7th report

Views of 'Free from Bullying' and the establishment of an anti-bullying culture

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Introduction

This report is one in a series from the follow-up research team attached to Save the Children Denmark's and the Mary Foundation's pilot project 'Free from Bullying'[1]. 'Free from Bullying' is the title of a collection of materials aimed at preventing bullying by involving children, parents and adult professionals from preschool and early school years in efforts to create inclusive, secure and bullying-free children's communities. Specifically, the materials come in a suitcase along with a number of described 'social practices', such as a consolation bear, a teacher's booklet on the project's background and another on actual activities, conversation boards for use at children's meetings, a tactile massage programme, dilemma cards to create discussion at teacher-parent meetings, and much more. Initial implementation has taken place in various selected schools and preschools in the three municipalities of Aarhus, Gentofte and Kolding, which thus participate in a pilot project also followed by a group of researchers from Roskilde University[2]. The pilot project was launched in the beginning of 2007, when it took off in the six participant preschool centres. In August of that year – at the start of the school year 2007-08 – it was joined by three schools and attendant after-school centres. After the initial experiences of using the materials had been analysed during the first part of the follow-up research, Save the Children and the Mary Foundation chose to develop a suitcase specifically targeted at schools, since the original collection of materials was, in some respects, found to be insufficiently age-appropriate for these somewhat older children.

The present report looks into the staff's experiences of using the suitcase, among other issues. It should be seen as supplementary to the previously published reports, which also document, discuss and put into perspective the preliminary results from the two-year pilot project. While we have previously focused both on the materials in the suitcase and on the involved parties' understanding of the phenomenon of bullying, in this round of empirical data collection we also inquire into whether the adults have noticed changes among the children, in the staff culture and in parental commitment. In all three rounds of empirical data collection, questionnaires were handed out to parents and personnel in educational institutions, specifically in preschools during the first round, in schools during the second, and in both preschools and schools during this third round.

In this paper, we compare the answers from parents with those from personnel, and the answers from preschools with those from schools, since marked differences between these categories of respondents have been detected in several areas. Given the vast amount of data, we have made a selection of issues and points of interest, which are conveyed in particular charts and in narrative form, adding our analysis, speculations and possible explanations.

The questionnaire was distributed in the three participant schools among management, staff responsible for early school years and for after-school centres, and in the six participant preschools among staff. Moreover, the survey encompasses parents of children in reception class and class 1 in the three schools and of all children in the six preschools. The questionnaires were sent to the respective educational institutions in the Danish autumn of 2008, when the staff took on the task of handing them out along with reply envelopes to everyone – a process that had to be repeated a

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[1] The follow-up research project has been financed by Save the Children Denmark, the Mary Foundation, the Danish National Federation of Early Childhood Teachers and Youth Educators (BUPL) and the Research and Development Fund of the National Federation of Social Educators (SL).

[2] The publications thus far resulting from this research are available at Save the Children Denmark's website (see www.redbarnet.dk/Default.aspx?ID=8514), which also has information in English about the pilot project 'Free from Bullying' and its materials at: www.redbarnet.dk/Default.aspx?ID=7566

couple of times, since the response rate in certain places turned out to be too low. Accordingly, the present report is based on questionnaires completed and handed in by 85 professionals and 315 parents (see also Annex 1).

Understandings of the concept of bullying

In this round of empirical data collection, as in the foregoing, we have inquired into the parties' understanding of the concept of bullying (Danish: *mobning*), since we have intended to uncover whether the perception and definition of this word has any impact on the implementation of Free from Bullying and on preventative efforts in general. In this round, we have asked school and preschool staff, and the following bar chart shows the distribution of answers:
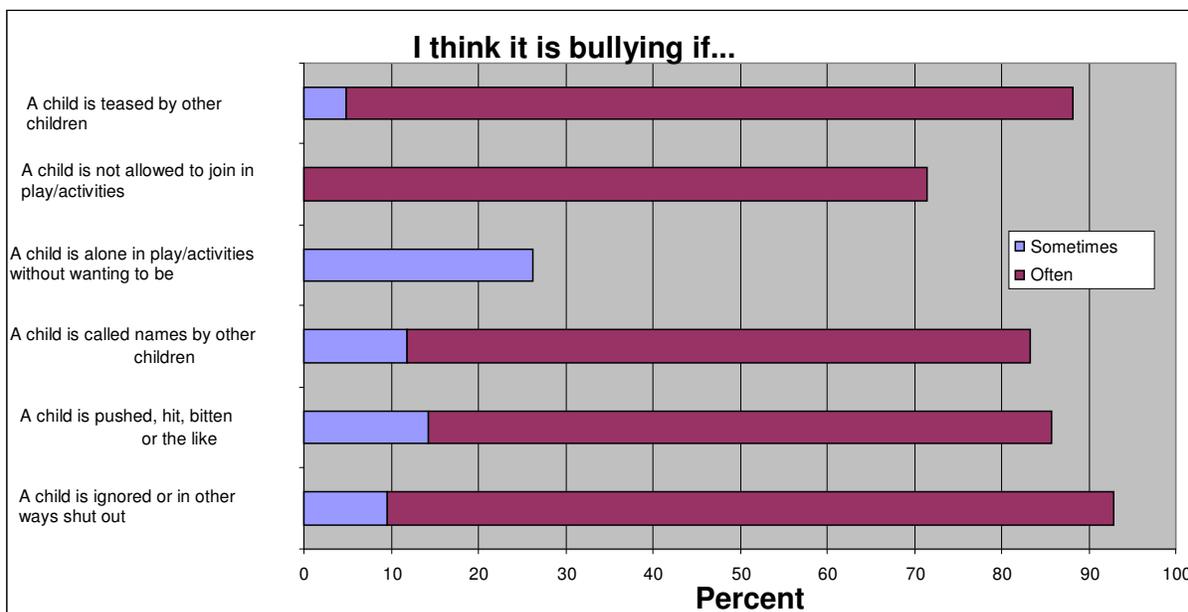

(Fig. 1)

The result shows that the educators are generally attentive to the phenomenon and have a wide understanding thereof. This broadness of their focus is an important starting point to address the situations concerned.

We have divided the bars into two colours to show the percentage of respondents who think it is a case of bullying when a given act takes place only *sometimes* and when it happens *often*. This shows that the vast majority of staff members believe an episode or act must be frequent before it can be categorised as bullying. The essence of this chart is that the professionals fundamentally consider unpleasant experiences inflicted on a child as bullying, if they occur often. An exception, however, is if *a child is alone in play/activities without wanting to be*, where there is greater reservation in describing it as bullying[3]. The chart also shows that no respondent perceives it as bullying if a child is only *sometimes* not allowed to take part in play. This is the explanation why this bar is entirely violet.

If we look closer at how the staff groups at schools and preschools, respectively, relate to the definition of bullying, the distribution of answers differs only substantially as regards the question of whether a child is bullied if it is sometimes alone without wanting to be (see next chart below).

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[3] In the answer to this particular situation, there was no option of differentiating between *sometimes* and *often*, which explains why this bar is one colour only.
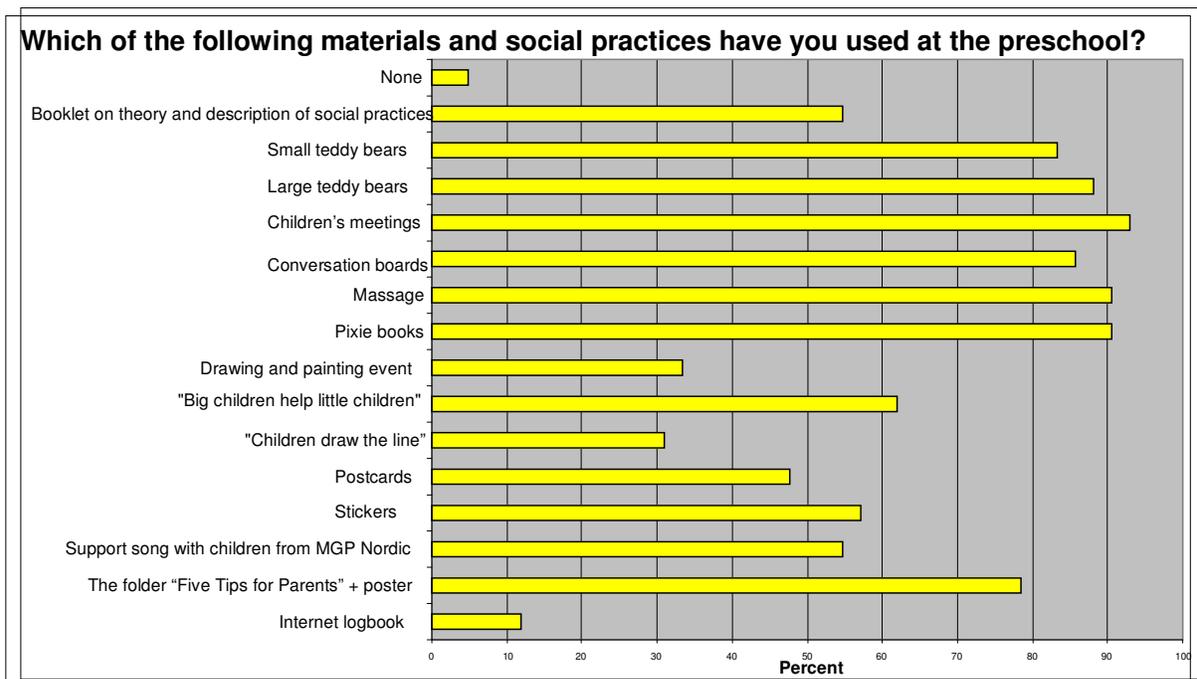
I think it is bullying if...
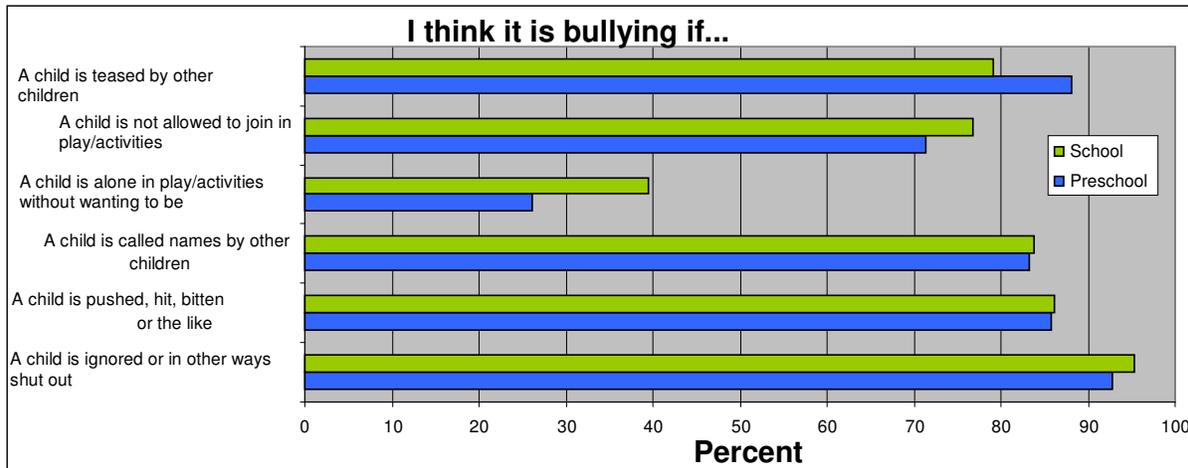
(Fig. 2)

The most conspicuous feature of the chart may be the clear correspondence between school and preschool personnel as regards the distribution of views of what bullying is. We notice that the blue and green bars are mostly of similar length. The preschool teachers do seem slightly more reticent than the school personnel to characterise it as bullying when a child is alone in play or activities without wanting to be. However, for both types of respondents, this is the unpleasant experience least categorised as bullying (cf. figure 1).

To verify if participation in the project has changed the perception of what can be labelled as bullying, we have copied this question from a previous questionnaire addressed to the school staff. This allows us to compare responses given with an interval of one year. The overall finding is that no change has occurred as regards the definition of bullying. Both before and after, the phenomenon is understood in a wide sense, as over 70% of respondents consistently see it as bullying when a child is subjected to the various unpleasant experiences described. Moreover, the vast majority of staff have emphasised – both before and now – that these negative acts must occur *often* – and not just *sometimes* – for them to be classed as bullying.

Use and assessment of Free from Bullying materials

When we sent out the questionnaires in the Danish autumn of 2008, both the preschool and the school suitcase had been put to use. The schools had only had a couple of months to get to know their new materials, while the preschools had had 1½ years. However, many materials in the new school suitcase are the same as those of the original suitcase for all (now dedicated to preschools only), so not everything has been entirely unfamiliar to the school staff. In order to form a picture of the popularity of individual materials and activities, we asked the educators what they had used and what their assessment of it was. The following chart shows the percentage of preschool employees who had used each material and activity suggestion from the suitcase.

Which of the following materials and social practices have you used at the preschool?

| Material	Percent
None	5
Booklet on theory and description of social practices	54
Small teddy bears	83
Large teddy bears	88
Children's meetings	93
Conversation boards	86
Massage	91
Pixie books	91
Drawing and painting event	33
"Big children help little children"	62
"Children draw the line"	31
Postcards	48
Stickers	57
Support song with children from MGP Nordic	55
The folder "Five Tips for Parents" + poster	79
Internet logbook	12

(Fig. 3)

First of all, it should be stressed that a *generally* substantial part of the materials has been used by many respondents. Accordingly, we may conclude that the suitcase has been well received in the preschool centres, and that advantage is taken of its wide range of activity options. Thus, use of the materials is not confined to a couple per institution, but rather comes across as a combined 'package' to be opened and employed relatively widely. This must also be seen in the light of preschools having had considerable time to familiarise themselves with the materials and explore its potential.

Their doing so is reflected in the fact that no less than 11 of the listed materials and social practices have been used by more than 50% of the preschool employees. Furthermore, seven activities have been used by over 75% of respondents, namely the folder and the poster with tips for parents, the tiny illustrated 'pixie books', the massage programme, the conversations boards and children's meetings (the two latter are typically linked together), the large and small teddy bears (which also often make an appearance during children's meetings). Less popular are the activities called

'Children draw the line' and the drawing and painting event. The least appealing part is clearly the logbook – located at Save the Children's website section dedicated to the project – where the staff can write their ideas, thoughts and experiences. Only about 12% have used the Internet logbook, which is no major variation from previous feedback, thus indicating that this 'activity' is given little priority. The reason, however, is hardly that the professionals have no need or desire to share their experiences or read about those of others, but rather that they prioritise their time differently. Many may also see it as outright inconvenient to use this medium in their day-to-day practice on the job, thus choosing to leave it out.

Only 5% of preschool personnel answer that they have used none of the materials.

If we turn our attention to the schools, however, it is clear that their use of the materials is more limited than that of the preschools. While the bulk of suitcase contents seems to have been employed by a majority of preschool employees, only a handful of materials have been utilised fairly widely in the schools (for elaboration on *how* the various materials have been used, see the Appendix to the 6th report of the follow-up research). The following chart shows the school personnel's use of the various parts of the school suitcase:

Which of the following materials and social practices have you (school employee) used?
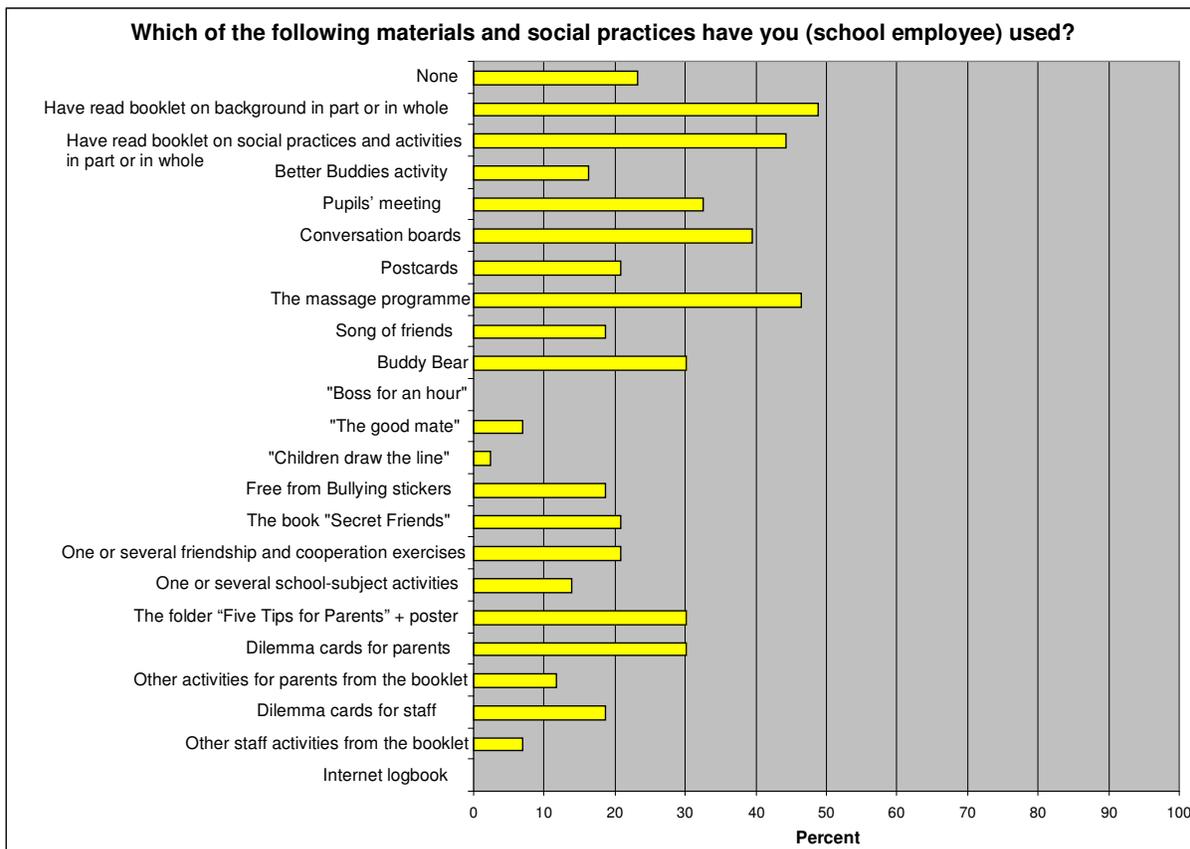
(Fig. 4)

Within this category of staff, almost 25% have not used any suitcase contents, while only three materials have been used by over 40%, including the two booklets, one on the background to the pilot project and the other with suggestions and instructions for 'social practices' and activities,

which can be seen as a precondition for employing any of the other materials. Of these, the massage programme and conversation boards are particularly popular, just as students' meeting and 'Buddy Bear' are relatively preferred. The least prioritised activities have the common feature of being new additions (i.e. only present in the new school suitcase) and not accompanied by any physical material (e.g. 'Boss for an hour', 'The good mate', 'Children draw the line' or other social practices described in the booklet). Thus, although the dissemination of activities is more limited in schools than in preschools, on the whole, the same activities attract the highest 'popularity ratings' in both types of educational institution.

The suitcase received by the schools also has more materials targeting adults than the original suitcase still used by the preschools. The above chart shows how many have taken advantage of these options, which is surprisingly few (only about 18% have used the dilemma cards for parents, which is equivalent to 2 or 3 classes) in view of the unmet needs previously expressed in this area. However, it should be kept in mind that, at the time of the survey, the schools had only had their new suitcase for some months, and would not have been able to hold more than one teacher-parent meeting per class in that period.

After looking at the kind of materials put to use, we now turn to the staff's *assessment* of the two versions of the suitcase. The following chart shows what the preschool personnel think of the preschool suitcase:

**What is your overall assessment of the suitcase for preschools?**
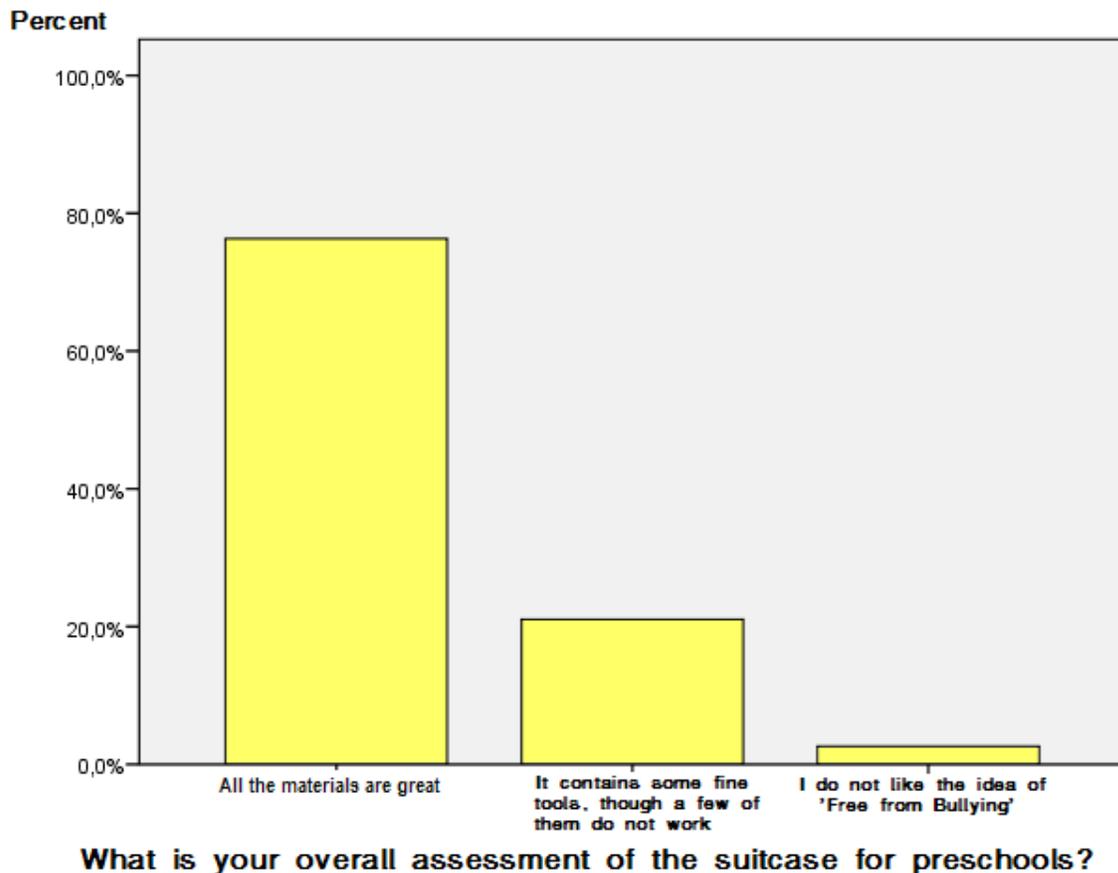
(Fig. 5)

As can be seen from the chart, almost 80% of preschool staff find that *all the materials are great.* Along with the share of those who think that the suitcase *contains some fine tools, though a few of them do not work*, this group accounts for fully 97.4% of all respondents, which must be characterised as a generally positive assessment. Nobody has manifested that only a few materials are good, or that the materials are outright bad. One individual has answered that she does not like the idea of Free from Bullying, an option that should not be interpreted as opposition to anti-bullying work as such, but as an expression that the issues have been addressed prior to Save the Children's and the Mary Foundation's pilot project. The person concerned puts it in these words:

- *We did it already before the project began,* and
- *It's what we've always been doing under a new name.*

This overall positive feedback from preschools is equally distributed among the various staff categories, such as preschool teachers, preschool teacher assistants and those in management positions, i.e. no particular group is more positive or negative than another. The massive approval of the materials seems to spring particularly from their ease of use. Indeed, many have chosen to elaborate on their responses with comments such as these:

- *It's easy and practical to get on with.*
- *The suitcase contains materials which describe the children's day-to-day life. The children recognise it as soon as you show it to them.*
- *The suitcase materials are easy to get on with. I've recommended them to many other institutions. I've been out telling others about the project, and here the suitcase has been highly useful.*

Looking at the distribution of answers from school personnel, the picture is less clear-cut. This can be seen from the following chart:

Percent

What is your overall assessment of the suitcase for schools?
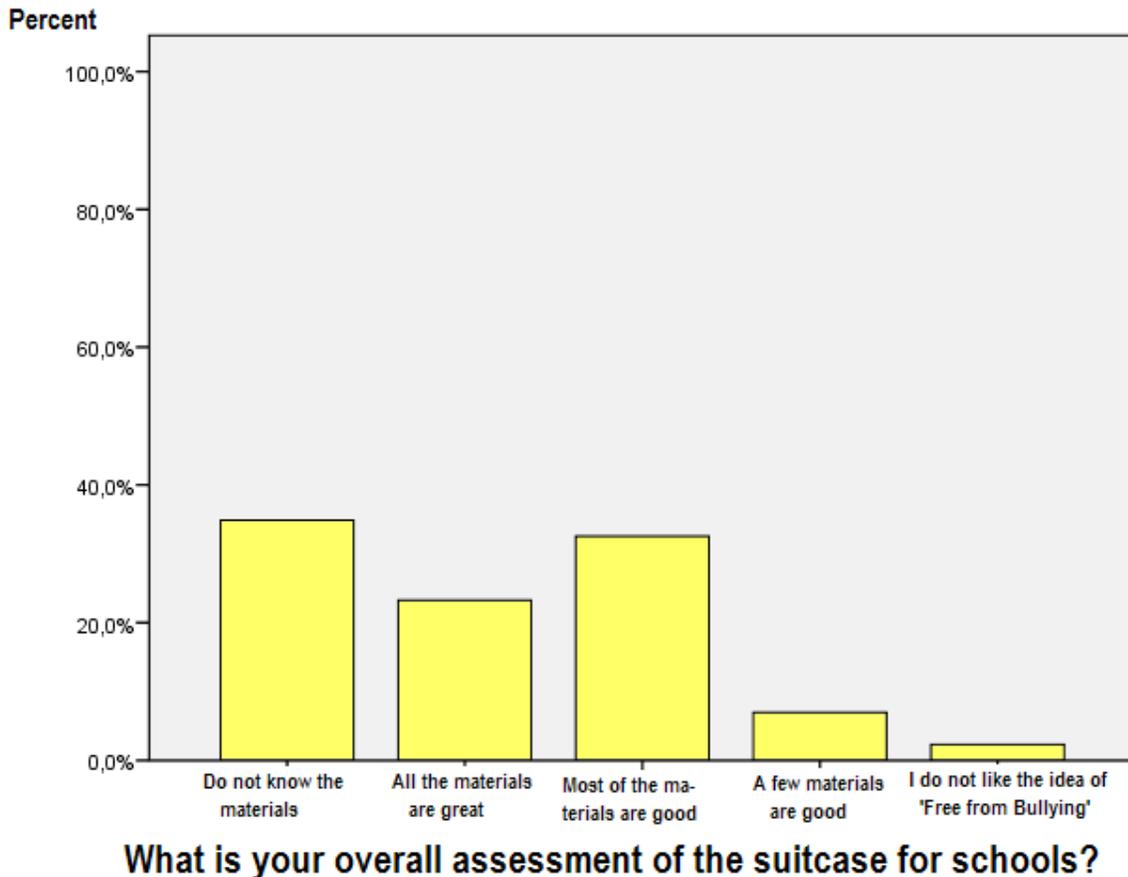
(Fig. 6)

First and foremost it is striking how much the outcome differs compared to the survey of the preschool personnel (reproduced in figure 5). It is clear that the school staff's assessment is somewhat more reserved, or at least characterised by less familiarity with the actual materials.

Only slightly more than half respond that *all materials are great* or *most of the materials are good* (put together 55.9%). However, as in the preschools, nobody finds the materials to be outright bad either, though 7% answer that *a few materials are good*. Finally, over a third (34.9%) of respondents have no knowledge of the materials at all.

We see several possible explanations for this. Firstly, as mentioned, the school had only had the school suitcase for a few months when asked to fill out the questionnaire, and this short period may be a reason why many had not had the time, or chosen to give priority, to study the materials. However, could it also have to do with school personnel being more divided into staff categories? For instance, we envisage that just because the class teacher knows and uses the materials, the other teachers of the class may not necessarily do so. At any rate, this appears to signal the importance of reflecting on ways to secure wider implementation of the initiative in the school context – if this is what is wished for.

Thus, there is a relatively large share of school employees who have not used the materials themselves, but this does not imply a perception that the materials are not good. Here are a few examples of respondents' views:

- *From my colleagues, I have got the impression that the materials are great.*
- *I have received an introduction to the materials, but have not tried them out in practice. It seems to be inspiring.*

Among those who *have* used the suitcase, the impression is also positive, which is elaborated upon in these comments, for instance:
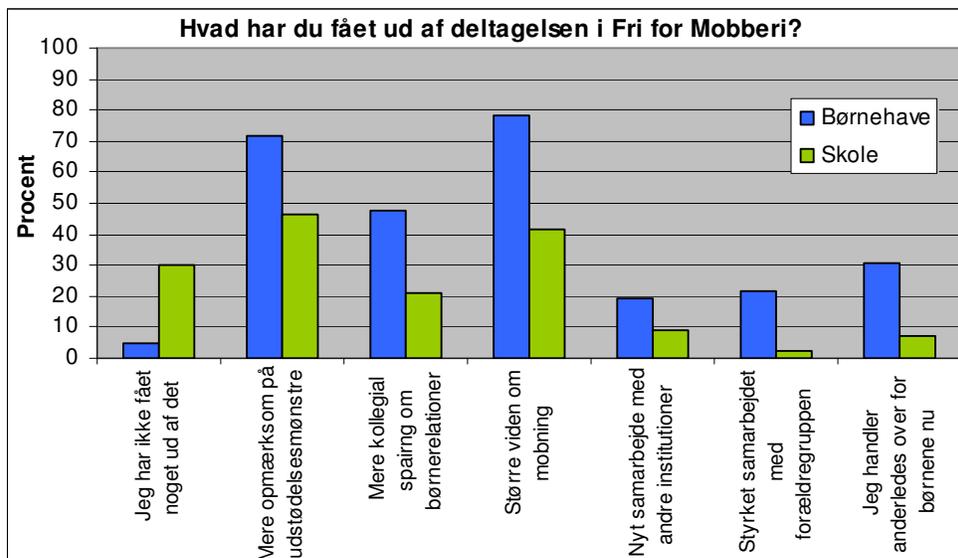
- *The materials are very inspiring. I am particularly pleased with the list of literature.*
- *Very positive to have a version of the suitcase tailored to schools.*
- *There are many options to choose from. This makes it possible to use it even if you have only passing knowledge of how the pilot project is run.*

Altogether, it can be concluded that the materials have been most *actively* received by the preschool staff. This is apparent both from their highly positive assessments of the suitcase as a whole and from the way in which the materials are used, as the individual preschool teachers seem to be running numerous activities simultaneously. As mentioned, no less than 11 of the 15 activities have been used by over 50% of preschool teachers, thus doing full justice to the versatility of the suitcase contents. Among the school personnel, assessments are more varied. Not because of poor impressions, but because the suitcase contents tend to be less familiar to the individual educator compared to preschools. Accordingly, the materials are less commonly used in schools, where only 8 out of 20 activities have been taken up by more than 30% of respondents. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the massage programme, conversation boards and children's meetings are among the preferred activities in preschools as well as schools.

Given this marked difference between preschools and schools in their approach to the materials, we might wonder: What is it that makes the suitcase harder to use in schools? And what might be the way forward?

The staff's gains from Free from Bullying

In this section, we look more closely at what the staff have gained from the pilot project in schools and preschools. On the face of it, the professionals at preschools seem to have benefited in particular, while those at schools are more moderate or reserved as regards the significance of Free from Bullying in their own practice. The following chart shows what the two staff groups think they have gained from the project:


Hvad har du fået ud af deltagelsen i Fri for Mobberi?

(Fig. 7)

What have you gained from taking part in Free from Bullying?							Preschool
Percent							School
	I have not gained anything	I pay more attention to patterns of exclusion	More discussion among colleagues about children's social life	Greater knowledge about bullying	New cooperation with other institutions	Strengthened cooperation with group of parents	I act differently towards the children now

Once again, it is striking that the personnel's experience of participation in the pilot project is markedly more positive in preschools than in schools.
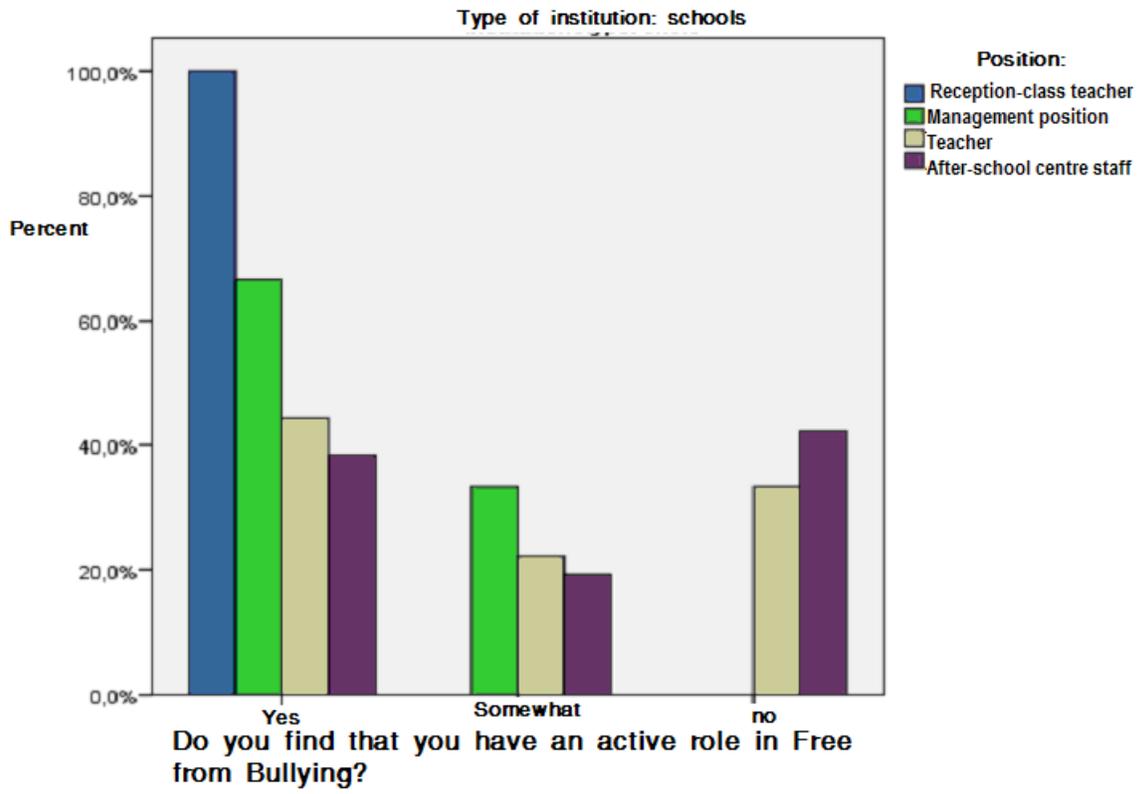
Looking at the extent to which the professionals find themselves playing an active role in the project, we also see differentiation between school and preschool staff, as the latter generally see themselves as more involved, whereas many more respondents working at schools do *not* think they are playing an active role:
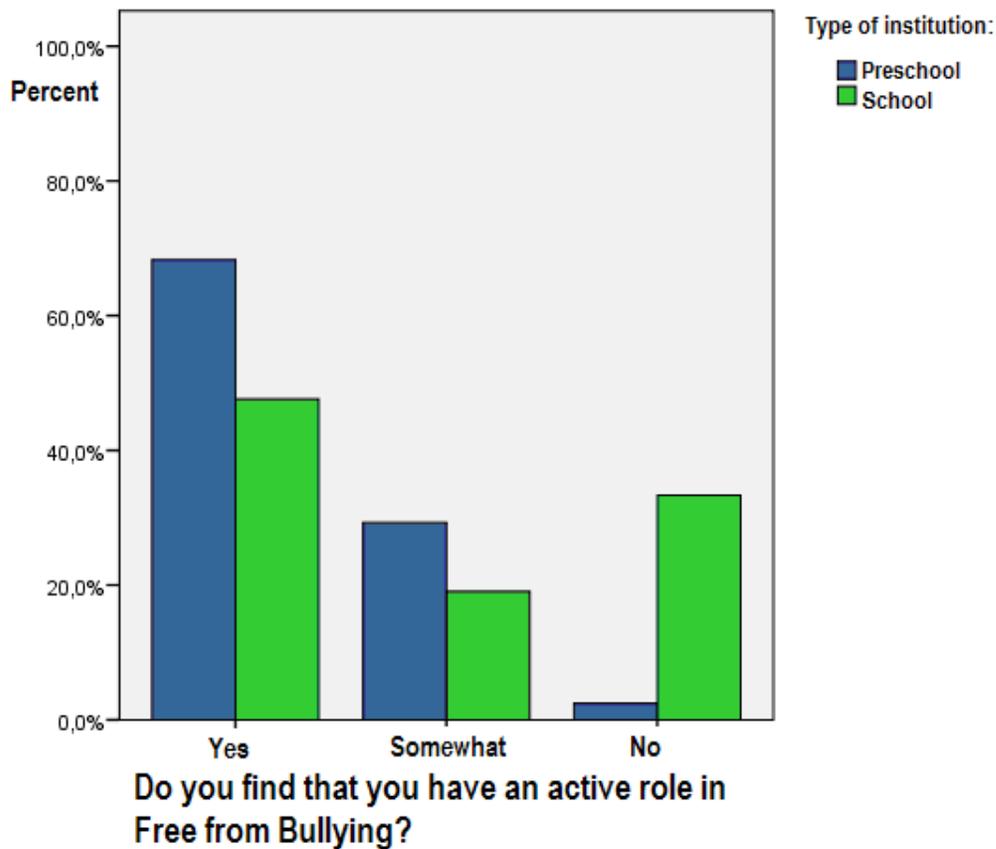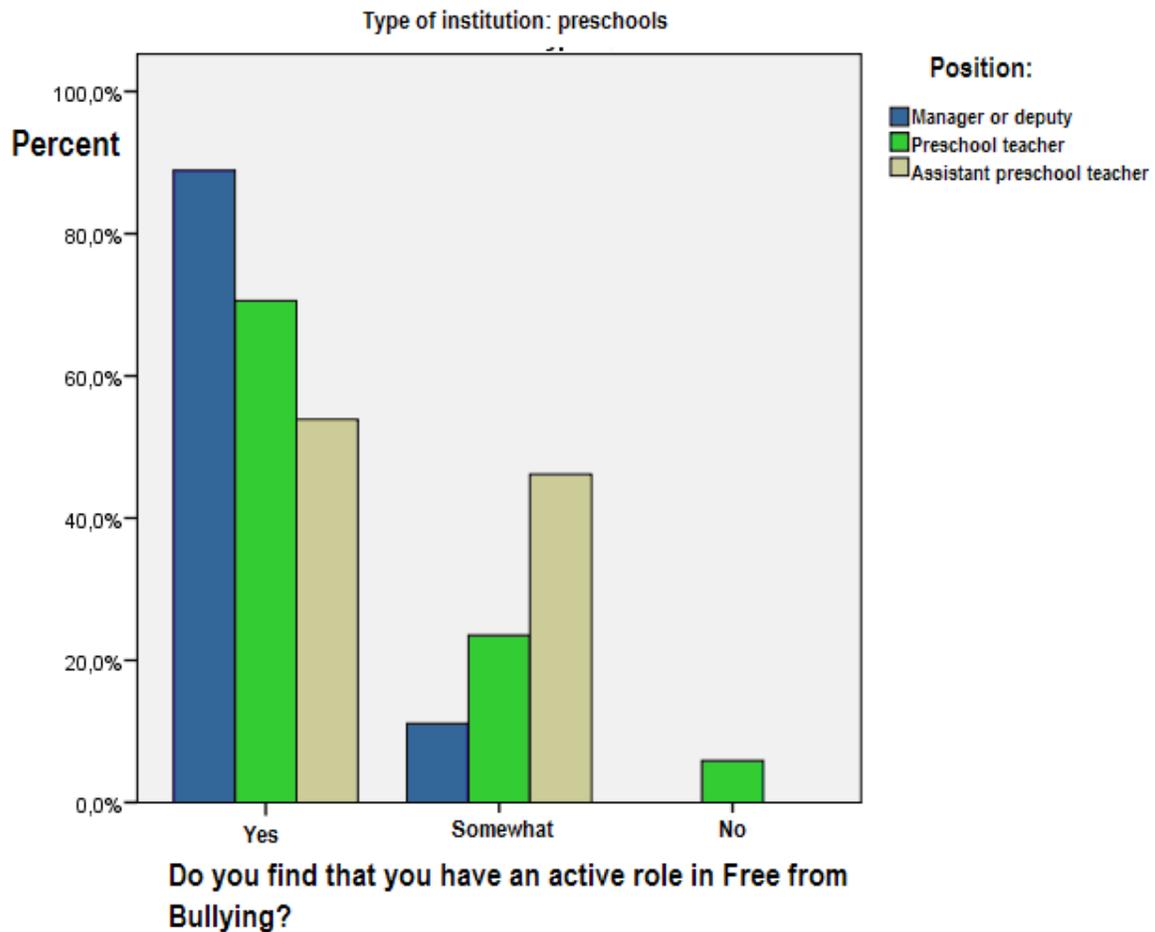
(Fig. 8)

One explanation why the preschool personnel are so much more inclined to answer 'yes' or 'somewhat' to the question of whether they have an active role may stem from the fact that in these educational institutions the pilot project has been running for a longer period, hence potentially being more embedded than in the schools. On the other hand, the disparity is not that huge, so perhaps other explanations should be considered too. Could it be related to how the division of labour differs in preschools and schools? While preschool employees tend to work closely together every day, perhaps holding joint activities across the various preschool sections, the teachers are more isolated in the course of a normal day, as cooperation with colleagues is mainly confined to preparatory teamwork outside the actual teaching situation. The issue here is whether the discrepancy stems from divergent forms of organisation. Regardless of the exact explanation, this difference seems to impinge on the sense of shared ownership of the pilot project, which is a decisive factor for the individual employee's assessment of his or her own active role in it.

Another perspective on who plays an active role can be seen from the distribution of answers by job position held. The following two charts show the variation in answers from staff categories at the schools and preschools, respectively:

Type of institution: schools

Do you find that you have an active role in Free from Bullying?

(Fig. 9)

Type of institution: preschools

Percent

Position:
- Manager or deputy
- Preschool teacher
- Assistant preschool teacher

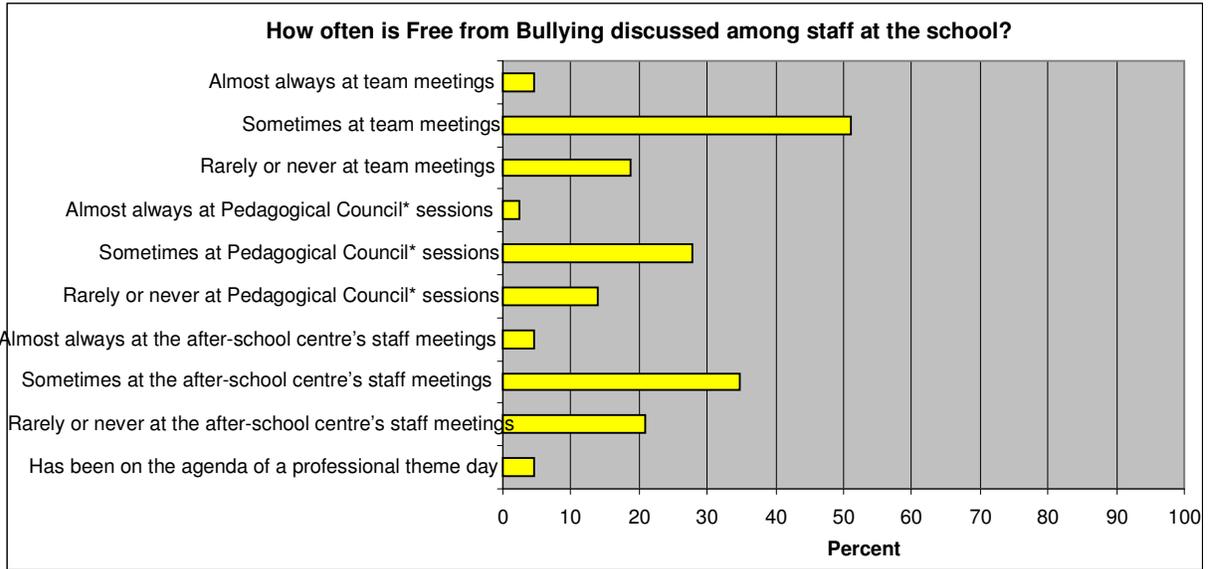Do you find that you have an active role in Free from Bullying?

(Fig. 10)

Overall, a majority of respondents see themselves as playing an active role in Free from Bullying. The first chart also bears out the impression we get from the qualitative interviews, namely that Free from Bullying has first and foremost been put to use by teachers of reception classes ('class 0' in Danish parlance, i.e. introduction to school life). At preschool level, we see that fully 90% of those in management positions think they have an active role, which dismisses any notion of management having primarily delegated anti-bullying work to 'rank-and-file' teachers.

Looking at preschool personnel, it is clear that management and trained educators are the most involved, while a lower proportion of assistants see themselves as active in the pilot project. This could be identified as a challenge to the preschools: getting everyone to join in the pilot project and feel responsible for initiatives to prevent bullying.

Moreover, we notice that those who have been the longest at the preschool/school concerned, or within their profession, find themselves to be the most active. Thus, over a third of respondents with a background of at least 15 years in children's education answer 'yes' to the question of whether they have an active role in Free from Bullying. Apparently, it is at the preschool level where seniority has the greatest impact on the staff's assessment of their own role as active or not. Indeed, it is only those who have been employed for less than a year who answer 'no' to whether they have an active role. Perhaps these persons are mostly assistant preschool teachers.

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In order to form an impression of the extent to which Free from Bullying has become an integral part of the schools and preschools, we inquired into how often the pilot project was discussed at internal staff meetings. The distribution of answers is illustrated in the following two charts representing employees from schools and preschools, respectively:

How often is Free from Bullying discussed among staff at the school?

Category	
Almost always at team meetings	
Sometimes at team meetings	
Rarely or never at team meetings	
Almost always at Pedagogical Council* sessions	
Sometimes at Pedagogical Council* sessions	
Rarely or never at Pedagogical Council* sessions	
Almost always at the after-school centre's staff meetings	
Sometimes at the after-school centre's staff meetings	
Rarely or never at the after-school centre's staff meetings	
Has been on the agenda of a professional theme day	

(Fig. 11)

* The 'Pedagogical Council' is a standard entity at every Danish school, composed of management and a cross-section of staff members

How often is Free from Bullying discussed among staff at the preschool?

Category	
Almost always at meetings of staff/teachers	
Sometimes at meetings of staff/teachers	
Rarely or never at meetings of staff/teachers	
Almost always at meetings of each preschool section	
Sometimes at the meetings of each preschool section	
Rarely or never at the meetings of each preschool section	
It has been on the agenda of a day dedicated to pedagogy	

(Fig. 12)

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Once again, the difference between the two types of educational institution can be interpreted as Free from Bullying being more integrated into the preschools, since a larger percentage of their employees indicate that they *almost always* raise it at staff meetings. In comparison, most employees at schools state that they *sometimes* talk about the pilot project at their meetings. It also noteworthy that Free from Bullying is mainly discussed in the schools at team level and to a lesser extent by the Pedagogical Council, which involves all categories of educational staff. This indicates that the pilot project is first and foremost played out in early school years, and to a lesser degree as part of the entire school's overall identity.

Since Free from Bullying works at three levels – namely with the children, the parents and internally within staff groups – a section of the questionnaire for staff members has been about relations among colleagues and about whether Free from Bullying has had any effect on these. The importance of this aspect springs from the adults' function as role models for the children, as well as the assumption that a good children's environment also hinges on the adults' wellbeing. The chart below illustrates how the staff from schools and preschools responded to this question:
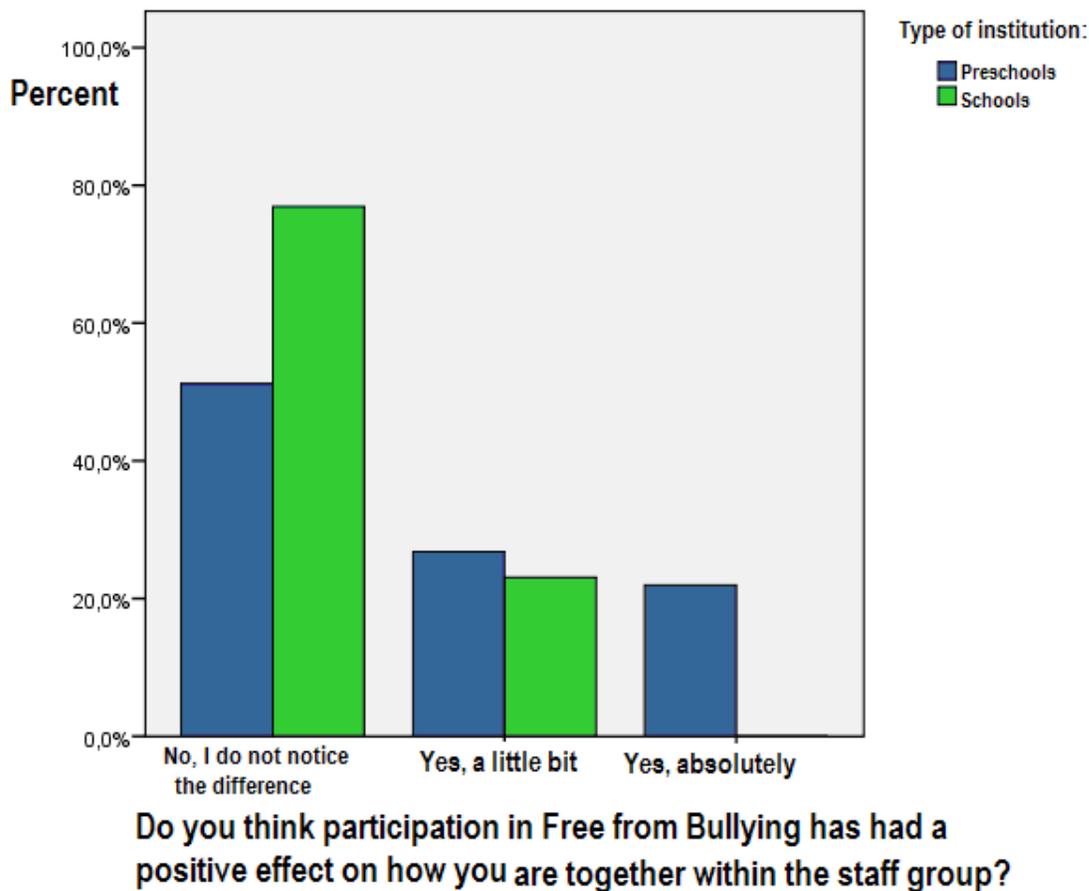

(Fig. 13)

As can be seen, it is not an overwhelming number of professionals, either from preschools or schools, who answer *yes, absolutely* or *yes, a little bit* to the question of whether Free from Bullying has changed the way in which the staff group is together. Accordingly, the tendency is for most not to notice any

difference. Why might this be so? Is it because the materials focus too much on social practices in the group of children and on cooperation with parents, and to a lesser extent on personnel concerns? Or has the pilot project simply not been used as the tool to enhance staff cooperation, which it was also intended to become? Whether this points to a problem or is a basic premise of materials with a strong focus on the children will be left undecided here, but it must be stressed that the pilot project does not seem to have much effect on how the professional educators get along and work together. This issue will be recognised by those who have read the previous follow-up research reports. It highlights that this has been a challenging area for the staff to work with throughout the pilot project. The qualitative interviews also reveal that addressing relations among colleagues has not been a priority and has been perceived as difficult to get started. Only recently has the topic begun to feature in earnest, which – according to the professionals – springs from a 'step-by-step approach' to Free from Bullying, concentrating on implementing and mastering activities with the children before mustering the energy to turn the focus on one's own role within the staff group.

The last aspect to be examined as regards the staff is whether they feel in command of new competencies as a consequence of participation in Free from Bullying. As previously described, there are discrepancies between the answers of professionals from preschools and schools, which is also manifested here. Once more, it appears that the preschool personnel generally appreciate the pilot project more, feeling that they have acquired new competencies. This can be seen from the following chart:

Do you feel that Free from Bullying has given you useful new competencies as regards the prevention of bullying?
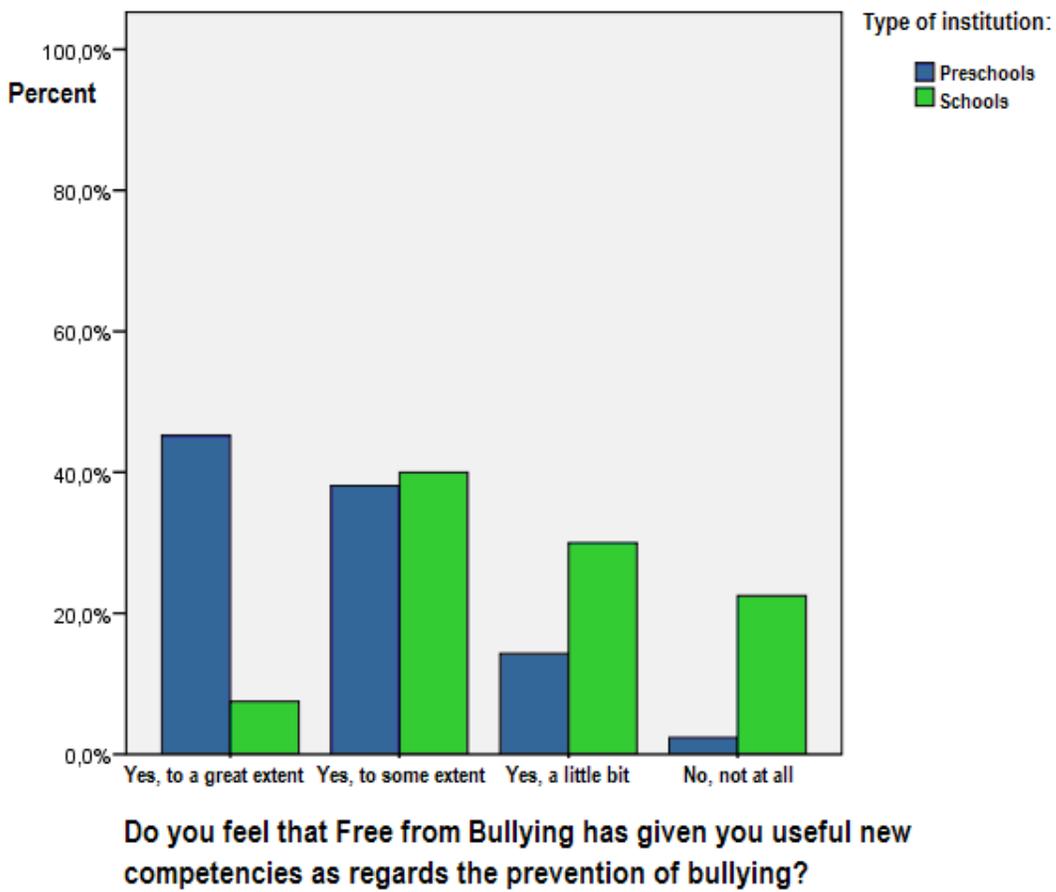
(Fig. 14)

While almost 50% of preschool staff respond that they have gained new competencies *to a great extent*, only 10% of school staff affirm likewise. Furthermore, while only 2% of preschool employees feel that they have acquired no new competencies *at all* as regards the prevention of bullying, this applies to fully 22% of the school employees, whose reservations are also reflected in a greater share of them answering that they have only gained new competencies *a little bit* as a consequence of Free from Bullying.

How can we explain this marked discrepancy between the two staff groups? Could it be because systematic anti-bullying work is a relative novelty in preschools, thus teaching them more of which they were previously unaware and inspiring greater enthusiasm, whereas the schools have addressed this subject long before Free from Bullying? Is it because the preschools have worked more intensively with the pilot project in the course of its implementation, hence obtaining more useful new competencies? Or could it be related to the different ways in which the work has been organised in each type of educational institution, so that the preschools' noticeably greater gains stem from their use of the pilot project in everyday routines?

Views of parental involvement

Among the core areas of the pilot project Free from Bullying has been – and will evidently continue to be – the participation of parents. Against the background of previous rounds of follow-up research, we have found this field to be challenging, since several of the parties involved have a relatively narrow view of parents' responsibilities and capacities in connection with the prevention of bullying. In order to follow up this crucial matter, the present questionnaire survey has inquired into the staff's as well as the parents' perception of teacher-parent cooperation and the level of information.

The parents' experience
Among other questions, we have asked the parents to what extent they notice Free from Bullying in their own daily lives. The chart below illustrates the responses from parents of children in preschool, reception class and class 1, respectively:
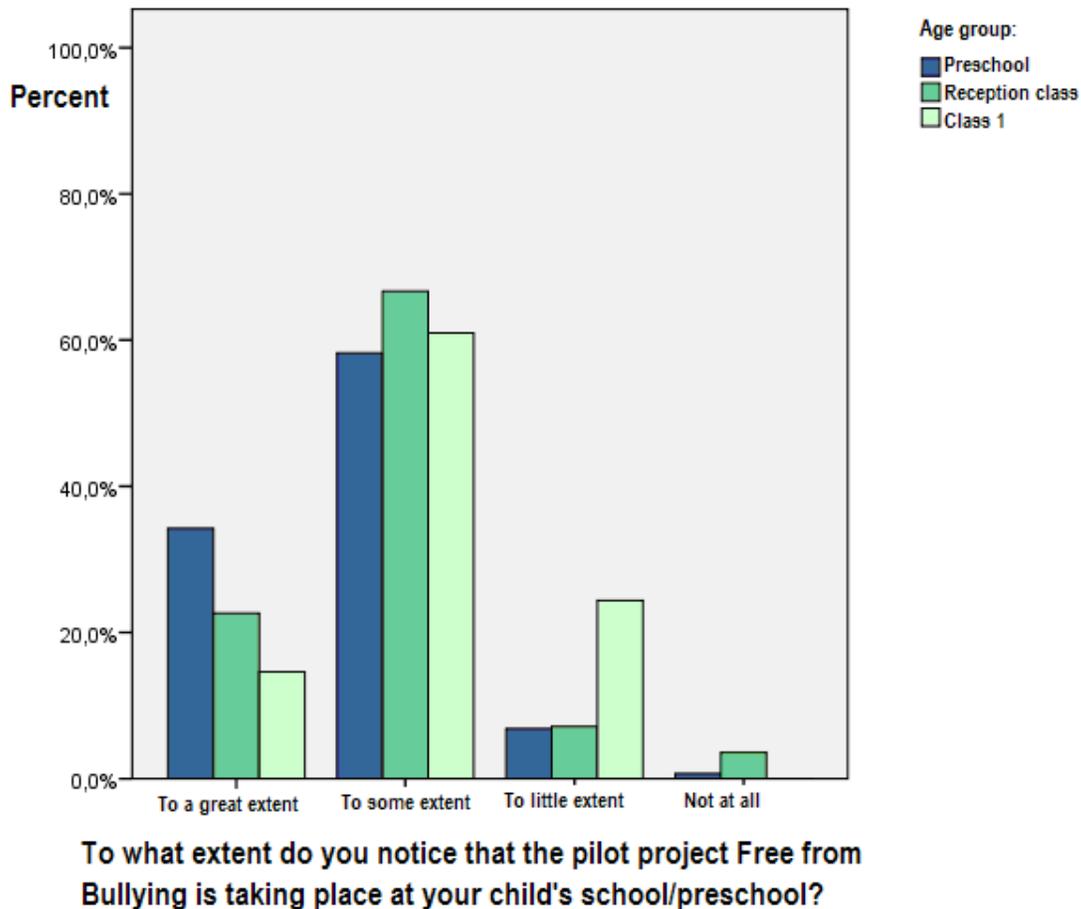

(Fig. 15)

The distribution of answers shows that *many* parents generally notice Free from Bullying. Moreover, it is revealed that parents of children in preschool and reception class are particularly aware of the pilot project's day-to-day realisation, whereas 22% of class 1 parents only notice it *to*

little extent. Could this be explained by the pilot project having been more intensively implemented in preschools and reception classes? Is the reason that the work with these age groups has been going on for longer? Or has more been done to inform the parents here than those of children in class 1, where the distance between school and home tends to be longer than for the younger children? Is it due to a combination of factors or to something else?

We also inquired into the parents' *knowledge* of Free from Bullying. The pilot project in its totality had been running in the schools for slightly more than a year and in the preschools for over 1½ years, when the questionnaire was filled in, which may help explain the difference in the distribution of answers. The chart below shows the parents' responses to the various ways in which they have been informed – or in some other way obtained knowledge – about Free from Bullying.

In which ways have you been informed or otherwise obtained knowledge about Free from Bullying?
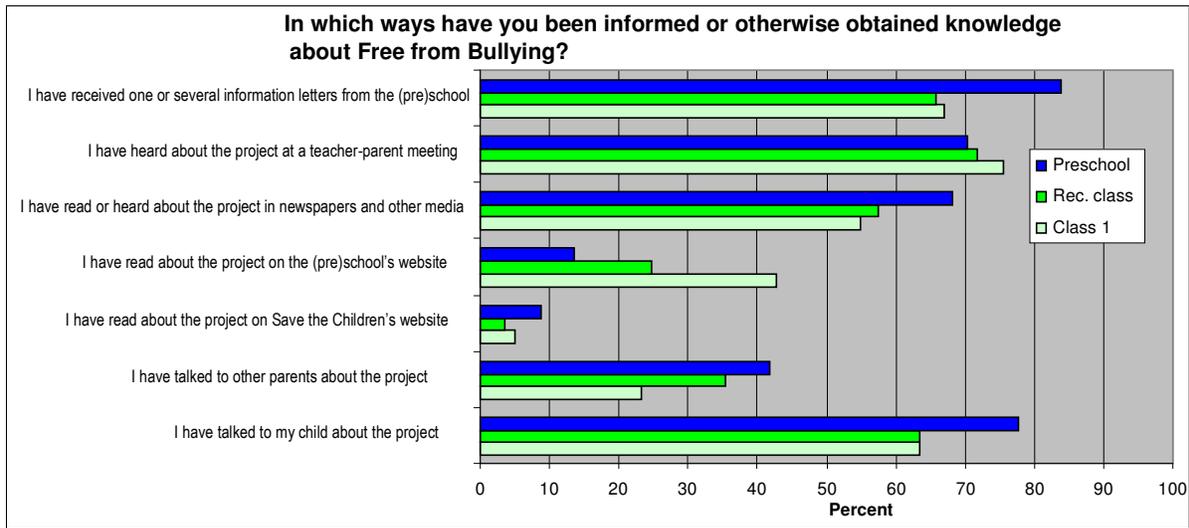
(Fig. 16)

The overall picture shows that most parents have knowledge of the pilot project and that information has reached parents along *many different* channels. A closer look at the chart reveals that between 65 and 85% of parents have been informed about the project at a teacher-parent meeting or in letters from their child's educational institution. Moreover, many have obtained knowledge through the media. There is no doubt that media coverage has played an important part in Free from Bullying (in some places not least the local media), among other reasons due to Crown Princess Mary's commitment, which has translated into parents paying greater attention to and learning more about the pilot project. In addition, most have also talked to their child about it at home, which may be a more 'subjective' source of information, but can nevertheless *also* give parents insights into the substance of the undertaking. An interesting point regarding the above distribution of responses is that the lowest number of parents have used those channels of information that seem, on the face of it, to require the greatest initiative to access, namely the website of the school/preschool or of Save the Children.

In the above chart, we have chosen to break down responses from parents by the age group of their children – i.e. preschool, reception class and class 1 – which reveals marked discrepancies in several regards. Firstly, a higher percentage of preschool parents than school parents mention *information letters, media, talking to their child* and *talking to other parents* as ways of learning about the project. It is striking that the older the children become, the less their parents seem to talk

to each other, at least about this particular subject. This may have several explanations. Could it be because the parents tend to know each other better at preschool and reception-class level than in class 1, as they are more likely to bump into each other at drop-off and pick-up? Could it be because the preschool children have been together longer? Or might the reason be related to the foregoing inquiry, indicating that parents of class 1 children generally notice the project less?

One communication channel, however, presents the opposite trend. We see that more parents of class 1 children have sought information about the pilot project on the *school's website*. Does this reflect that some class teachers, who have limited day-to-day contact with parents, have encouraged more active use of this forum? Or has it come about on class 1 parents' own initiative, perhaps prompted by a different kind of correspondence with teachers, information about homework, excursions etc.?

One question was whether the respondent had talked to his or her child about the project at home. Many had indeed done so. In this connection, we were curious to know which parts of the project the children had *especially* told their parents about. Consequently, we asked the parents about this, and in the following chart we have chosen to break the answers down by parents of girls and boys. It must be stressed that this chart shows the *number* of responses, and not their percentage distribution (we have obtained a total of 147 responses from parents of girls and 161 from parents of boys).
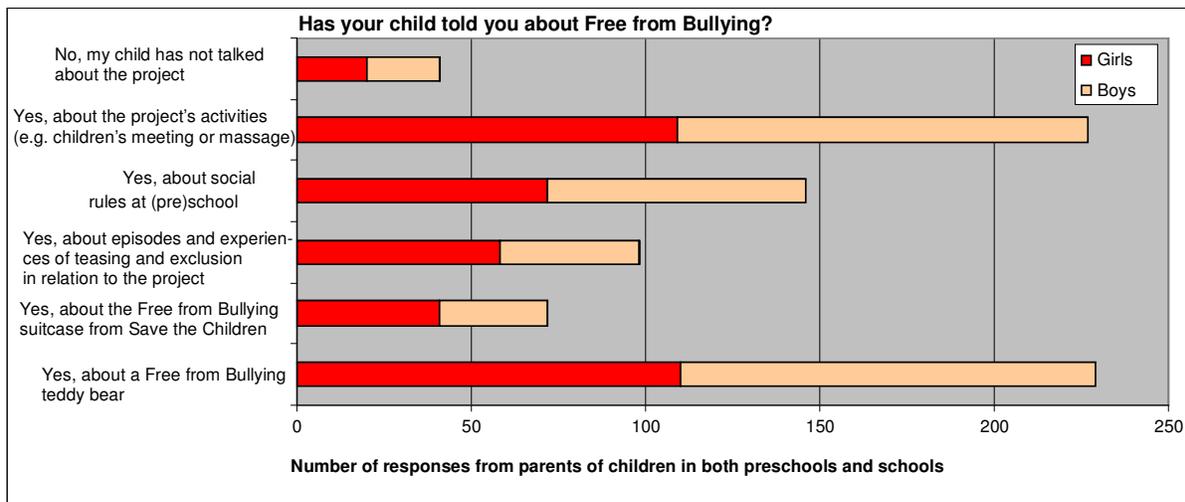
(Fig. 17)

First and foremost, we see that the teddy bear and the various activities of the pilot project (e.g. massage and children's meetings) are what the *highest number* of children have talked about with their parents. It is also apparent that girls and boys basically attribute the same importance to the various conversation topics, and that no gender has *generally* reported on more aspects of Free from Bullying at home than the other. This is at odds with the notion that girls generally speak more about the pilot project and its related issues than boys, which many parents of boys have expressed in our interviews with them – ascribing their sons' taciturn manners to their boyhood. However, the questionnaire survey cannot tell us *how much* the children have narrated about each subject. Consequently, this result does not *necessarily* disprove the parents' impressions, conveyed in the qualitative interviews, that the boys recount less. In one respect, such a gender-based difference can

indeed be traced, as more daughters than sons are reported by their parents to have talked about episodes and experiences of teasing and exclusion, and related it to Free from Bullying.

Incidentally, it must be mentioned that responses inserted in the chart can be interpreted both as what the children have spontaneously told their parents and as those subjects into which the parents have inquired. The latter obviously presupposes certain parental knowledge of what to ask about, which leads back to the question about level of information addressed above.

However, being informed does not amount to active participation. Free from Bullying suggests that genuine parental *involvement* should take place in the prevention of bullying, but a recurrent issue for the parties concerned has been how this can occur – and on what terms. Against this background, we asked the parents in what ways they considered themselves to be actively involved. The following two charts show how school and preschool parents, respectively, responded to this question:

(Fig. 18)

In what ways have you, as a preschool parent, been involved in Free from Bullying?
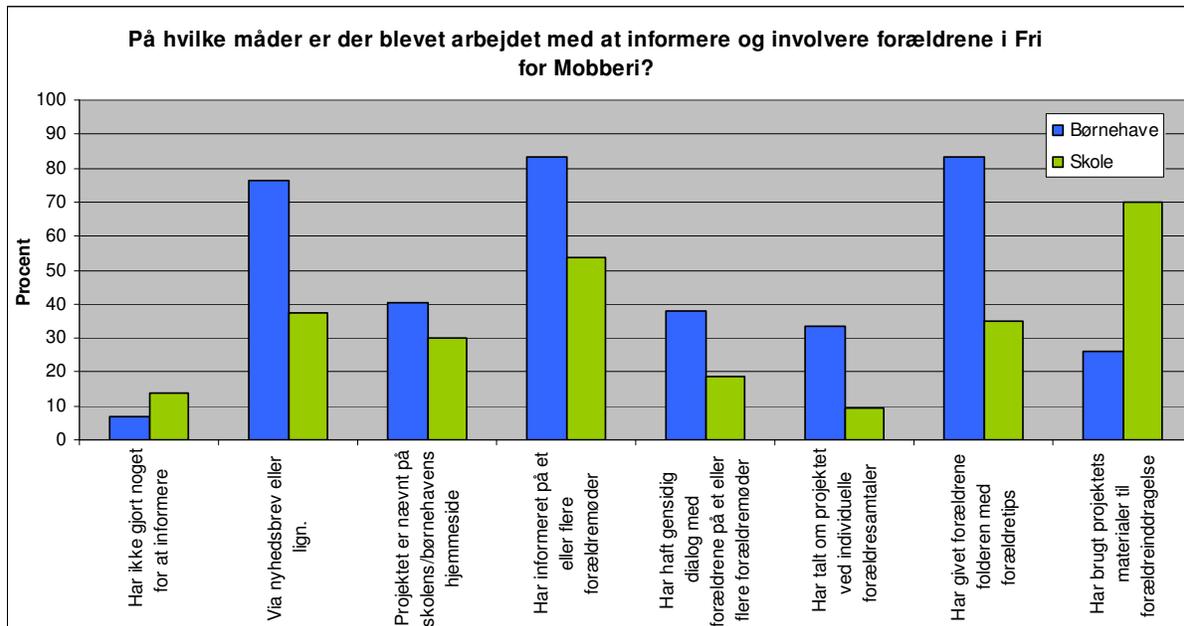
(Fig. 19)

It seems that most parents continue to get involved first and foremost in the intimacy of their home. The responses show that the vast majority take part by talking to their children, whether it be specifically about Free from Bullying or generally about teasing and social life in preschool or school. In addition, over half the parents have followed one or several pieces of advice received in connection with the pilot project. However, it is interesting that around one third of parents indicate having participated actively in discussions on Free from Bullying at a teacher-parent meeting. It appears that progress has been made in this area compared to feedback received in previous rounds of empirical data collection, where several educators requested more of this type of parental involvement. The distribution of responses also shows that parents of preschool and schoolchildren do not differ significantly in the nature of their participation.

The staff's viewpoint

While we have asked parents, on the one hand, how they have been informed or obtained knowledge about Free from Bullying, we have also asked the personnel, on the other, how *they* think they have informed and involved parents. The questionnaire to preschool employees inquires into what has taken place generally *in the institution*, whereas school employees are asked what they have done *personally*.[4] Accordingly, the difference between the collective and individual formulation must be taken into account in the interpretation of the following chart, which shows how the staff groups have worked on informing and involving parents:

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[4] The rationale behind this was that a class teacher typically has limited knowledge of what has been done in other classes, whereas a preschool centre traditionally has a more cohesive staff group, for instance sending out the same information letters to all parents.

På hvilke måder er der blevet arbejdet med at informere og involvere forældrene i Fri for Mobberi?

(Fig. 20)

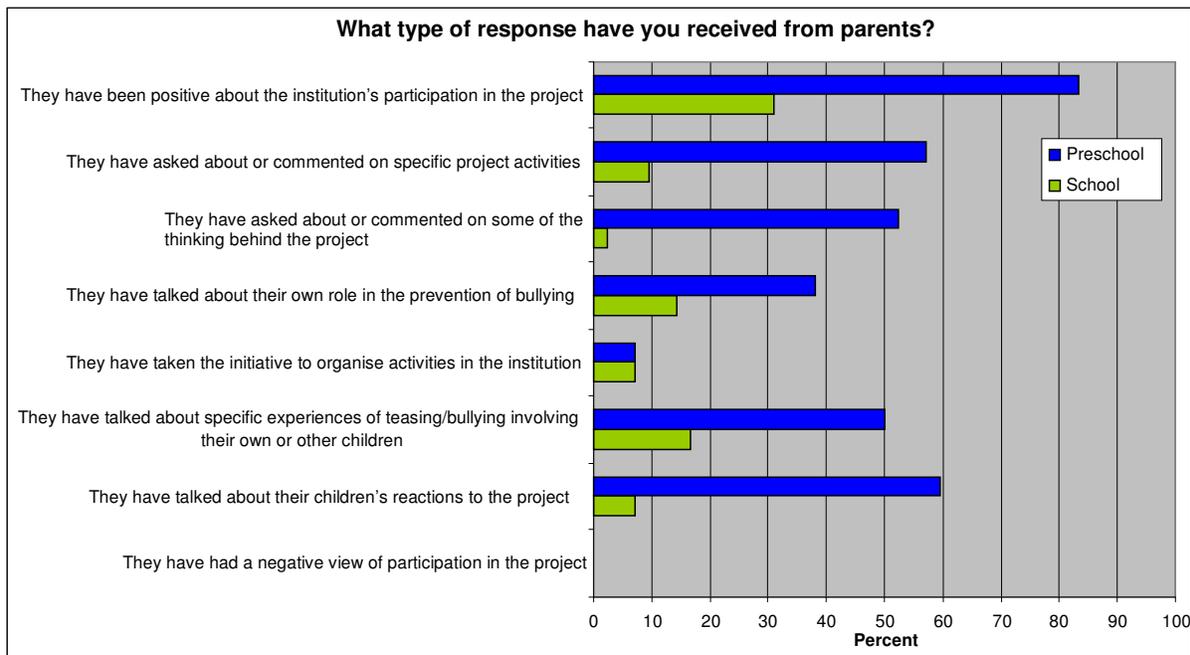| In what ways have you sought to inform and involve parents in Free from Bullying?							Preschool
Percent							School
Have not done anything to inform them	Through newsletter or the like	Project is mentioned on the website of the (pre)school	Have informed them at one or several teacher-parent meetings	Have had a two-way dialogue with parents at one or several teacher-parent meetings	Have talked about the project in conversations with individual parents	Have handed out the folder with tips for parents	Have used the project materials to involve parents

Once again, the answers of personnel from each of the two types of educational institution differ markedly, as more preschool employees respond that they have used several information channels or involvement methods. This can, as mentioned, be ascribed to the collective formulation of the question to preschool staff as opposed to the individual approach used towards the school staff. However, this need not be the only explanation. It is also conceivable that the longer period in which the preschools have been active in Free from Bullying has allowed them to gain more numerous and extensive experiences of parental involvement.

Altogether, the chart shows us that an effort has been made to inform parents in general. Very few – namely 8% of preschool and 15% of school personnel – affirm not to have done *anything* to this effect.

The most used channels of information and involvement are clearly newsletters and similar publications from the preschool or school, oral messages at teacher-parent meetings and handouts of the five tips for parents from the Free from Bullying suitcase. To a lesser extent, respondents have chosen to visit the educational institution's website, to enter into an actual dialogue at teacher-parent meetings, and to raise the subject in conversations with individual parents.

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One pair of bars in the chart reverses the trend, as schools have made greater use than preschools of *the project materials to involve parents.* The reason for this is probably that the new school suitcase contains some 'dilemma cards' targeted at parents, for instance at teacher-parent meetings, and these have yet to be included in the preschool suitcase. We know from the qualitative interviews with parents that these cards have been in play in at least one place.

But how have parents then reacted to the pilot project? We asked the educators if they had noticed any interest or response from parents. Once again, the reports from preschools and schools differed significantly as illustrated below:

What type of response have you received from parents?

	Preschool	School
They have been positive about the institution's participation in the project		
They have asked about or commented on specific project activities		
They have asked about or commented on some of the thinking behind the project		
They have talked about their own role in the prevention of bullying		
They have taken the initiative to organise activities in the institution		
They have talked about specific experiences of teasing/bullying involving their own or other children		
They have talked about their children's reactions to the project		
They have had a negative view of participation in the project		

Percent

(Fig. 21)

Above all, the parents have reacted positively to Free from Bullying, according to staff at both types of educational institution. However, there is no doubt that preschool employees have, on the whole, experienced much greater response from parents regarding the pilot project than school employees. The exception is that few in both staff categories consider parents to have taken greater initiative to organise activities at the school or preschool. The marked discrepancy between preschool and school in the above chart springs undoubtedly from the much greater daily contact between parents and professionals in preschools than in schools – the same explanatory model as suggested in the case of other conspicuous differences between the two types of educational institution.

The impression from previous interviews and feedback sessions in participant institutions has been that the educators would like to see greater parental initiative and involvement in Free from Bullying. To follow up on this point, we have asked the staff about their overall assessment of parental involvement, and here the result is not nearly as discouraging as could have been feared:
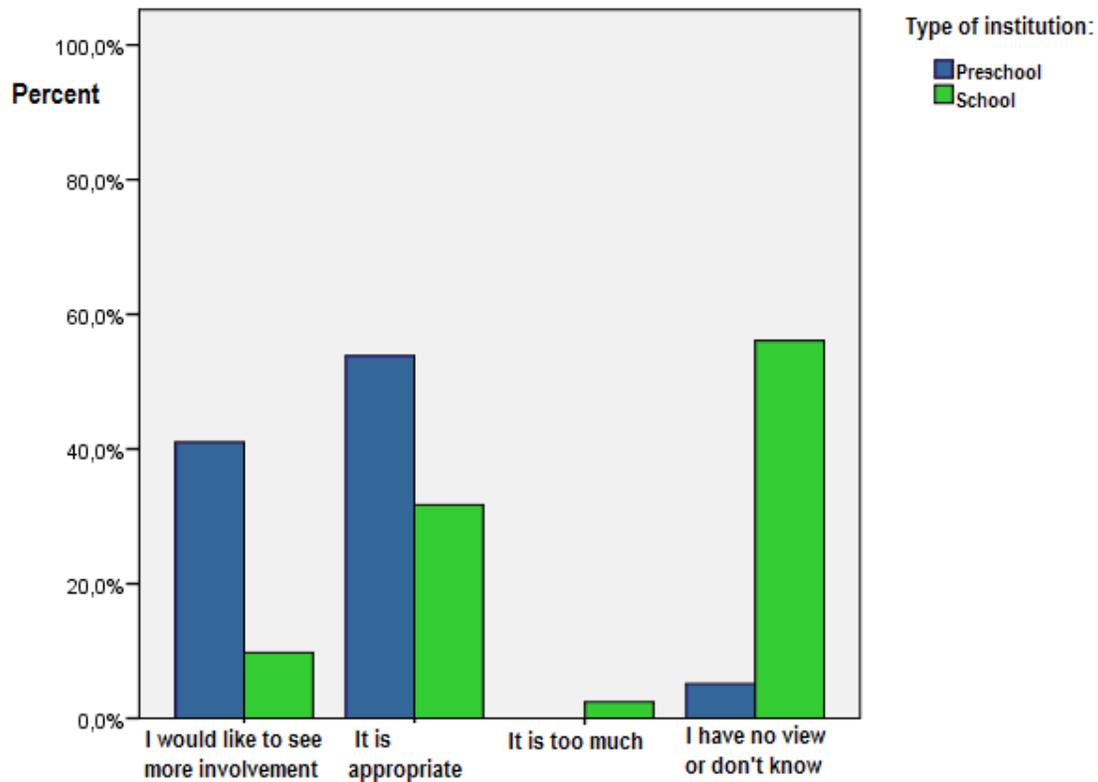
What is your general view of the parents' involvement in the class/preschool in connection with Free from Bullying?

(Fig. 22)

Disregarding the high percentage of school employees who feel unable to assess this matter, there is in fact a majority of both staff categories who find the parents' involvement to be appropriate. In addition, it is striking and puzzling that far more preschool than school personnel still wish to see greater parental involvement, not least in view of clear indications that preschools perceive the greatest response from parents. Does this stem from parents of schoolchildren having a significantly higher level of participation? Or do schoolteachers, to a higher degree than preschool teachers, dislike parents interfering with their work?

Having inquired into the staff's experience of the parents' involvement, we found it interesting to also ask the staff about their own effort to this effect. Could we find any correlation between the two? The following chart shows the distribution of answers from preschool and school personnel:

What do you think about your own effort to involve parents actively?
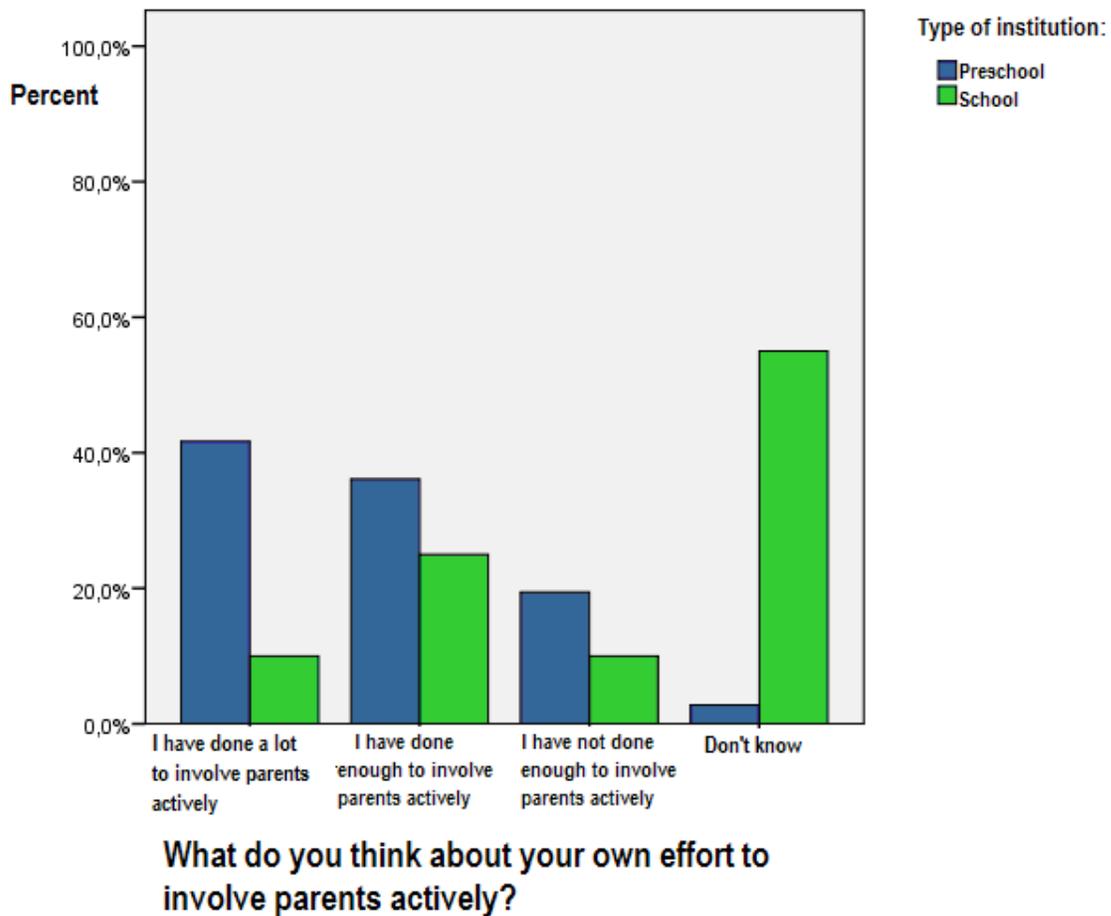
(Fig. 23)

As in the case of the foregoing question, many school employees found it difficult to assess this, thus ticking the 'don't know' option. Leaving out this vast group, most of the school staff found that they had done *enough*, while most preschool staff thought they had done *a lot* – categorised as even more than *enough* – to involve parents. Looking ahead at the coming years, the schools might conceivably receive new parents who have been accustomed from preschool to a certain anti-bullying activity level, thus bringing expectations to the school of similar attention to the issue. One way for schools to handle this could be to take up the activities specifically targeted at parents – based on Free from Bullying's focus on parents' importance for the children's social manners.

Finally, the professionals were asked whether their school's or preschool's participation in Free from Bullying had had an effect on the parents' behaviour. In the following chart, we have also chosen to show how responses are distributed between preschool and school personnel:
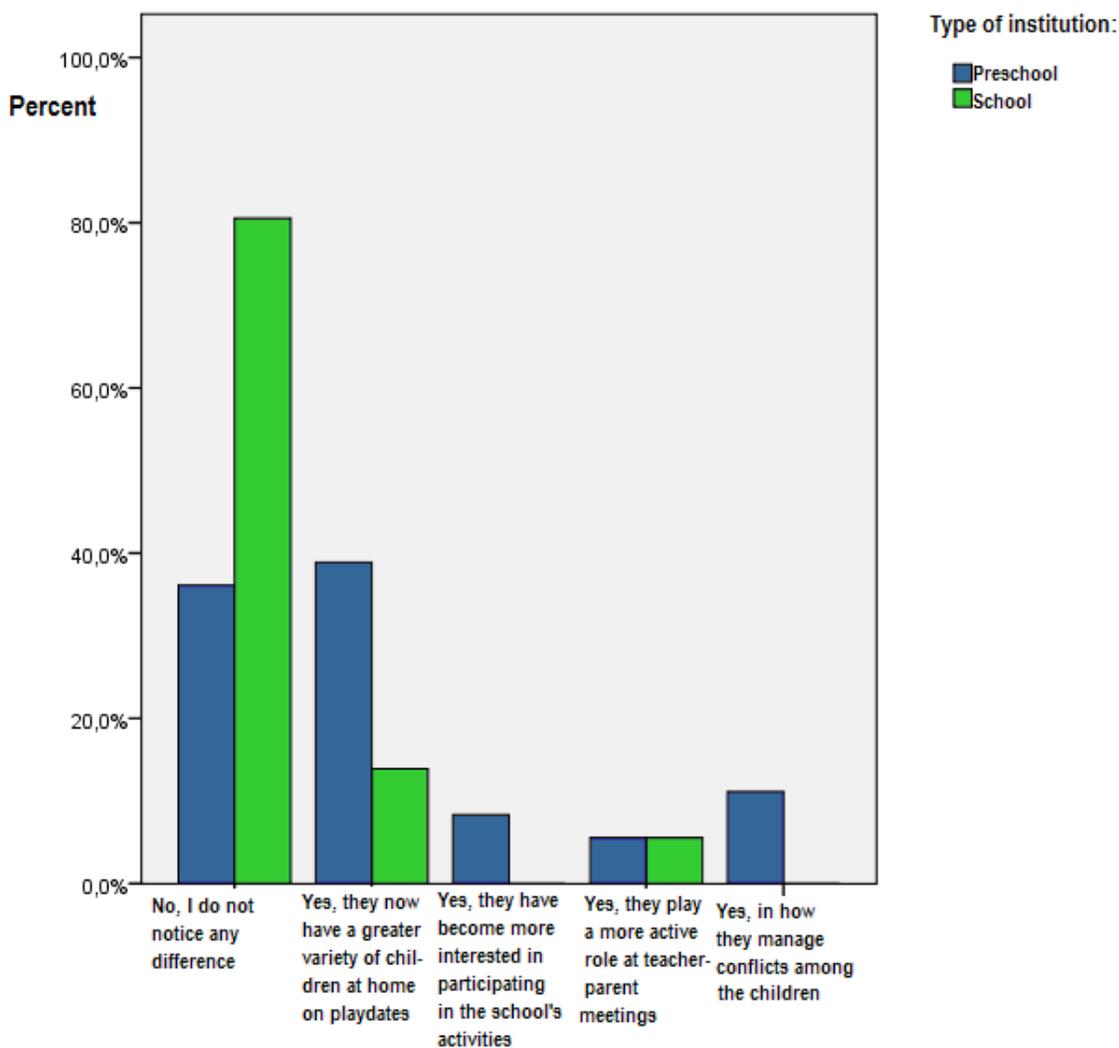
Do you notice that participation in the project has changed how parents behave?

(Fig. 24)

On the whole, many respondents find that the pilot project has had no major effect on parents' behaviour. This is much more pronounced among the school personnel, where fully 80% notice no change in this regard compared to only 37% among the preschool personnel. It may be relevant to qualify the interpretation of this result. Because we cannot know if the responses reflect a perception that parents are not committed to fighting bullying and never have been or that parents are committed to fighting bullying and always have been. Whatever is the case, the school personnel do not find that Free from Bullying has had much effect on parental contributions.

But why is the parents' conduct affected to a higher degree in preschools than in schools? Could it be because preschools go to greater lengths to involve parents, getting them to act differently or to focus on the group of children in a new manner? Could it be because addressing the issue of

bullying is less groundbreaking in a school context, perhaps leading the staff to conclude that *this project* has not made any difference (distinguishable from the impact of many other efforts)? Or is the explanation simply that preschool educators have easier access to *see* how parents behave with their children, since school employees are less likely to be present when parents drop off and pick up theirs?

Looking at the changes in parents' behaviour particularly noticed by the staff groups, more inclusive playdates stands out, i.e. the parents are now bringing home a greater variety of other children to play with their own. This is indeed one of the 'Five Tips for Parents' distributed by Free from Bullying.

As mentioned, the survey included all three schools and six preschools taking part in the pilot project. We have found it interesting to look at how the answers to the latest question are distributed between the various educational institutions, finding, for instance, that:

• only at Skjoldhøj School, Spirekassen Preschool Section and Humlebien Preschool was the pilot project considered to have induced parents to play a more active role at teacher-parent meetings;

• only at Hoppesvej Preschool, Vonsild Preschool and Humlebien Preschool (mostly in the latter) was the pilot project found to have changed parents' ways of managing conflicts between the children; and

• only at Vonsild Preschool and Hoppesvej Preschool was the pilot project found to have made parents more interested than previously in taking part in the institution's activities.

Changes among the children

The subject that might ultimately be most interesting to assess is whether the project has made a difference to how the children interact with each other in those preschools and schools which have used the Free from Bullying materials. We have inquired into this matter in the questionnaire for professional educators, and the answers convey an impression that changes have indeed, to a certain degree, taken place in how the children are together and manage their conflicts.
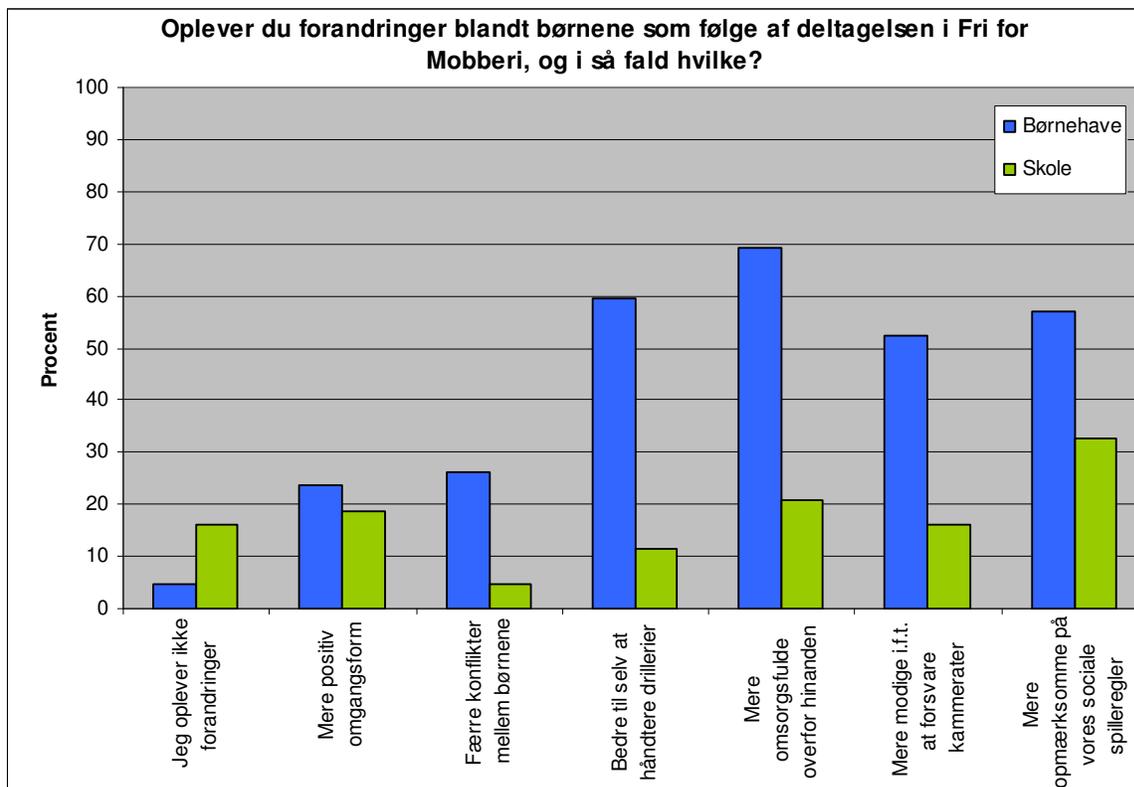
(Fig. 25)

Do you notice any change among the children as a consequence of participation in Free from Bullying, and if so, which ones?							Preschool
Percent							School
	I do not notice any change	More positive social manners	Fewer conflicts among the children	Better at handling teasing on their own	More caring towards one another	More courageous in defending peers	More attentive to our social rules

In the above chart, we have once again presented the responses of preschool and school personnel separately, and the trend is clear – and comparable to several of the aforementioned findings: a much higher percentage of preschool employees have ticked the various options regarding noticeable change, which altogether gives the impression that the preschools are experiencing greater gains from the pilot project measured in terms of the effect among the children.

However, in addition to more preschool than school professionals *generally* noticing change in a higher number of areas among the children, the chart also shows that this particularly applies to the preschool children becoming *more caring towards one another*, *better at handling teasing on their own*, *more courageous in defending peers,* and *more attentive to social rules*. Conversely, few preschool personnel perceive *more positive social manners* and *fewer conflicts* as a result of participation in Free from Bullying.

In the schools, the change among the children noticed by the highest percentage of staff members is their increased attention to social rules. However, it has also been registered that the children are more caring to one another and have more positive social manners, though it remains a small minority who mention these effects.

One of the most pronounced differences observed between schools and preschools in the above chart regards the children's ability to handle teasing. One might wonder why the schoolchildren do not appear, according to staff, to have improved in this respect, when the preschool children have. Is it because they were already good at it at school, while the preschool children had much more to learn in this area? Is it because the work with conflict management has been more intensive in preschools than in schools? Or does it have to do with preschool personnel being closer to the children, and hence more likely to notice such change, whereas school personnel are in fact unable to see when pupils solve their own breaktime conflicts, realising what goes on only when they address the adults with those problems that they cannot solve?

According to 33% of school employees, the schoolchildren have responded to the pilot project's implementation by paying greater attention to social rules. Should this possibly be ascribed to systematic efforts of individual classes in formulating, writing down and displaying their social rules – thus drawing and maintaining the children's attention to these? Or are other factors at play here?

Altogether, the distribution of answers shows us that the greatest gain from – and the richest resource of – Free from Bullying is that children are offered and actively acquire new, more and better tools to manage their social relationships – through the ups and the downs.

Annex 1

Number of questionnaires completed and handed in by parents and staff from each educational institution:

Total
Staff: 85
Parents: 315

Vonsild Preschool
Staff: 9
Parents: 31

Venøvej Preschool
Staff: 3
Parents: 14

Skjoldhøj School
Staff: 17
Parents: 66

Hoppesvej Preschool
Staff: 10
Parents: 37

Humlebien Preschool
Staff: 9
Parents: 35

Vonsild Parish School
Staff: 11
Parents: 60

Smilehullet Preschool
Staff: 7
Parents: 19

Eventyrhusene Preschool (only section 'Spirekassen')
Staff: 4
Parents: 12

Hellerup School
Staff: 15
Parents: 41