed mother tongue is a fundamental precondition for further linguistic development, and points to the importance of using language as a "tool for thinking and as expression of the individual's thoughts and feelings" (KD 2006:29). The same perspective is maintained in Report number 23 to the Storting, *Language builds bridges* (KD 2007-2008). Valvatne and Sandvik (2007) stress that what is true for children who are native speakers of Norwegian is also true for children with other mother tongues. "It's as if people forget everything they otherwise know about the importance of good communications and a secure identity when they talk about children who grow up with more than one language" (ibid:307). See more on the importance of the mother tongue in the previous chapter.

Report number 23 to the Storting, *Language builds bridges*, proceeds on the basis of a holistic language policy "with an emphasis on Norwegian-language and multilingual diversity, the Nordic language community and the need for all-round foreign language competence" (KD 2007-2008:7). The report refers to a team of experts from the European Council that called attention to the linguistic richness of Norwegian as having great value. It was pointed out that instruction in bokmål, nynorsk (the two official forms of the Norwegian language), Sami, Finnish and Kven, the extensive use of dialects, and the fact that examinations in over 100 languages are arranged for pupils whose mother tongue is not Norwegian, all play their part in creating a positive linguistic environment that should be highlighted and celebrated.





Thus there are good grounds for making all of the languages represented in kindergartens both visible and audible as well. One way of helping to achieve this will be a conscious hiring strategy with a view to hiring bilingual staff. A kindergarten that creates curiosity about language and various linguistic expressions will provide children with a metalinguistic awareness that will be able to create favourable conditions for further language development in all children, including the monolingual Norwegian children. Read more about this in chapter 2.

The governmental grant scheme<sup>6</sup>, discussed in more detail in chapter 1, can be used for bilingual assistance among other things. The directive emphasises what an opportunity this is:

“Bilingual assistants are an important resource in kindergartens, for children, parents and other employees. Bilingual assistants can help to achieve the following:

- the integration of all children into the community
- that children can understand and make themselves understood at kindergarten
- bridge-building and the transmission of culture between children with minority language backgrounds and children with ethnic Norwegian backgrounds
- good relationships between kindergartens and parents”

(KD 2010:21)

In 2006 Rambøll Management received the assignment to evaluate the grant scheme. Among their findings are that the number of bilingual assistants has been reduced over time, and that kindergarten directors judged that the grant scheme resulted in better skills in children’s mother tongues to a lower extent than in 2004 when the scheme was introduced. Nonetheless more children are receiving bilingual assistance in 2006, distributed across fewer bilingual assistants. About half of municipalities have put measures into place beyond bilingual assistance. This is especially true of the larger municipalities. The report also shows that the majority of the municipalities don’t feel sufficiently qualified in the subject of language development of minority language children and describe it as a shortcoming. The report questions whether there is a growing language-philosophical paradigm shift, where the focus on children’s mother tongue has now been replaced by kindergartens more extensively implementing language stimulation measures that are based on Norwegian as a second language. “The pitfall is that as municipalities evolve from a mother tongue-based learning strategy to one that is second language-based, they lose sight of the importance of the mother tongue to minority language children’s well-being and development” (Rambøll Management 2006b:8). Østrem et al. 2009) sees some of the same thing in her evaluation of the framework plan.

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<sup>6</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2009: Directive F-02/2010. Government grant for the operation of kindergartens.



“The survey of kindergarten directors shows that measures to support multilingual children in using/developing their mother tongue is a low priority. Thus it can appear that language teaching and language assessments focus exclusively on children’s skills and knowledge in the Norwegian language, while their mother tongue receives little recognition” (ibid:103).

Another circumstance that the Rambøll Management sheds light on is that the municipalities state that it’s difficult to recruit bilingual assistants with sufficient teaching qualifications to work in kindergartens, so that they would rather hire Norwegian-speaking staff. Here the report points to clear potential for improvement for the municipalities, in offering courses and other qualifications measures for this group of employees as well.

The report also mentions the balance between “obligatory” and “extra” for the municipality as municipalities are obligated at the outset to offer some of the activities and measures mentioned in the grant scheme. This can result in municipalities replacing operational obligations with the earmarked government grant.

### **The role and function of the bilingual assistant**

When kindergartens or kindergarten owners choose to hire bilingual assistants, doing so will provide great help and support to individual bilingual children and enrich the kindergarten as a whole. The bilingual assistant will be able to play many roles in a kindergarten. Some of them are highlighted in this chapter.

#### **Work with children**

The booklet on linguistic and cultural diversity discusses what children can experience together with an adult who shares their mother tongue.

“Together with an adult who is fluent in the child’s mother tongue, the child has the possibility to:

- understand and make herself understood
- express thoughts, opinions and feelings (contributing)
- explore and expand her knowledge
- participate in play and other activities on equal terms
- prepare for activities and the educational aspect of kindergarten, as well as process impressions after activities”

(Gjervan (ed.) 2006:34)

A bilingual assistant will be able to help make it easier for minority language children to participate in play and activities, by supporting them in the process of understanding and making themselves understood. Findings from Danish research (Bundgaard and Gulløv 2008) show that play and various activities can create barriers between children, and that integration between minority and majority children



in kindergarten does not necessarily take place. On the contrary, kindergarten can be minority children's first encounter with an institution where they feel marginalised. In an environment where language is fundamental, the children are grouped according to their level of fluency in the language, and researchers see that fluency in Danish quickly becomes a dividing line between children. They find that educational activities proceed on the basis of children's motivation, and that the kindergartens do not do much work with the conditions for feeling motivated. The children's differing circumstances can produce different degrees of participation, for example earlier experiences and familiarity with the play materials. They also see that shared references make the children's time together easier. Some references are only shared by a few, and children seek out those they share experiences with. In the same way the researchers see that staff recognition of the children's experiences has importance for what they pay attention to. This is a circumstance that backs up the importance of having bilingual assistants on staff. They can help ensure that children's diverse references and experiences are recognised and included in the kindergarten's work. They can also help ensure minority language children will be able to understand and make themselves understood with both children and adults, i.e. in play, activities or conversation. In the framework plan we can read the following: "Children's care and learning environments must promote the joy of life, mastery of skills and self-esteem among the children. Kindergartens must provide the individual child with support and challenges based on the child's abilities and opportunities, and contribute to a meaningful life in fellowship with other children and adults" (KDb 2006:18).

The bilingual assistant will be able to play a central role in making more languages accessible to children during play or attempts to play with others. One possibility is entering the game along with the children; another is to stay in the vicinity and entering to add support as needed.

Having access to books in the language the child is most fluent in and letting the children experience the joy of being read to is fundamental to further progress in reading and writing. The bilingual assistant can contribute by reading books in the children's mother tongue and finding songs, rhymes and nonsense verses in that language. An example from Kirkenes kindergarten in Sør-Varanger municipality illustrates this:

The bilingual assistant has read and received guidance on chapter 5 in the book *Teach me Norwegian before I start school!* by Margareth Sandvik and Marit Spurkland. Now she is to meet with the kindergarten's Russian-speaking two year-olds about the children's book *Little Ghost Godfrey*. The kindergarten has created a book bag for this book, with associated tangible objects. She reads the book and discusses the objects in Russian. She writes out the Russian words and the entire staff learns them. The plan is to teach the book with the tangible objects in Norwegian-language meetings for the two year-olds.



The kindergarten wants to use book bags this way in all of the languages represented at the kindergarten. They don't have bilingual assistants in more languages and will therefore involve parents in translating the tangible objects in the book bags to the children's various mother tongues. At the same time the parents have the opportunity to take the books home and read them to their children in their mother tongue.

It's important to create curiosity about and interest in the languages found at the kindergarten, and allow linguistic diversity to put its stamp on daily life in such a way that the children become proud of their language. However, it's important that this process involve not only the bilingual children; it should be something that the entire group gets to share in. The example from Kirkenes shows how the bilingual assistant works with both her own language group and with the other children as well. When working with language it can be fun to listen to how different languages sound or to compare the written languages, for example by seeing how many letters are needed in each language to write the same word. In addition written languages have completely different letters or symbols! Kyrkjevegen kindergarten in Forde municipality tells the story:

Halldis and Quraishi have a gathering time with 18 children. After singing and roll-call, Halldis begins to show a book with fables and folktales from Somalia. The book showed the stories written in both Norwegian and Persian (Farsi). She said that she would read the story of the Elephant and the bird in Norwegian, and Quraishi would read it to them in Persian. Halldis read one third in Norwegian, and then Quraishi read the same section in Persian. After Quraishi had read her part, Halldis gave a brief summary before she read the next third. She did the same before she read the last part. The entire group of children was gathered around Quraishi when she read her part in Persian. After the entire story had been read, everyone spoke a bit about what it was like to listen while Quraishi read. Many of the children thought it was interesting and exciting. Halldis said that if we had travelled to Afghanistan and spoken Norwegian there, it would be the same for them to listen to us. The children also got to look at the letters used to write Persian. Many of the children are familiar with the Norwegian alphabet. Tage thought the Persian letters looked like a pattern. Quraishi told them that Persian is read from right to left, while you read Norwegian from left to right. Halldis and Quraishi showed them how this looked in the book. Next Halldis wrote her name on a piece of paper in the Norwegian alphabet, and Quraishi wrote her name on a piece of paper in the Persian alphabet. The children sat eagerly during the entire gathering and followed everything.



After lunch and a trip to the toilet everyone went down to the cloakroom to put on their coats to go outside. Halldis talked to Per Heine while they were putting their coats on, about the gathering and Quraishi, who spoke and read Farsi. Per Heine said “I really wanted to ask her to read more, more, more in Persian!” Halldis said that he could ask Quraishi to do so, because there were many more folktales and fables in the book.

Here we see how the educational leader and the bilingual assistant carry out a bilingual story hour. All of the children have the chance to hear both Norwegian and Persian. The native Persian speakers have the chance to become familiar with the story in a language they know well, and they get to see space given to their mother tongue when a story is read. The other children get to hear and become acquainted with sounds and writing in another language. The transmission by the two adults inspires conversation and wonder at language and writing. The linguistic diversity that exists among children and adults in the kindergarten is enriching for the individual and the group.

Both spontaneous and planned activities take place in a kindergarten, and the bilingual assistant can play an important role here. As activities are being planned, the bilingual assistant can be involved in the work with the bilingual children before, during and after the activity. As children gain an initial understanding of what’s going to happen in their mother tongue, it will be easier to participate along with the other children during the actual activity. After the activity the bilingual assistant will be able to process what has happened with the children in their mother tongue, and expand their understanding of what happened. For example it may be a matter of planning work with a folktale, a visit to a workplace, or a trip to the library. Spontaneous activities require a presence “right there and then” and sensitivity to children who need support in play and activity with other children. This requires both experience and awareness, and the educational leader will play a central role by supervising these types of situations.

In Granåsen kindergarten in Skien municipality the bilingual assistant has been actively involved in working with folk tales. They have also involved the parents in this work. The bilingual children have had good opportunities to understand the folk tales in both their mother tongue and Norwegian. Watch the film from Granåsen kindergarten here:

<http://www.skoleipraksis.no/flerkulturell-opplering/filmer/sprakarbeid-i-barnehage/>



Photo: Snøball Film

### **Staff cooperation and management**

The educational leader is responsible for managing the educational work at the section or group, and plays an important role as the supervisor of the rest of the staff including the bilingual assistant. It is essential to convey knowledge of how to make use of the bilingual resource to the entire staff. This is an important skill for all assistants; it has a central role in kindergartens' work and represents a good deal of the daily contact with and follow-up of the children.

The bilingual assistant may work long or short days at the kindergarten. Regardless, it is important to reserve time to prepare for work together with the educational leader and for cooperation with the rest of the section. The bilingual assistant on his or her part must have the opportunity to impart what he or she observes in the kindergarten, and finds solutions along with the rest of the staff.

The manner in which the kindergarten works together with the bilingual assistant will be critical to both workplace morale and the quality of the work. In the guide *Listen up: bilingual assistance in kindergartens*, Øygarden Mjelve (2002) points out the importance of kindergartens being reflective about their own operations in their encounter with bilingual assistants and looking at methods and educational activities from different points of view. It's absolutely necessary for kindergartens to clarify their goals and working methods, so that the bilingual assistant has the opportunity to employ his or her resources well and appropriately. The role the bilingual assistant will play, expectations, and what the specific duties will be are important issues to clarify. It's necessary for the bilingual assistant and educational



supervisor to work together to define objectives for the work as well as the most suitable approach. Receiving clear duties and knowing how and when they are to be performed help to give assistants good work morale and confidence that they are working according to expectations. Instructions such as “involving yourself in the children’s play and participating on the children’s terms, being more clear in the adult role and setting clear boundaries, paying attention to the culture of the children’s homelands and promoting the children’s mother tongues” (ibid:32) are examples of duties that it can be difficult to know how to perform. It will therefore be necessary to discuss different ways of interpreting the instructions and what they may entail in practice.

Bilingual assistants who work in several kindergartens in the course of a week face a particular challenge. For this to be a beneficial and satisfactory work situation for the assistant, it’s extremely important for the kindergarten to have a structure that pays attention to the assistant and also creates predictability for the children. Feeling valued and included in the kindergarten’s social and professional environment is critical to morale and the feeling of doing a good job. It’s important for each employee to receive good information about plans for the work and to be included in what happens at the kindergarten. Many kindergartens have pictures of children and employees hanging where parents and passersby can see them. It goes without saying that a picture of the bilingual assistant should hang there as well, even if he or she is only there a few hours a week. According to Rambøll Management’s report (2006b), the bilingual assistants considered working at several kindergartens to be more tiring. At the same time they considered belonging to a joint base shared with other bilingual assistants to be positive.

Sometimes the staff could be sceptical about hiring a bilingual assistant who is unfamiliar with Norwegian kindergarten traditions and who does not speak Norwegian at an advanced level. This requires openness on the part of the kindergarten, and perhaps putting extra effort into the cooperation, but “in many kindergartens it will be seen as enriching, both personally and for the kindergarten’s overall environment, that the adults’ language and cultural backgrounds are varied and diverse” (Sand 2008:133). “I think that all kindergartens should hire bilingual staff whether they speak the same language as the children or not. It provides a good deal of new knowledge that we wouldn’t have gotten otherwise” (Kindergarten director).

The bilingual assistant has an important mission in being involved with and fulfilling the needs of the minority language children in the groups. A Danish study (Glitz-Johansen i Sand 2008) found that minority language employees expressed themselves more positively about the minority language children than the ethnic Danish staff did. When a bilingual assistant speaks the same language and in many cases also shares some of the same cultural and religious affiliations as the children and their families, they can help ensure that the children are met with recognition and acknowledgement at kindergarten. At the same time they will be able to help ensure that the children are seen through different eyes by the other staff as well.



The bilingual assistant will have a natural place in the efforts to develop kindergartens and staff competence, both through internal meetings and outside/external courses. Kindergartens' competence-building will be based upon a mutual process amongst the staff, where everyone's contributions are important. When the assistant is associated with the kindergarten in a limited percentage position, obviously it will be necessary to assess the extent of their presence.

In 2001 the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences initiated a partnership with three districts in Oslo where they developed a course for assistants called *Kompass* (Kompetanseutvikling for assistenter, Competence-building for assistants), which gave academic credits (Furu and Granholt 2007). The course focuses on language minorities and alternates class meetings with guidance at individual workplaces. The course leaders have seen that competence-building for an individual assistant can lead to development for the entire kindergarten. "However if the learning process is to reach beyond the individual participant and create development processes at the kindergarten, this requires active leaders who show interest, follow up on what happens and involve the entire staff in the work" (ibid 2007:17). This shows an example of how kindergartens' development work can be based on reflections on the bilingual assistant's work and role at kindergarten. A corresponding course called *Komped* (Kompetanseutvikling for pedagogiske ledere, Competence-building for educational supervisors) was subsequently designed for educational supervisors as well (ibid).

### **Cooperation with parents**

Bilingual assistants will play an important role in cooperation and contact with parents. Many parents will see it as a strength and feel relieved that someone on the staff team knows their background and life situation, and that they can talk about matters large and small in their mother tongue.

However some parents will be sceptical about the hiring of a bilingual assistant at the kindergarten. Their primary desire is for their children to learn Norwegian, and they're afraid that their mother tongue stands in the way of this. In these cases it's important for the educational supervisor to talk to the parents about how the mother tongue is included in order to make it easier for their child to make progress in Norwegian. Sandskogan and Kvislabakken kindergartens in Nord-Trøndelag County relate their experiences with having a bilingual assistant.

The bilingual assistant plays an important role when it comes to explaining and preparing both children and parents for activities that will take place at kindergarten. Parents have given a lot of feedback that the assistant helps to create stability and security for both them and their children. He arranges separate gatherings in Somali and regularly reads books and talks with the children in Somali. The rest of the time he uses both Norwegian and Somali





during the day, to help the children understand and make themselves understood in play and activity with others. In this way he helps both to strengthen their mother tongue and to support their progress in Norwegian. The bilingual assistant participates in the kindergarten's meetings and he is involved in the planning, performance and evaluation of the work.

In some cases the parents of minority language children may have different beliefs about childcare, child rearing, and what constitutes a good childhood than the kindergarten does. The bilingual assistant will have both the linguistic and cultural background required for establishing contact and cooperation with the parents, and can be a resource to both them and the kindergarten. For kindergartens this can be a good approach to having a good dialogue with the parents about how things are going for their child at kindergarten and about how both the parents and the staff wish the child to be treated at kindergarten.

Nevertheless it is important for the educational supervisor to have the primary responsibility in the cooperation with parents, and for all contact with the parents to be in agreement with this. It is also important for everyone on staff to have a working relationship with all of the parents, and not to delegate too much of the responsibility for working with parents to the bilingual assistant. This is especially important if conflicts arise. If the educational supervisor does not see his or her senior responsibility for parental contact with all of the section's parents, the staff who shares the parents' language may end up in a situation where they are given too much responsibility for the development of cooperation with the parents.

Several municipalities have begun ICDP guidance<sup>7</sup> for parents, where bilingual assistants partner with Norwegian-speaking teachers to hold courses for parents from their own language group. When having the opportunity for dialogue and discussions in their own language, the parents may be more secure in their role as parents and also contribute to understanding of different views on children, childhood and adolescence.

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<sup>7</sup> International Child Development Programme, <http://www.icdp.no/aktuelt-hva-skjer-i-icdp-norge>



### **Who may provide bilingual assistance**

According to Report number 41 to the Storting (KD 2008 – 2009), bilingual assistants make up only one percent of kindergarten employees. This is an extremely small share in the larger context. Nonetheless several municipalities have made efforts to hire bilingual employees as part of their regular staff. Sometimes they will speak the same language as the children in the kindergarten, and other times they won't. Hiring bilingual assistants through the grant scheme has made many municipalities and individual kindergartens aware of what a resource this group of employees is for kindergartens and therefore they've wanted to hire bilingual employees as part of their regular staff.

It's important not to limit children's opportunities for receiving bilingual assistance at kindergarten to hiring bilingual assistants with funds from the grant scheme. Bilingual assistance can be provided by everyone at the kindergarten who speaks the same mother tongue as one or more of the children, whether they are employed as bilingual assistants, assistants who are bilingual and work on the regular staff, or educational supervisors whose mother tongue is not Norwegian. It's important for kindergartens to make use of the linguistic and cultural resources that exist among the staff.

**Nepjarhaugen kindergarten** in Sogn og Fjordane County is an example of a kindergarten that partners with its municipality's introductory programme and welcomes its participants for language and work experience. In their experience this process enriches the kindergarten's linguistic environment and has strengthened the focus on gatherings where the children use their mother tongue. Larvik municipality gives introductory programme participants the opportunity to function in language work experience positions at the municipality's kindergartens. Kindergartens can notify the municipality of language needs that are not covered by the regular staff or bilingual assistants.

**At Bikuben kindergarten** in Møre og Romsdal County, which was discussed earlier in this guide, none of the children are native speakers of Norwegian. All of the parents participate in the kindergarten's activities for several hours a week. As a result all of the children have the opportunity to practise their mother tongue in kindergarten.

When a kindergarten has gained a good overview of the children's mother tongues, they can actively pursue different ways of strengthening multilingual efforts at the kindergarten. For example this might mean visiting another kindergarten, a school or a workplace where the languages are spoken. The framework plan's recommendations for language efforts in kindergartens are clear: "Kindergartens must support children's use of their mother tongue" (KD 2006: 29). This is work that must be done, regardless of whether the kindergarten has staff members who speak the children's mother tongues or not. There are many ways for kindergartens to approach this work. Read more about this in chapter 2.



## Organisation of bilingual assistance

The number of minority language children in municipalities around the country varies widely. This affects the choice of which organisational solutions the kindergarten authorities decide to employ to provide bilingual assistance to the children. Here we will present different forms of organisation and experiences that municipalities have had in this work.

### **Employment in individual kindergartens**

Several kindergartens have hired bilingual assistants tied to the grant funds directly. This is the case at **Krokane kindergarten** in Flora municipality. The municipality has resolved that each minority language child releases funds for a 10 % position for one bilingual assistant. Thus the municipality is appropriating the funds needed to achieve this, in addition to the funds from the grant scheme. This has made it possible to have one 100 % position and one 70 % position, which together cover three languages at the kindergarten.

Kindergartens see that offering bilingual assistance for minority language children is of tremendous importance to these children's prospects for development. This has in turn led them to find different ways of recruiting employees who speak minority languages. They regularly have students from the municipality's introduction program come for language work experience at the kindergarten. They have also hired speakers of minority languages on the regular staff, often after a time as temporary employees at the kindergarten.

The municipality's chief administrative officer has appointed a working group which has reported on the municipality's kindergartens' experiences with and need for bilingual assistants. The conclusions of this group's work will be incorporated into the municipality's plan for children and adolescents.

**Førresfjorden kindergarten** in Rogaland County also has experience with hiring bilingual assistants directly at the kindergarten. They regularly receive minority language children, some of them recently arrived refugees. They see a great need to offer these children bilingual assistance and funds from the grant scheme are used for this purpose. They have a good partnership with the municipality's Refugee Service concerning refugee children who are starting at kindergarten.

The Refugee Service has contributed funds for a bilingual assistant's salary for several years. Both the kindergarten and the Refugee Service are concerned about being able to offer bilingual assistance to children who are the only speakers of their mother tongue at the kindergarten, precisely because they don't have anyone with whom to speak their mother tongue at kindergarten. When it comes to the grant scheme for children of newly arrived refugees, there must be more than three children to trigger the release of grant funds. Often only one or two children come to the kindergarten per year, which means that they cannot use this grant.

### **Employment in partnerships between kindergartens**

In some municipalities several kindergartens have deliberately joined forces to hire a bilingual assistant. **Sandskogan** and **Kvislabakken kindergartens** in Stjørdal municipality have jointly hired a Somali-speaking bilingual assistant. Between them the



*Photo: Marte Garmann Johnsen*

bilingual assistant has received a full-time position. Both kindergartens have been receiving Somali-speaking children for several years, and they view a partnership for this type of position as a clear strength. This provides the bilingual assistant with a stable work situation and good prospects for being included and influencing the kindergartens' work.

The kindergartens see that it has meant a lot to the Somali-speaking children to have the chance to meet an adult who shares their mother tongue. The bilingual assistant has played an important role, especially during their early time at kindergarten. He has helped the children become acquainted with daily life at kindergarten, and

helped ensure that they have established a feeling of security in the encounters with other children and adults at kindergarten. They see that the bilingual assistant has become an important resource person for the entire kindergarten. Since he has a 50 % position at each kindergarten, he is an adult who all of the children at the kindergartens get to know.

### **Employment in the municipality**

In **Sør-Varanger municipality** two bilingual assistants are employed centrally by the municipality, and so which kindergarten they work at varies according to the need of each kindergarten. In recent years they've had a Russian-speaking assistant who has been associated with Einerveien and Kirkenes kindergartens.

**Kirkenes kindergarten** has worked systematically with how to attend to the development of children's language skills by strengthening their development in their mother tongue, as one part of holistic language development. One year they had the following objectives for this work

- Develop a shared understanding of bilingual assistance.
- Develop tools for use in daily work with bilingualism.
- Develop methods for implementing bilingualism in the daily routine.



Kindergartens saw that they had previously delegated responsibility for work assignments to the bilingual assistant alone to an excessive extent. As a result the bilingual assistant usually held separate gatherings for the children who spoke her mother tongue, independent of the other work carried out at the kindergarten. The kindergarten wanted to change this. They set aside time for professional discussions for the entire staff, where they discussed how the kindergarten could develop its multilingual efforts and how the bilingual assistance should be carried out. They considered it important for the entire staff to become educated about bilingual assistance and take part in this work. Next the educational supervisors took the primary responsibility for planning the multilingual work, including that of the bilingual assistant.

Now the bilingual assistant is involved in the section's planning, and plans her tasks together with the educational supervisors. These plans have become an integrated part of the kindergarten's plans. The bilingual assistant gets time to read professional literature, receive guidance from the head of the kindergarten and to plan meetings and activities for which she is responsible. The kindergarten considers it important for the bilingual assistant to acquire theory-based expertise as well. "We take time for it," the head of the kindergarten said. "We choose to do this, giving it priority over something else."

The kindergarten wants the bilingual assistant to share her expertise on bilingualism and bilingual assistance with the rest of the staff, and to receive joint responsibility for not only the Russian-speaking children, but for all of the multilingual children.

*"It's very important that our staff have expertise in providing minority language children with a sound foundation for development and further learning,"* said the head of the Kirkenes kindergarten.

**Laksevåg kindergarten** in Rogaland County is working to make the bilingual assistants important colleagues in the kindergarten's linguistic and cultural efforts. Their experience is that bilingual assistants contribute their knowledge and experience, so that all of the children at the kindergarten gain a mutual understanding of each other's linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The bilingual assistants at Laksevåg kindergarten are connected with several other kindergartens. Some of them work at five different kindergartens in the course of a week. This means that they may encounter several different procedures at the different kindergartens where they work. They also encounter many different children and adults. The fact that bilingual assistants work at many kindergartens may have an impact on the connection they feel with each kindergarten. For some, this type of work situation can make it difficult to feel like part of the kindergarten's permanent staff, which in turn can mean not having much of a relationship with one's colleagues there. Work shifts at a given kindergarten that are short and limited in number can also make the bilingual assistant's role invisible to the permanent staff. One consequence of this invisibility is that the bilingual assistant is not included in the kindergarten's planning efforts.



Photo: Rosetårnet kindergarten

Laksevåg kindergarten is working to see that bilingual assistants are acknowledged as important participants in the kindergarten's educational work. They are viewed as important co-workers and the kindergarten is engaged in cooperation between bilingual assistants and the rest of the staff. Therefore they've created an employment contract designed to ensure that the bilingual assistants receive meaningful tasks while at the kindergarten, and that the other employees are familiar with their tasks. They have also drawn up goals for the cooperation between the kindergarten and its bilingual assistants. One of the kindergarten's educational supervisors has special responsibility for supervising the bilingual assistants. A 20 % position has been reserved for this work. They have regular planning meetings for professional interchange and development, which all of the bilingual assistants attend along with the teacher, as well as other staff members with whom they work. The bilingual assistants participate in the kindergarten's planning days. The kindergarten feels that it is especially important to get the assistants' perspective on their own work tasks. The work in which the bilingual assistants participate is also made known to the parents.

The kindergarten systematically employs language groups composed of majority and minority language children. These groups have developed their own materials through a method they call *Make me a story*. Bilingual assistants and the teacher work together in the language groups when possible.



## **Employment of bilingual assistants in bases**

### **Staff affiliations**

Some municipalities choose to organise bilingual assistants at so-called *bases* associated with different types of educational competence centres, which also provide other support functions to the kindergartens. In these cases these bodies take care of the human resources aspect. This is the case for example in the municipalities of **Skien, Kristiansand, Fredrikstad, Egersund, Vennesla, Lørenskog, Larvik, Stavanger** and the City district of Gamle Oslo.

In Stavanger and Larvik the base for bilingual assistants is associated with large learning centres containing kindergartens for new arrivals to Norway, primary and lower secondary education, adult education, and introductory programmes for refugees, as well as a base for bilingual assistants and teachers.

The largest base is at the Johannes learning centre in Stavanger municipality, where there are 33 bilingual assistants covering 26 different languages. Most of them have fulltime positions.

Most of the bases have from 4 to 7 positions, and the bilingual assistants are employed in fulltime or shared positions. Most of the bases have hired some of the assistants in permanent positions, and some in temporary positions. Some may also have a percentage as a permanent position and then temporary appoints in addition one period at a time. Clearly, having permanent bilingual assistants is an asset to the workforce. This is weighed against the advantage of the potential flexibility that comes with being able to offer bilingual assistance in the languages the kindergartens report a need for. The municipalities have appropriated their own funds for this work as described in the grant scheme guidelines, in addition to funds from the grant scheme. Stavanger municipality has appropriated considerable funds for the operation of their base.

The percentage size of the positions for those managing bilingual assistance work also varies somewhat. Most have a fulltime position. Skien has what they call a minority language team of four employees who do this type of work.

In Larvik we see the strength of co-location at the Larvik Learning Centre, which makes combined positions for the bilingual assistants possible. Several of them also work as bilingual teachers, assistants in the before and after-school programme (SFO) or as assistants in “mother-child” groups connected to the Learning Centre. The base arrangement began as a project where the municipality and the kindergartens wished to find out whether this was an arrangement of bilingual assistance work that they wanted to pursue.

Several municipalities have also made parallel, conscious efforts to recruit bilingual



assistants to the kindergarten's permanent staff. They see that the arrangement where bilingual assistants are provided through the grant scheme is not sufficient to meet the kindergarten's need for bilingual assistance. Municipalities such as Larvik, Lørenskog and Skien are seeing a continual increase of bilingual employees at their kindergartens.

One possible base model might also be to locate the base for bilingual assistants at one of the municipality's kindergartens. The assistants could be employed by that kindergarten, and a teacher could be hired to manage their work.

#### **Cooperation procedures and organisation of work**

In most municipalities being the base manager for the bilingual assistants entails the following:

- hiring the bilingual assistants
- preparing a grant application form for the kindergartens to use
- processing applications from kindergartens
- preparing plans for bilingual assistance with bilingual assistants, educational supervisors and kindergarten directors
- coordinating the work
- managing professional supervision of the kindergartens and the bilingual assistants

When a bilingual assistant belongs to a base rather than being employed at a kindergarten, this requires regular follow-up from the base manager. Many of them hold meetings with all of the kindergartens that will have bilingual assistance every fall, and a gathering for all of the bilingual assistants in the district or municipality once or twice a month. Professional topics are passed on at the meetings, and specific experiences from working in kindergartens are discussed.

In addition several municipalities and districts have found it suitable to have regular meetings between educational supervisors, bilingual assistants and base managers. Some choose to hold the meetings at the individual kindergartens, while others choose to gather all of the educational supervisors and bilingual assistants at regular intervals.

In Larvik the newly hired bilingual assistants are only associated with one kindergarten for the first month in order to ensure a good training situation. In addition they hold start-up meetings between the kindergarten director, bilingual assistant and coordinator where they follow a special procedure for new employees, which include plans for dialogue and guidance, roles and tasks.

The base managers point out the importance of continuity and regular follow-up with the bilingual assistants and the kindergartens. There are many procedures that collectively help ensure that the minority language children can benefit from good





bilingual assistance in their everyday life at kindergarten. An example of such a procedure is each kindergarten reporting all of the children who trigger the release of grant funds. The kindergartens apply to the base to have bilingual assistants assigned to them, by using the application form the base has developed. Many bases ask the kindergartens to report which tasks they need support for, and then the base manager allocates the bilingual assistant's hours.

The number of kindergartens an assistant works at varies, ranging from two to seven in the course of a week. All of the base managers convey the importance of being flexible in this area. The bilingual assistants have different views on this: some think it's great to visit numerous kindergartens, while others want a closer relationship with fewer kindergartens. This can be connected with their length of experience with this type of work. Several of the bilingual assistants say that if they have relationships with numerous kindergartens, the focus is directed more to the children who need bilingual assistance rather than the kindergarten as a whole.

#### **Habituation time**

The base managers emphasise the possibilities they have to organise the bilingual assistants flexibly. There may be a great need for bilingual assistants at the beginning of the kindergarten year, when several children are just beginning to learn Norwegian. Lørenskog and the City District of Gamle Oslo have chosen to give priority to children who are completely new and neither understand nor speak Norwegian when assigning bilingual assistants.

In Lørenskog the bilingual assistants generally work with new children and parents in August and the beginning of September. The coordinator communicates closely with the kindergartens, who forward a summary of which children are new and when they start kindergarten, so that the bilingual assistant can be placed where there is a need. Therefore the bilingual assistants don't begin their steady kindergarten assignments until mid-September.

Sometimes there are children who start kindergarten after the schedule for the bilingual assistants has been created and their time has been allocated. Many bases emphasise the importance of having flexibility that observes these children's need for bilingual assistance during their first time in kindergarten. As a result, bilingual assistants may work for short periods at other kindergartens than their original placements.

In Skien the kindergartens have reported a need for bilingual assistance for a short period in the middle of the year several times. The reason is a change in situation as compared to when the applications for assigning bilingual assistants were processed. The base takes this into account, which kindergartens, parents and children all greatly appreciate. Flexibility of organisation also means that the base allocates payroll funds so that they are able to purchase services from bilingual



teachers when there is a language their base does not cover. One kindergarten reported a need for a Polish assistant after a Polish-speaking child started there. The child cried a lot, and struggled to calm down at kindergarten. The base lined up a Polish-speaking bilingual teacher for a few hours a week over the course of a month. When this teacher started, the child began to relax, speak, get acquainted with other children and adults, and become interested in the kindergarten's games and equipment.

All of the bases have procedures for making work plans, where the educational supervisor, base manager and bilingual assistant all participate. The plans are evaluated on a regular basis and the kindergartens report back to the base on how the work is going.

Many base managers report that in the past the bilingual assistants' work often had the quality of being disconnected from that of the kindergarten. Now it is increasingly seen as an important part of the kindergarten's plans. In the past bilingual assistants felt that they were viewed as substitutes at the kindergarten; now they feel that they are valued as important resource people who help to strengthen the quality of the kindergarten's educational work. The kindergartens also report that this approach is perceived as binding and clarifies their support needs. When the bilingual assistants' duties are clearly defined it is easier to monitor the work and evaluate how it is progressing.

### **Job duties**

When it comes to the bilingual assistants' job duties, they are defined in different ways. In Lørenskog they define job duties based on Lørenskog's own job descriptions, which in turn are based on the job description prepared by Drammen municipality. This is a good starting point for further clarifications of what the bilingual assistants are to do at each kindergarten.

In the City District of Gamle Oslo they define the job duties at joint meetings between kindergartens, base managers and bilingual assistants. As a result they are able to draw on the assistants' personal expertise. Some are especially good at working with parents and are given responsibility in this area. Others have acquired good ICT or mathematics skills and get the opportunity to use them in their work with the children. ICT efforts in kindergartens are otherwise one of the priorities of the district's educational competence centre, which means that bilingual assistants attend courses and receive training in this area.

In Skien municipality they've compiled a binder on bilingual work in kindergartens where various materials have been collected, such as an application form for bilingual assistance, language development theory and good examples of work with language. The materials that have been prepared nationally, for example the guide *Children in multilingual families* also go into the binders that are found in all of the municipality's kindergartens. This procedure ensures that all of the kindergartens



have access to fundamental information on bilingual work. New materials to go into the binders are distributed at joint meetings of the kindergarten directors. Vennesla municipality is an example of a smaller municipality that is also working to ensure the quality of multilingual work by collecting materials in a manual that the kindergartens can use.

In Skien they've also selected six kindergartens to receive newly arrived refugees. As a result several of these children also receive bilingual assistance.

In Lørenskog the bilingual assistants say that the mother tongue gatherings they run are popular, and that the minority language children often invite their majority language friends to come and participate. They have had many wonderful shared experiences which have mostly taken place in Urdu, Somali, Vietnamese or Tamil. The children who are native speakers of these languages have the chance to teach words to their friends who speak Norwegian. Multilingualism has become something that provides status and fascinates the children.

The base managers gain a good overview of which mother tongues are spoken by the staff and children in the various kindergartens. In Lørenskog they are actively making use of this in meetings with parents when they apply to have their children go to kindergarten. They tell them which kindergartens in the vicinity of the family's residence offers bilingual assistance.

Several of the base managers also attend the municipality's ordinary meetings for kindergarten directors or educational supervisors when topics that concern the multilingual children are discussed, or they attend regularly once or twice a year.

### **Development of competence**

At the Johannes Learning Centre's base in Stavanger municipality, the bilingual assistants state that the base provides them with a good working environment and an inspiring professional environment. Unlike the previous arrangement where they were employed by individual kindergartens, now they only have one employer, which enables them to turn more of their attention to the professional work with the children in the kindergartens. The administrative work is handled at the base. Their professional duties as bilingual assistants are always the focus of attention at the base. This strengthens their professional identity and their opportunities for competence building. Many have also been inspired to take continuing education together. They become obvious resource people who advance the multilingual and multicultural perspectives in the various staff groups they work with. The base is engaged with making competence development systematic. All of the bilingual assistants take a so-called industry course when they start at the base, and individual competence advancement plans are created for each assistant.

In the City District of Gamle Oslo the assistants are also noticing how aware they and their kindergartens are of the jobs they do. This gives them a sense of



professional pride in being part of the work at the base. It's a strength to be able to discuss their jobs with others in the same situation. Many of the bilingual assistants have extensive work experience. Several of them have working experience from kindergartens going back to the 1980s. As a result they have both kindergarten expertise and life experience that are perceived as an asset, both in daily work in the sections and in cooperation with the minority language parents. They would rather work at the base than in an assistant position on the permanent staff. Their perception is that by being at the base they are involved in supporting the minority language children in the district with the greatest need for bilingual assistance.

Several municipalities tell of how the bilingual assistants had low status in the past. There weren't so many kindergartens that wanted bilingual assistants. The work they did was often in separate gatherings that the rest of the kindergarten didn't know much about. Also, the kindergartens sometimes focused on how demanding it was to cooperate with the bilingual assistants, and how easily misunderstandings occurred. Today the kindergartens are planning so that the bilingual assistants also participate in gatherings for all of the children, and the minority language children receive bilingual assistance in the regular work of the day, whether during a meal or during play with other children. Many kindergartens report that they feel at a loss without the bilingual assistants. They have become important colleagues.

The base managers are concerned that the development of the bilingual assistants' skills should focus on different aspects of their work. They are discussing what it means to be a bilingual assistant, their role both in relation to children's linguistic and identity development, how they can be involved and make aspects of the children's cultural background visible at kindergarten, and how they can contribute to a good dialog with parents. They are also focusing on other educational topics such as play, participation by the children, various types of activities, work with literature, planning and holding gatherings etc.

In Larvik the base organises annual course days for the bilingual assistants. All of the bilingual employees in both municipal and private kindergartens are also invited to participate.

One competence measure being implemented in Skien is to organise a Norwegian course for employees with minority backgrounds. Several of the bilingual assistants have participated in the course, which covers both written and verbal work-related Norwegian. The course takes four hours a week during working hours over six months. Several bases are pursuing working methods that involve writing. For example some have the bilingual assistants write log books and have events and experience accounts they have written down become the basis for discussions and guidance.



#### **Further reading on bilingual assistance**

Drammen kommune 2006: *Veileder Tospråklig opplæring i barnehagen*

Nettutgave: <http://www.drammen.kommune.no/>

Furu, A. og Granholt, M. 2007: *Sammen om kunnskap. Kvalifiseringsarbeid i barnehagens personalgruppe*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Gjervan (red.) 2006. *Temahefte om språklig og kulturelt mangfold*. OSLO: KD

Gjervan, M., Andersen, C.E, Bleka, M. 2006: *Se mangfold! Perspektiver på flerkulturelt arbeid i barnehagen*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademiske Forlag.

Sand, S 2008: *Ulikhet og fellesskap. Flerkulturell pedagogikk i barnehagen* Oplandske bokforlag.

Øygarden Mjelve, A. 2002: *"Hør på maken" Tospråklig assistanse i barnehagen*. Barne- og familiedepartementet.

**READ MORE**





## Language assessments

The framework plan has a requirement that “kindergartens must plan, document and evaluate their educational operation” (KD 2006a:85).

“Documentation can be a means of bringing out different opinions and paving the way for a critical and reflective practice. The children’s learning and the staff’s work must be made visible as a basis for reflection (...)” (ibid:49).

“(...) Ordinarily kindergartens should not evaluate the achievements of each child in relation to stated criteria” (ibid:50).

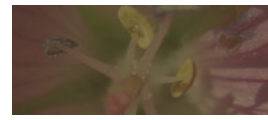
In the evaluation of the framework plan entitled *Alle teller mer* (Everyone counts more) (Østrem 2009), the authors find that political documents other than the framework plan are of great importance to kindergartens’ language efforts. Report number 16 to the Storting was highlighted in particular. In this report the term “assessment” is used more than “documentation” which is used in the framework plan.

“It can appear as though municipalities with more multilingual children tend to focus much more on the use of assessment tools. (...) The survey of kindergarten directors shows that measures to support multilingual children in using/developing their mother tongue is a low priority. Thus it can appear that language teaching and language assessments focus exclusively on children’s proficiency in and knowledge of the Norwegian language, while their mother tongue receives little recognition” (ibid:103).

In order to discover needs for language stimulation and tailor this stimulation to each child at kindergarten, it may be necessary to document or assess children’s language proficiency. In Report number 41 to the Storting, the Ministry states that all 3 year-old kindergartners are entitled to a language assessment (KD:2009). A study conducted by Rambøll (2008) shows that 92 percent of Norway’s municipalities have initiatives to assess the languages of children in municipal kindergartens. 75 percent of the municipalities that have private kindergartens have similar initiatives for those kindergartens.

### Assessing kindergartens’ linguistic environment

The staff can assess what they are doing to promote a good linguistic environment in order to strengthen language efforts in kindergartens (Høigård et al. 2010). By documenting and evaluating kindergartens’ linguistic environment, the teachers can gain an understanding of the background the children bring to language learning at kindergarten, how the staff works with language and what can be improved. For example the nature of the staff’s knowledge of language, multilingualism and language stimulation methods, and whether they have multilingual expertise, can all be critical to a kindergarten’s linguistic environment.



The kindergartens in **the City District of Stovner** in Oslo have developed a tool for assessing the linguistic environment in kindergartens. Among the topics addressed by the assessment are good conversations, how children serve as resources for each other, language games, play, the use of books and libraries, children's mother tongues, second language learning, cooperating with parents and upgrading of skills. Performing an assessment enables kindergartens to look at their own practice and reflect on how they can develop their linguistic environments. Through this process the kindergartens' management and municipal kindergarten authorities learn what kinds of competence, support and follow-up the kindergartens need (KD 2009b).

### **Assessing of individual children**

When kindergartens use assessment tools to evaluate each child's language proficiency, it is important to evaluate what type of tool is being used. Rambøll's evaluation of the grant scheme (Rambøll 2006) shows that the assessment tools that kindergartens use with minority language children were developed to survey language or discover language difficulties in monolingual children with majority language backgrounds. In other words many kindergartens are using assessment materials that are not designed for children who speak Norwegian as a second language.

Many of the assessment tools that the kindergartens use are norm-based. For example this is the case with TRAS (Early Registration Of Language Development), which is based on expectations for normal language development in monolingual majority language children (Høigård et al. 2010). When this tool is used on minority language children, preschool teachers are effectively comparing children who speak Norwegian as a second language with native Norwegian speaking children as they evaluate the children's language proficiency. This can result in the marginalisation of minority language children, where there is an unbalanced focus on what the children can't do rather than what they can do (in their mother tongue) (Østrem et al. 2009, Sand 2008, Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka 2006). Most of the assessment tools used in Norwegian kindergartens such as TRAS are not specially designed for multilingual children<sup>8</sup>.

**Tonning barnehage** in Sogn og Fjordane County has done a good deal of work with language assessments. Their experience was that the two assessment tools *TRAS* and *Alle med* did not work well for children where "the family has changed countries" (minority language children), specifically because the tools' categories were determined by age. Tonning based their project on an assessment tool for primary and secondary school that follows the plan for Basic Norwegian. The materials they've developed are based on modules covering listening, speaking, comprehension, dialogue and participation. The preschool teachers focus on what the children can do through the assessment, not what they cannot do.

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<sup>8</sup> TRAS also contains a form developed for assessing children regardless of age. It is designed for the assessment of minority language children among other purposes. [http://www.statped.no/moduler/Module\\_FrontPage.aspx?id=37274&epslanguage=NO](http://www.statped.no/moduler/Module_FrontPage.aspx?id=37274&epslanguage=NO)



If children's languages are to be assessed, this should be done both in the child's mother tongue and in Norwegian if an opinion is to be formed on the child's total language proficiency (Sand 2008). Bilingual staff is an invaluable resource in this connection. The children's parents must be involved in the assessment process as well. Assessing the language of minority language children in kindergarten may be of interest in order to evaluate whether they need special language instruction when starting school, cf. section 2.8 of the Education Act. Assessing children's language proficiency and kindergartens' linguistic environment requires preschool teachers




Photo: Marte Garmann Johnsen

to have expertise in language and language development, also from a multilingual perspective. A higher demand for assessments creates a higher demand for preschool teachers' professional expertise, and when there are not many preschool teachers in a kindergarten this can become problematic (Kjelås 2009).

Sandvik and Spurkland (2009) have developed an assessment tool called *Språkpermen* (The Language Binder), which follows the book *Lær meg norsk før skolestart!* (Teach Me Norwegian Before I Start School!). The tool documents both an individual child's language development

and the kindergarten's linguistic environment. *Språkpermen* allows for the assessment of both Norwegian and the child's mother tongue, and takes a socio-cultural view of children's learning, i.e. that learning is socially conditioned and children learn from and with each other (ibid). The assessment tool should give preschool teachers, kindergarten staff and parents a profile of a child's language development over time, and is a form of portfolio assessment. The tool is based on levels and is not divided by age. Sandvik and Spurkland are critical of assessments that are based on a given norm or standard. In their view there is a danger that multilingual children will be marginalised when kindergartens use tests and assessment tools where native Norwegian speakers are the norm (ibid). Children's





total language proficiency often becomes invisible if they are not given the opportunity to show their proficiency in their mother tongue at kindergarten as well. If a language assessment can only be performed in a child's second language, it's impossible to gain an insight into the child's total language proficiency. Therefore it's difficult to assess the child's language proficiency if their mother tongue is excluded. The language binder also includes an assessment of children's mother tongue when possible.

**Further reading on work with documentation and assessments**

Høigård, A., Mjør, I. og Hoel, T. 2010: *Temahefte om språkmiljø og språkstimulering i barnehagen*. Kunnskapsdepartementet.

Sandvik, M. og Spurkland, M. 2009: *Lær meg norsk før skolestart! Språkstimulering og dokumentasjon i den flerkulturelle barnehagen*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.

READ MORE



Here is a summary of various resources on multilingual work with children: websites, publishers and authorities that focus on multilingualism. We have also created a summary list of the kindergartens and municipalities that we referred to earlier in this guide.

## Internet resources

<http://www.bzzzpeek.com/>

Website where children who speak 20 different languages have recorded animal noises. The website is very well suited for use in a multilingual group of children, for conversations about different languages.

<http://www.dfb.deichman.no/>

The Multilingual Library is a resource centre for library offerings to language minorities. Lends books in 30 different languages. They also have books for sale.

<http://www.familieforlaget.no/>

Website where it's possible to order books and audio books and accompanying resource binders. The publisher has a special emphasis on Norwegian fairytales translated into nine languages, and the resource binders contain assignments based on the fairytales.

[www.hio.no/nafo](http://www.hio.no/nafo)

Nasjonalt senter for flerkulturell opplæring (National centre for multicultural education)

<http://www.kulturbro.no/>

The publisher Kulturbro Forlag works to promote integration, cultural understanding and language development through the exchange of literature between cultures and in different languages. They offer children's books in different languages.

<http://decentius.hit.uib.no/lexin.html>

Web-based dictionaries created especially for immigrants in Norway. As of 2009 they translate between Norwegian and 10 different languages. The dictionaries contain explanations of each word, as well as illustrations. They can be used with minority language children and parents, for example.

<http://www.lærmegnorskførskolestart.no>

This website is associated with the Bjerke project *Lær meg norsk før skolestart* (Teach me Norwegian before I start school), the book with the same title, and the assessment tool *Språkpermen* (the Language Binder) (Sandvik and Spurkland 2009). The website is not accessible with all browsers (use Opera or Firefox, for example).



<http://www.mantralingua.com/home.php>

Website where it's possible to order children's books in different languages, posters with various written languages and educational materials designed for language work.

<http://www.morsmal.no>

Website on mother tongue education and bilingual vocational education, with teaching resources and information. The website's target group is mother tongue teachers in kindergartens and primary and secondary schools, bilingual subject teachers, teachers with responsibility for bilingual vocational education, pupils, parents and others who are interested in this field. The website currently has limited offerings for kindergartens, but this is under development. See also the site's Swedish forerunner at <http://modersmal.skolverket.se/>

<http://naartoersinte.deichman.no/>

Retrieved from the Oslo Public Library website. Web-based story and game by Thor Åge Bringsværd and Tina Solli. In Norwegian, Sorani Kurdish, Urdu and Somali.

<http://www.omniglot.com/>

English-language website on languages. Contents include sentences in different languages, alphabets and lot of exciting material on various languages.

<http://www.skoleipraksis.no/flerkulturell-opplering/filmer/>

The resource packet *i praksis: flerkulturell opplæring* (in practice: multicultural learning) is intended to inspire teachers, preschool teachers and supervisors to make changes in their practice, both in relation to educational provisions for speakers of minority languages and in relation to education in general. The target groups for the videos are preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers and supervisors, primary and secondary schools, upper secondary education and adult education. The videos may also be a tool for gaining a foundation in practice in teacher training programmes.

<http://snakkepakken.no>

The chatterbox is an educational tool developed for both kindergarten and early primary school. It contains language stimulation materials and a resource guide.



## **Overview of kindergartens that have contributed examples and experience accounts:**

**Bikuben kindergarten** Sunndal municipality, Møre og Romsdal County

The kindergarten does not have a separate website; it can be found under the municipality's reception centre for asylum-seekers and immigrant services.

[www.sunndal.kommune.no](http://www.sunndal.kommune.no)

**Førresfjorden kindergarten**, Tysvær municipality, Rogaland County

<http://www.tysver.kommune.no/foerresfjorden/category373.html>

**Globus kindergarten**, Larvik municipality, Vestfold County

[http://www.larvik.kommune.no/Om-Larvik/Oversikt-over-enheter/Larvik-laringssenter/Globus\\_barnehage/Globus-barnehage/](http://www.larvik.kommune.no/Om-Larvik/Oversikt-over-enheter/Larvik-laringssenter/Globus_barnehage/Globus-barnehage/)

**Granåsen kindergarten**, Skien municipality, Telemark County

<http://skien.kommune.no/Kommunens-organisering/Radmenn/Kommunalomrade-Oppvekst/Barnehager/Kommunale-barnehager/Granasen-barnehage/>

**Hanken kindergarten**, Skien municipality, Telemark County

<http://www.skien.kommune.no/Kommunens-organisering/Radmenn/Kommunalomrade-Oppvekst/Barnehager/Barnehager-i-Skien-soneinndelt/Sentrum/Kommunale/Hanken-barnehage/>

**Kirkenes kindergarten**, Flora municipality, Sogn og Fjordane County

Kronprinsensgate 14, 9900 Kirkenes

**Krokane kindergarten**, Flora municipality, Sogn og Fjordane

<http://webfronter.com/sognfjordanegs/flora/krok/>

**Kvislabakken kindergarten**, Stjørdal municipality, Nord-Trøndelag County

<http://www.bhgnett.no/kvislabakken/Sider/Forside.aspx>

**Kyrkjevegen barnehage**, Førde municipality, Sogn og Fjordane

<http://www.kyrkjevegen.barnehage.forde.no/>

**Laksevåg kindergarten**, Bergen municipality, Hordaland County

<https://www.bergen.kommune.no/organisasjonsenhet/barnehage/laksevag>

**Lillehammer kindergarten**, Lillehammer municipality, Oppland County

<https://dexter.ikomm.no/Lillehammer/>

**Kindergarten for new arrivals to Norway** at Johannes learning centre, Stavanger municipality, Rogaland County

<http://www.velkommentiljohannes.no/minskole/johannes/>



**Møllenhof kindergarten**, Nedre-Eiker municipality, Buskerud County  
<http://www.nedre-eiker.kommune.no/index.php?id=325265>

**Nepjarhaugen kindergarten**, Sogn og Fjordane County  
<http://webfronter.com/sognfjordanegs/flora/nepj/>

**Rosetårnet kindergarten**, Bergen municipality, Hordaland County  
<https://www.bergen.kommune.no/organisasjonsenhet/barnehage/rosetarnet>

**Sandskogan kindergarten**, Stjørdal municipality, Nord-Trøndelag County  
<http://www.bhgnett.no/sandskogan/Sider/Forside.aspx>

**Solheim kindergarten**, Gran municipality, Oppland County  
<http://www.solheim.barnehageside.no/index.asp>

**Solheim kindergarten**, Lørenskog municipality, Akershus County  
<http://solheim.barnehage.lorenskog.no/>

**Storgaten kindergarten**, Grimstad municipality, Aust-Agder County  
<http://www.grimstad.kommune.no/>

**Trollberget kindergarten**, Frogn municipality, Akershus County  
<http://www.frogn.kommune.no>

**Tonning kindergarten**, Stryn municipality, Sogn og Fjordane County  
<http://www.sophusportalen.no>



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