

Children's Voices on Bullying in Kindergarten

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Abstract Research suggests that bullying does occur in kindergarten. The extent of bullying in Norway and other Scandinavian countries is estimated to be about 12 %. The purpose of this study is to investigate children's understanding and experiences of bullying. We use a qualitative approach and have conducted individual interviews and focus group interviews with a total of 31 children, 5 year-olds, in 4 different kindergartens. Additionally, observations were made of 4–5 year-olds in the same kindergartens, 142 children in total. The results show that the children describe bullying as doing or saying “something mean”. Exclusion from play is what all the children fear the most. This study shows that 1–2 children in each kindergarten are systematically excluded from play, and these children are overlooked by both other children and the adults in kindergarten.

Keywords Bullying · Inclusion · Victim · Anxiety · Insecurity

Introduction

Kindergarten is one of the first contexts in which we begin learning how to include others, as well as how to play, and make friends. Because kindergarten is meant to be a safe

place that facilitates the development of friendship, play, and wellbeing, prevention of bullying is important. Comprehensive research has been done concerning bullying in school, but much less in regard to bullying in kindergarten (Kirves and Sajaniemi 2012; Monks and Coyne 2011). The studies that do exist on bullying in kindergarten show that the problems are extensive. Current research literature estimates that bullying in Norwegian kindergartens is at 12 % (Bratterud et al. 2012). Some comparisons with other countries follow. In Finland it is estimated that 12.6 % are being bullied in kindergarten (Kirves and Sajaniemi 2012), and in Switzerland 6 % of children aged 4–7 years were victims of bullying (Perren 2000). In the UK 13–22 % of 4–6 year old children in kindergarten were victims of bullying (Monks and Coyne 2011, p. 13). American research shows that in the United States, 22.6 % of children aged 5–7 are subjected to bullying or “peer abuse” (Alsaker and Nägele 2008).

Involvement in bully/victim problems in kindergarten may lead to school avoidance (Kochenderfer and Ladd 1996). Additionally, growing evidence suggests that children who are frequently targeted for physical, emotional or verbal abuse by their peers are at high risk for psychological maladjustment (Perren 2000). Other studies have suggested that victimization correlates with psychosomatic complaints, as well as lowered self-esteem, loneliness, impaired concentration, and isolation (Salmivalli et al. 1996; Søndergaard 2012).

Research shows that the adults tend to overlook bullying in kindergarten, and to trivialize the children's behavior (Lund 2015). Disagreement exists in the field regarding the concept of bullying associated with kindergarten children and the kindergarten context, with a particular critical question concerning children's intentional actions (Hanish et al. 2004; Kochenderfer and Ladd 1997).

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More research is needed concerning bullying in kindergarten, so that early childhood educators, families, and professionals from related fields will be able to identify and prevent bullying, and to create a safe and good kindergarten environment that promotes play, learning and wellbeing. This research is based on a qualitative study which explores children's perspectives on bullying, because it is vital that the children's voices are heard. Taking the children's perspectives into account involves using children as direct informants and exploring their understanding of, and experiences with, bullying in kindergarten. The primary goal of the present paper is to examine and discuss bullying in kindergarten, based on the following research question:

1. What sort of understandings of and experiences with bullying do kindergartners have?

An additional objective is to draw particular attention to what these findings are likely to mean for future kindergarten practice.

Bullying: Definition, Forms and Roles

Definitions of bullying vary among researchers and are associated with bullying in school (Varjas et al. 2008; Vlachou, Andreou, Botsoglou and Didaskalou 2011). One dominant trend within research on bullying has been inspired by the Swedish researcher on school bullying Dan Olweus. He argues that bullying is (1) intentional "harm-doing," (2) it occurs repeatedly over time, and (3) it involves a relationship that includes an "imbalance of power" (Olweus 1993; Varjas et al. 2008; Vlachou et al. 2011). Olweus (1993, p. 10) used the term *direct* bullying (open attacks on a victim) and *indirect* bullying (social isolation and interpersonal exclusion from a group). Bullying behavior can be physical (e.g. hitting, shoving, kicking), verbal (e.g. name-calling, verbal provocation, negative comments) (Fekkes et al. 2005), or can include other types of behavior such as actively excluding someone from a social group (Roland 1998).

Findings from a Finnish study indicate that systematic bullying does occur in kindergarten. The most common form of bullying was found to be exclusion from peer relationships, which is defined as psychological bullying. The second most common form of bullying was different kinds of verbal bullying, name-calling, pointing and laughing. Physical bullying was less common (Kirves and Sajaniemi 2012).

Research shows that children who are involved in bullying in kindergarten have different roles: bullies, victims—and bullies-victims (both bullies and victims) (Vlachou et al. 2011, p. 337). Repo and Sajaniemi's (2014)

research focuses on the bystanders' roles in bullying in kindergarten. They found that the peripheral roles of other children could be observed in preschool groups.

Theoretical Foundation

In this article, we will primarily be discussing the data material in connection with Danish researcher Dorte Marie Søndergaard's understanding of bullying, as her approach urges adults to be explorative in relation to the processes of inclusion and exclusion that kindergarten involves. She understands bullying as social processes gone awry (Søndergaard 2009), an approach which moves the focus from the young children's personal qualities to context, culture and social processes. Søndergaard (2012) is critical to the dominant definition of bullying and the argument that bullying is a consequence of individual aggression, carried out with an intention to harm (Olweus 1993). Søndergaard (2012) describes bullying as one of many reactions to particular kinds of social insecurity. The concept of social exclusion anxiety builds on the understanding that human beings are dependent on belonging to a community (Tajfel and Turner 2004; Viala 2013, p. 274). Anxiety arises when one's belonging to the community is threatened, and this may breed feelings of contempt in both children and adults. A third party is always involved, directly or indirectly, whether it be other children, kindergarten staff, or parents. Bullying can be seen as an extreme positioning mechanism whereby normal positioning tools and the mechanisms of conflict resolution fail. It is essential that the definition and understanding of bullying must capture the complexity of the phenomenon (Søndergaard 2012).

Method

Choice of Method: The Process of Data Collection

We have chosen a qualitative research approach to investigate the research question, making use of focus group interviews, individual interviews and observations, because we wished to be thorough and go in-depth (Bryman 2008). The focus group interviews were chosen because children can feel safer when together with other children, and be more active than when alone with an adult (Mayall 2000; Morgan et al. 2000). We also chose to conduct individual interviews because it gave us the opportunity to look more closely at the experiences of each child (Kvale 1996). It also gave the victims a chance to discuss their experience without fear of bully reprisals or other children's knowing if he or she is being bullied (Paley 2009). Systematic

observational data provide rich information about events and situations, as they are based on direct observation (Perren 2000).

Sampling and Selection Procedures

The samples consist of children in four different kindergartens:

- 4 focus group interviews in the same 4 kindergartens, a total of 15 children: 7 girls and 8 boys.
- Individual interviews of 4 children in each of the 4 different kindergartens, a total of 16 children, 7 girls and 9 boys.
- The observations were made in the same 4 kindergartens. The total number of 4–5-year-olds observed in all the kindergarten was 142.

The selection of children for interviews was conducted randomly, but gender distribution was emphasized. The manager of each kindergarten undertook a blind selection of names from lists of five-year-old boys and girls. By the time the observations could be conducted, the children who had participated in the interviews had left kindergarten and started school. The selection of 4–5-year-olds observed was therefore a different one from the children interviewed. The descriptions of teasing/bullying offered by the children are phenomena generally considered a part of the culture of kindergarten, and thus the selection is deemed representative.

The study has been approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), who secure privacy and quality in research in Norway. We first applied for permission to conduct focus group interviews and individual interviews, and then for permission to make observations. Informed consent forms were developed in accordance with NSD's requirements for anonymity and voluntary participation. Parent meetings were held in the kindergartens, where the project was presented and parents were given the opportunity to ask questions. The parents were given informed consent forms to take home, which they signed and delivered back to the kindergarten. We informed them that should information emerge indicating that a child was not doing well in kindergarten, we would address this with the kindergarten staff, who in turn would contact the parents. This happened in two cases. Our researcher was present at one of the following meetings with parents.

Previous to conducting the interviews, we visited each kindergarten and introduced ourselves to the children. We told them we were researchers who wished to investigate how it was to be a child in kindergarten, and that we needed their help. Subsequently, the interviewing researcher spent 1 day in each kindergarten, to better get to know the children. When we came to conduct the

interviews, we allowed each child the freedom to participate or to say no. One child did not wish to participate in the focus group interviews. For the individual interviews, one child wished for the kindergarten manager to be present during the conversation. One child was also exempt from the observations.

Individual Interviews and Focus Group Interviews

The interviews were conducted in the kindergartens. One researcher conducted the interviews, while another made video recordings and had a supportive function by coming up with probing questions when needed. We started out with the focus group interviews, as we assumed that being interviewed in groups felt safer for the children. The interviews were semi-structured, but with the opportunity for children to spontaneously tell their stories. We used the same interview guide for the focus group interviews as for the individual interviews. However, to prevent the children from naming each other in negative ways, the questions in the focus groups were a bit more general, while in the individual interviews they were made more specific to adjust to the experiences of each child. Results from the analysis of the interviews formed the basis for hypotheses about what was an important focus for observation.

Observations

The method of observation was participant observation. One researcher conducted the observations. The focus was primarily to observe, the extent of participation was limited to interacting with the children when they contacted the researcher as an adult for assistance, such as asking for help with practical things. The researcher did not take the initiative to play or interact with the kindergarten students. The focus of the observation was the inclusion and exclusion of children at play, because these were issues which had emerged during the interviews as important to the children. The researcher was present in each kindergarten for 1 week, and the children were primarily observed during outdoor play. This is because exclusion tends to be easier to spot in spontaneous play, i.e. play not organized by adults, which often takes place outdoors. Events were written down from the researcher's point of view: as specific as possible, with narrative description, to get an overall picture of the situation in (Vedeler 2000).

Analyses

All interviews were recorded on video, and transcribed and summarized using the qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo (Richards 2002). The data from the interviews and observations formed the basis for analysis,

discussion, reflection and conclusions. In interpretation and analysis of data, we have used the phenomenological descriptive analysis process developed by the American psychologist Giorgi (1997, 2004). Reading the transcribed material repeatedly gave an overall impression, which we then categorized into units of meaning. The data were analysed in several stages, starting with the focus group interviews, followed by the individual interviews.

Validity and Ethical Considerations

The use of interviews, focus group interviews and observations strengthens the validity of the findings (Howitt and Cramer 2005). Additionally, the use of multiple methods reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question, and is of extra importance for an individual researcher (Patton 2002), leading in turn to more valid, reliable and diverse constructions of realities (Golafshani 2003).

To protect children as research participants, the children have been given fictitious names in the analysis of the interviews. However, in the course of the process it was not possible nor ethically justifiable to keep anonymous the identity of the children observed who were systematically excluded from play, the bully and bystanders. In the aftermath of the interviews and observations, the researcher held a meeting with each of the kindergartens regarding how best to take care of the children observed systematically excluded from play, the bully and the bystanders.

Findings

1. With a reference to the question *what sort of understandings of and experiences with bullying do kindergartners have?* we analyzed data from individual interviews and focus-group interviews (Table 1).
2. The focus of the observation was the inclusion and exclusion of children at play, and the findings can be illustrated in Table 2.

Discussion

Based on the findings made in the process of analysis, two themes emerge as central to the discussion regarding children's perspectives of bullying and the processes of inclusion and exclusion that take place in kindergarten:

1. Children's experiences, explanations and understanding of bullying.
2. Friendship and play, and the children excluded from it: The field of tension between inclusion and exclusion

How we define bullying influences the interpretation and discussion of findings. We have chosen to emphasize bullying as social processes gone awry, with particular reference to Søndergaard's perspectives (Myong and Søndergaard 2013; Søndergaard 2012).

Children's Experiences, Explanations and Understanding of Bullying

Just under half of the children interviewed have heard of bullying. All the children know what teasing is, and the children's descriptions of bullying and teasing are similar to the definition of verbal and physical bullying¹ (Fekkes et al. 2005). Some of the children distinguish between teasing and bullying: for instance, Lina, who says that *bullying is like teasing, only a bit meaner*. Or Tobias: *Bullying is to curse, teasing is to say "neener-neener"* (sticking tongue out, fingers in ears, making taunting sounds). The children define bullying as saying and doing something mean. Such as:

Vilde: *It is to say something mean, and if you tell someone to look up, they pinch.*

Frikk says that *to bully is to do mean things. To do mean things is to strike, kick, pinch and stick your tongue out.*

Some of the children's descriptions can be seen as existing in the field of tension between bullying and teasing, and as a trying out of language, actions and boundaries, both their own and those of others. This is a different approach than ascribing negative intentions to the children. The transition from teasing to bullying may be difficult to discover, perhaps for both children and adults. Søndergaard (2012) describes the process or transition from teasing to bullying. According to her, what happens is that children's natural empathy recedes and gives way to negative feelings and actions.

(...) when bullying arises, several changes occur. The dignity-producing form of empathy closes down for the one who is the object of bullying (Søndergaard 2012, p. 368).

During the observations in kindergarten, the researcher on several occasions heard "neener-neener" sung by children in a playful tone, in situations interpreted by the researcher as children simply having fun; a good-natured teasing. However, the interviews clearly show that the same singsong tone can be used with other intentions and in a way that may cause children to feel humiliated or hurt, and to cry or feel sad. It is possible for situations to develop from mutual play to teasing, and further into what can be

¹ Cf. def. p. 2.

Table 1 Findings from individual interviews and focus group interviews

	Children's perspectives on bullying	Children's perspectives on teasing	Do not know what bullying is
Kindergarten A			
Individual interviews	To curse To hit each other, to box	Neener-neener To hit each other, to box When someone says Neener-neener	2
Focus group interviews	Sticking your tongue out A bad word. Like teasing, only meaner		1
Kindergarten B			
Individual interviews	No fun When someone does something mean on purpose	Neener-neener Teasing is no fun	2
Focus group interviews	Sticking fingers in ears and waving them Neener-neener Sticking your tongue out To make fun of To hit		2 say nothing
Kindergarten C			
Individual interviews	Sticking your tongue out, making fun of, hitting Saying something mean, like teasing. If they tell you to look up, they pinch you and say poop and dummy To do very mean things	To do mean things. Shoving, kicking, pinching	1
Focus group interviews	To be yelled at, to hit, to say something mean, to pounce on When you say things that aren't true. Doing mean things, hitting, kicking. Then you cry Sticking your tongue out, hitting Say something: Dummy, poopy-head		
Kindergarten D			
Individual interviews	When someone is mean they won't get any friends	Saying mean things	3
Focus group interviews	To be mean	Saying mean things	2

Table 2 Findings from observations

Kindergarten A	Girl, Nora, 5 years old	Nora is often by herself. She is not invited into games. Often rejected by the others
	Boy, Emil, 5 years old	Emil is defined by the adults as a troublemaker. The staff say that several children are not allowed by their parents to play with him
Kindergarten B	Girl, Sunita 5 years old	Sunita speaks Norwegian fairly well, but she is not a native Norwegian. She is often alone, walks around the playground or stands watching the others without taking initiative
	Girl, Tea 5 years old	Tea sometimes plays with the others, on their terms, i.e. allowing them to be mean to her (such as tossing water at her or walking away from her)
Kindergarten C	Boy Yasir, 4 years old	Yasir is non-Norwegian and is not familiar with the Norwegian language or rules of play. The other boys frighten him and shove him. He is excluded from play
	Boy 5 Noa, 5 years old	Noa (non-Norwegian) is quiet and cautious. He is often an observer to other children's games. He is occasionally invited in, but is often ignored and leaves the game
Kindergarten D	Girl, Siri: 4.5 years old	Siri is a native Norwegian, but has poor language skills. She is fairly active in her attempts to be included, even though she is almost always told no. The manner in which the others tell her no is sharp and abrupt. Some also make use of "angry looks"

construed as bullying. When such a transition happens, negative feelings and actions may take over. Children may “tag along” due to the anxiety of being excluded, securing themselves inclusion in the excluding group (Myong and Søndergaard 2013).

Friendship and Play and the Children Excludes from It: The Field of Tension Between Inclusion and Exclusion

When we ask during the interviews what it is like to be a child in kindergarten, the great majority of the children respond that it is “all right” or “nice.” The children express in various ways that the best thing about kindergarten is to play and make friends. Hedda and Tom both say that *the most fun part is to play with others*. The fact that play and friendship is vital to children is confirmed in existing research (Greve 2009; Lødrup 2011; Ytterhus 2002).

It is clear from the children’s stories that there is a lot of vulnerability and insecurity associated with succeeding in making new friends when switching kindergartens. Emma relates that when she was new in kindergarten, she was uncertain whether she would make any friends. She says:

(...) when I was new here in kindergarten, I didn’t dare to ask anyone to play with me. I just sat on a bench and ... imagine if I could ask someone to play with me.

The worst thing for the children is to be excluded from play, particularly by their regular playmates or best friends. Vulnerability and fear of exclusion is a phenomenon clearly present among the children. Most of the children say they have experienced having no one to play with. A significant amount of the children relate this specifically to situations where the person or persons with whom they would rather play, are playing with other children. About such experiences, where their friends choose others, the children say it is “boring”. Such as Ida: (...) *it is boring—when you’re just playing on your own*. And Linn says:

(...) she doesn’t want to play with me. Once, she told me she doesn’t want to be my friend anymore. That’s mean.

Other children express that having no one to play with makes them sad. Observations confirm the children’s strong feelings about the significance of having a friend in kindergarten. Groups of 2–3 or more children play together for large parts of the day. Some children go “to and from,” are on-lookers to the games of others, play by themselves, or invite themselves into the game. Observations show that it is common for children to invite themselves in by asking

to join. After negotiations on the nature of the game, roles and rules, this often works out very nicely.

Norm: Everyone Must Play with Everyone

A clear norm in kindergarten is that “everyone must play with everyone”. This attitude appears to be the ideal among the children, and is a rule that seems to be imposed by the adults. Several of the children alert the adults when they are excluded from play, like Mariell:

It’s boring when someone is left out of the game. I tell a grown-up and then a grown-up tells me I am allowed.

Most of the children, both in the individual interviews and in the focus group interviews, say the same thing, albeit in different words. Their expressed attitude is the same, as Marie says: *everyone must play with everyone*.

In the interviews, the children were confronted with situations to which they could relate. One of the questions dealt with what they thought an adult should say to the children when two best friends are playing and a third party wants to join them. None of the children said that they themselves exclude others. They referred to situations where other children excluded someone else from games in which they themselves were participants. They claimed to always be willing to let “the other” child join in the game.

Ida: (...) *we always say yes, someone says no, but I never say no, and Sofie and I, we always say yes*.

Vilde: (...) *I usually always play with others, very often, but Lene really doesn’t want anyone to play with us, because she wants us to play all by ourselves. But I just say yes. I tell Lene it’s just nice when others are allowed to join*.

There is a high level of awareness about this norm among the children, and the statements could indicate that the children feel a guilty conscience and empathy for those who are excluded from play. This is understandable, as we talked with the children about exclusion on a general basis, so the existential exclusion anxiety was not triggered (Søndergaard 2012). The children refer to other children who exclude others, but emphasize that they themselves do not.

The Children Who are Bullied in Kindergarten

Considering that play is so crucial, and the fear of having no one to play with so evidently present, exclusion from play can be characterized as the children’s understanding of bullying. This is also confirmed and described in existing research (Kirves and Sajaniemi 2012; Ytterhus 2002). Because friendship and play is so important, it also

involves the risk of rejection. All children are aware of it, and that it could happen to any of them (Haavind 2013, p. 194; Søndergaard 2009; Ytterhus 2002).

The observations show that 1–2 children in each kindergarten are systematically rejected and excluded from play. Some characteristics of the excluded children: they have poor language skills, they have difficulties deciphering the codes of the games, and they are negatively defined by the adults in kindergarten. Research shows that such issues may cause the children to be particularly exposed for bullying (Repo and Sajaniemi 2014). The excluded children are different in regards to whether and how they take the initiative. Some have a withdrawn and quiet behavior, while others are more active and adamant, such as Siri:

Siri is fairly active in her attempts to be included, even though she is almost always told no. She approaches single children and groups of children. The manner in which the others tell her no is sharp and abrupt. Some also make use of “angry looks”. After having been rejected multiple times in the course of a day, Siri throws sand at a boy, and is sent away by an adult. Siri is a native Norwegian with poor language skills.

Siri is described by the adults in a negative manner, as someone who “is always very forward” and who “often causes trouble.” As the example shows, observations reveal that Siri is repeatedly rejected while the adults are not looking. When Siri, at the end of the day, lashes out, she is made visible to the adults, is scolded, and sent away. Another example is Sunita, whose behavior is rather quiet and withdrawn:

Sunita speaks Norwegian, but she is not a native Norwegian. She is often alone, walks around the playground or stands watching the others without taking initiative. She usually is not invited to join the game, the other girls ignore her or run away from her. Sometimes she is allowed to join, but is quickly excluded. The other girls may say: “it’s not like that, you don’t know the rules, it’s no fun.”

The children who are adamant receive attention from the adults in connection with the conflicts in which they get involved. Sunita and several other children are more “invisible,” and are overlooked by the adults as well as the children. They mostly walk around by themselves, observing others playing, rarely being invited in. Occasionally they are allowed to join for a short while, but they are quickly excluded from the game. We have no grounds for claiming that the children in this context, who are excluded from the social play community, are particularly withdrawn or quiet in general. They demonstrate a withdrawn behavior in the situations where they are overlooked

day after day. Two of the kindergartens have had visiting high school students for teaching practice. In both kindergartens, the students engaged the children in a common game of tag. On those occasions, the “overlooked” children participated, running around and shouting loudly, just like the other children. This study shows that the children, in addition to being excluded from play, are overlooked by the adults. Attitudes revealed among the adults involved individual causal explanations: for instance the child’s poor language skills, lack of competence in games, or blaming of the home environment. This could reflect the cultural attitudes in the kindergartens, but it could also be a sense of individual and collective helplessness in the face of bullying as exclusion.

Summary and Implications for Future Research and Practice

Just about half of the children define bullying as saying and doing “mean things,” such as cursing, saying “douche” or “dummy,” hitting and kicking. The children’s description of teasing largely correlates with how the children define bullying. Some children describe bullying as slightly meaner than teasing.

This research confirms existing research (Greve 2009; Lødrup 2011; Ytterhus 2002). Friendship and play are most important to the children, and what the children fear most is being excluded from play. All the children have experienced not being included in play. Most of the children have preferences regarding who they would rather play with, and feel a guilty conscience when someone is excluded. The study shows that 1–2 children in each kindergarten are systematically excluded from play, and are overlooked by both the children and adults in kindergarten.

By understanding and reflecting upon the mechanisms which lead to social processes going awry, Søndergaard believes that prevention of exclusion and bullying is possible (Kofoed and Søndergaard 2013; Søndergaard 2009). This involves an approach to the processes of inclusion and exclusion as social processes present in the social community that the kindergarten represents. The desire to be included in the community and the fear of exclusion will always play a role in the social processes. Curiosity is essential when exploring the processes of inclusion and exclusion that are part of the kindergarten culture in question.

Søndergaard describes social processes in general, and defines the fear of exclusion as anxiety of an existential nature. Her research is largely related to bullying in school. Processes of inclusion and exclusion in kindergarten specifically should therefore be researched broadly:

qualitative and quantitative approaches, information from kindergarten staff, parents and children. The children's subjective experiences and descriptions should be a main focus.

The information acquired from this study poses challenges for kindergarten staff and parents to reflect upon what sort of attitudes they wish to be dominant in the culture reflected in kindergarten. Such attitudes affect conflict resolution, methods of handling disagreements, thoughts on friendship, interest in exploring differences and similarities among children, etc.

In each of the participating kindergartens there is an apparent norm saying: "everyone must play with everyone". Myong and Søndergaard (2013) note that there are also negative aspects related to inclusion. The data material shows that the children perceive the act of excluding others as ethically difficult, while at the same time they do wish to get to play with their best friend. Thus, it is important to reflect upon which processes of inclusion might be beneficial for each kindergarten. Must everyone play with everyone, or should some limitations be allowed? If so, how, and in which situations? The challenge should be to establish a culture which allows for spontaneous play between "best friends", as well as the occasion and opportunity for all children to be included in developmental play. A kindergarten culture which tolerates the exclusion of children will be perceived by the children as unsafe. As this research shows, the kindergarten employees allow exclusion by contributing to it themselves. This is in great contrast with the clear norm about inclusion of everyone.

An unsafe kindergarten environment triggers the social fear of exclusion that can be seen as an existential phenomenon in all children. The transition from inclusion to exclusion can be understood as a process where the contempt and branding of one or more individual gradually take hold. It is therefore essential to be forewarned to prevent the processes from evolving in a negative way. This calls for attentive and available adults, who see all the children and each individual child. It demands a focus on context and relational processes rather than defining individual children as the cause, as a result of "how they are," based on personality variables. Adults must be able to look behind the behavior and be curious about what might trigger a situation of conflict.

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