Language in Kindergarten
Much more than just talk

A GUIDE TO

LANGUAGE STIMULATION

DOCUMENTING AND EVALUATING LANGUAGE SKILLS

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION
Preface

I am pleased to be able to present this guide on language stimulation to those of you who work in Norway’s almost 6,500 kindergartens!

Stimulating a child’s language development is one of the core tasks of kindergartens, where the children should be able to encounter and become part of a rich and diverse linguistic environment. Linguistic competence is key to communicating with each other, participating in play and having a say in everyday situations. Efforts to support the children’s language acquisition are a central part of life in kindergarten. Children learn best when they actively participate and are given a chance to put their language to use together with others. It is therefore important to allow the children to use their language in meaningful contexts. This guide contains a number of examples of how kindergarten staff can use language actively in everyday situations together with the children and invite them to use language themselves. It also looks at children’s language acquisition and demonstrates how staff can document, observe and evaluate the linguistic environment and the language of individual children to assist in creating a good linguistic environment and provide appropriate language stimulation to every child. Linguistic competence is important for the children both now and in the future in respect of schooling and participation in work and social life.

I hope you will find this guide useful and inspiring, and I should like to wish you all the best as you work on language skills with the children in your kindergarten!

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Introduction

All kindergarten children should be part of a rich and diverse linguistic environment
Supporting children’s language acquisition is one of the core tasks of kindergartens. Communicative and linguistic competence is important both to the child’s life right now and for the child’s future opportunities. Kindergartens should give all children varied and positive experiences in using language as a means of communication, as a tool for thinking and as a way of expressing their thoughts, opinions and feelings. Life in kindergarten should support the children’s language development, and language stimulation should form part of day-to-day interaction. Kindergarten is a central and important arena for taking preventive and early action to boost children’s linguistic competence.

Staff who work with language development need knowledge and skills
Our aim with this guide is to add to the knowledge and skills of all kindergarten staff as regards children’s language development. It is important to plan the work, to execute it in the right way, and to document and evaluate the linguistic environment and the children’s linguistic competence. Rather than set out hard and fast rules, this guide is intended to offer support as staff go about their work. It contains suggestions and advice as well as practical examples. Part 2 of the guide also addresses relevant issues relating to regulations on documentation and evaluation, while Part 3 is an academic text about children’s language acquisition. We hope that you find the guide useful and inspiring as you set about your important work.

Children’s language is an important part of everyday life
Language skills are highly important to the children’s everyday well-being and sense of achievement. Children with good linguistic competence are well placed to interact with others and take part in play, friendships and learning. Understanding what is being said and being able to express own thoughts, feelings and opinions are important in order to understand what is happening, to interact with others and to have a say. Children who struggle to understand language, use language or express themselves may find it difficult to interact with others during everyday activities and play.

Children’s present language skills have a bearing on their future
A good linguistic environment is crucial both from a current and a future perspective. There has been increasing focus in recent years on the impact of good language skills at an early stage on subsequent performance at school, particularly with regard to reading and writing skills. There has proven to be a correlation between the quality of the linguistic environment in which the children grow up, their language skills, and their reading and writing skills later in life. It is therefore particularly important to let the child actively participate in a kindergarten environment that offers a rich vocabulary and allows the child to engage in conversations that help develop its language.

All staff should contribute to the children’s language development
All staff who work with kindergarten children play an important role in the children’s language development. Part 1 of this guide on language stimulation and Part 3 on language acquisition have therefore been written with all kindergarten staff in mind. Documenting and evaluating the linguistic environment and the children’s linguistic competence are primarily the duty and responsibility of kindergarten teaching staff. Part 2 of the guide is therefore aimed particularly at this group.

Read the part of the guide that you think will be useful to you
The guide is divided into three main sections. It has been arranged such that the section thought to be relevant to all staff members comes first. This section looks at language stimulation and is relevant both to the planning process of individual staff members and
when staff work together on specific language issues. Next follows the part addressing documentation and evaluation of the linguistic environment and of the children’s linguistic competence. This section is most relevant to teaching staff. Lastly there is a section on children’s language acquisition. The third part provides useful information in the form of a short summary of children’s language development, and it briefly addresses multilingualism, language delays and various types of speech and language problems. Some staff may wish to refresh or update their knowledge in these areas. It may also be useful to seek out additional literature on these topics.

Kindergarten staff should work together on children’s language development
Reflecting on and evaluating own practices together with others, making adjustments and working with purpose are key to ensuring the quality of the kindergarten’s language development initiatives. The exercises listed under the heading “Suggestions for reflection and co-operation” provide examples of the sort of initiatives that could be tried out. With practice and ongoing reflection, experimentation and evaluation, the quality of these initiatives may improve and the benefits to the children increase.
1. Language stimulation

DEVELOPING THE KINDERGARTEN’S
LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT AND THE
CHILDREN’S LANGUAGE SKILLS

The target group for this part of the guide is everyone working directly with the children in kindergarten. Teachers, child and youth workers and assistants all contribute to the children’s language development in kindergarten. Every staff member is an important initiator and participant in this process. When we use the terms staff or adults in this guide we are addressing all of you. You all play a key role and can make an important contribution in creating a good linguistic environment for all of the children and assisting in the language acquisition of each child.

Children need practice in using language
Early and appropriate language stimulation is an important element in kindergarten. Part II of the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens addresses language both in Chapter 2 under the heading “Linguistic competence” and in Chapter 3 under “Communication, language and text”. Children learn language best by being linguistically active. Staff are responsible for inviting all children to join in linguistic activities; that means both young and old children as well as children with varying language skills. The adults must allow every child to gain varied and positive experiences in using language as a means of communication, as a tool for own thoughts, and as a way of expressing own opinions and feelings.

Adults must meet the children at their level and on their territory
Staff should adapt language activities to suit the children’s linguistic skills, interests and motivation. Children learn when they engage in activities that they are curious about and interested in. Every child should feel that someone is there to listen to and show an interest in what it says and communicates every day. The key question is how staff can promote good linguistic development during ordinary day-to-day kindergarten activities. Large parts of this guide has therefore been dedicated to just this issue. Working on language skills in small, separate groups, sometimes referred to as language groups, is a supplementary yet important part of the language learning provision for many children. However, it cannot replace systematic language stimulation, which is one of the everyday duties of a kindergarten.

The Framework Plan
The kindergarten should use the children’s own means of expression as a starting point. Staff must listen and try to interpret their body language and be observant of their actions, physical expressions and, eventually, their verbal language.

The way in which staff respond to the children as they express themselves physically, linguistically, emotionally and in social relationships has an impact on their learning.

In order for a child to continue to develop its spoken language, it is essential that adults recognise and acknowledge its expressions while using words to describe its impressions and experiences.

Language development is an integral part of life in kindergarten
Staff must be conscious of the interrelationships between care, play, development and learning, including language learning. The different elements must form part of a bigger picture, and the children must be able to experience meaningful connections between them in everyday situations. For example, language and interaction become a natural part of play in the sandpit and during shared experiences on a visit to the local shop. Staff should instil trust between the children and between the adults and the children so that the children...
feel secure and can take pleasure in communicating and using their language.

**Kindergarten life is an arena for using language**
A typical day in kindergarten consists of numerous everyday situations in which the children can use language actively. To create a good environment for language stimulation, staff will use language as they interact with the children throughout the day. The adults’ input is important, and they are language role models for the children. Staff should also encourage linguistic interaction between the children. For example, around the dining table the adults and children will converse with each other, and the children will use language to communicate with each other during play. In the changing rooms the adults and children name the garments they are putting on and talk about what they are doing, and they talk about shared experiences or about things that they will do later in the day. With regard to language stimulation, the majority of – and the most important – work taking place in kindergarten involves everyday activities, and different approaches and methods may be suitable for engaging the children in linguistic activities.

**The Framework Plan**
Kindergartens should allow all children to gain varied and positive experiences in using language as a means of communication, as a tool for thinking and as a way of expressing their thoughts and feelings.

**Language development requires a systematic approach**
Efforts to encourage language development in kindergarten must be knowledge-based, reflected, planned, justified, organised, purposeful and coherent. This part of the guide aims to support staff in their systematic approach to language development. Taking a reflected look at their pedagogical practices helps raise awareness amongst those who work to stimulate children’s language. It allows them to develop new knowledge and to raise the quality of the work they do. The section “Suggestions for reflection and co-operation” provides examples of possible approaches. The questions and tasks may also help staff decide what to focus their efforts on and how best to organise language learning based on the children’s and the kindergarten’s needs.

**Colleagues can learn from each other**
Staff who co-operate can learn from each other, and colleagues who support each other can increase the quality of the work they do. It is important to try to create an open climate of co-operation based on the fundamental idea that everyone wishes everyone else well. Some staff members will feel comfortable in their roles and may be happy for others to observe them when they talk to groups of children or to parents. Others need training before they begin to feel relaxed in such roles. When colleagues give each other feedback it may be useful to agree to focus on a couple of concrete issues. This could be how and to what extent the adult adapts his or her language when speaking to a child or children, or how he or she explains new words and uses them when conversing with the children. Always ensure that such feedback contains some positive elements. It can also be a good idea to identify something to work on further in order to develop the person’s skills.

**Finding time for everything can be a challenge**
Most kindergartens take a systematic approach to language development, but many staff members often find it difficult to set aside enough time for this important task during a busy working day. It may be worth adopting the view that working on language skills is not a separate task in addition to everything else, but rather an integral part of the everyday interaction with the children. Everyday situations and activities are always good opportunities for the children to be linguistically active.

**Concentrate on the core issues**
Nobody can do everything all of the time. It is therefore important to focus our efforts on those things that we know for certain stimulate a child’s language. For that reason, this guide describes a number of measures that research has proven to be effective. Children benefit linguistically, both in the long and short term, from being in an environment where they are given plenty of opportunity to develop their vocabulary and partici-
pate in conversations that help develop their language. Several studies have also identified a link between early exposure to books and reading and children’s linguistic, and eventually also literary, development. This part of the guide will therefore look at:

- using conversation to develop a child’s language
- using stories to develop a child’s language
- using language during activities and experiences
- acquiring language through play
- adapting the content of books
- words and conceptual understanding
- linguistic awareness and literary stimulation

EXAMPLES OF EVERYDAY LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The examples below of how to work on language skills describe some of the possible approaches that the adults can take. The aim is to make a few specific suggestions and to highlight the adults’ different language roles in these situations. Neither the situations nor the roles can be clearly distinguished from each other. The reader may therefore find that some of the content overlaps. The objective is to provide guidance, encourage reflection and raise awareness. The idea is for staff, collectively or in groups, to work through the different topics/issues to boost their expertise, improve their skills, raise the quality of their work, and help the children develop their language skills. You may concentrate on one topic at a time, and spend as long as you need on one topic before moving on to the next. Perhaps you will only be able to cover one or two topics in the current six-month period. Incorporate the work and any measures to be taken over a given period into the annual and term plans as you go along.

Conversations to help develop a child’s language

Most conversations in kindergarten are casual. Conversation is a fundamental aspect of language acquisition and learning. Spontaneous, informal conversations take place anywhere and at any time during a normal day in kindergarten, and these conversations are an important learning arena. Good conversations between an adult and a child or small group of children have shown to be productive for language learning.
Adults should invite children to converse

When an adult initiates a conversation with a child he or she invites the child to participate in linguistic interaction. The adult attracts the child’s attention and interest and uses language actively by asking questions, for example. “Do you remember when we went to the park?” “What did you enjoy most about the trip?” This also happens with the youngest children while they are being fed or washed, for example. “Are you hungry?” “Would you like some more bread?” The adult may not expect the child to reply, but the child interprets the questions as a sign that it is its turn to give the adult a signal. This way the child begins to discover that language involves communication and interaction.

Children develop their language skills when taking part in conversations

Talking about experiences, thoughts and feelings is necessary in order to develop good language skills. By being active participants in conversations, the children acquire a broad knowledge of language. They convey messages, they listen and observe, and they receive and interpret messages. Children learn words and give the words content. They create sentences and acquire grammar in a meaningful context. They also learn to take turns and give signals to indicate that it is someone else’s turn, and they gradually become able to respond to the input of others. They also get used to sticking to a topic and expanding on it.

Everyday conversations may also require organisation and planning

Taking part in a conversation requires attentiveness and mental presence. Noise, poorly laid out rooms and stress can reduce the quality of a conversation. If possible, consider going to a separate room or focusing only on a few children at a time. It is also important to reduce background noise insofar as it is possible. During a busy day it is also a matter of awareness and priorities. Spending some of your valuable time on conversations to help develop a child’s language skills is an appropriate use of resources. Some children, including children with speech impediments, need to be given ample time and opportunity to express themselves in their own way and at their own pace.

Conversations can be both monologic and dialogic

Monologic conversations are characterised by one party being the most active speaker, e.g. an adult who informs or explains. In a dialogic conversation several people are taking part, e.g. a child and an adult. The two of them can explain, ask each other questions, answer and reflect together. Dialogic conversations are the most useful when children are acquiring language skills. Studies have shown that adults often talk more than children when they speak to each other. It is essential that the child’s statements are given plenty of room in conversations between an adult and a child. When a child invites an adult to a dialogue the adult must focus his or her attention on what the child is trying to convey, on seeking to identify the child’s intentions during the conversation, and on responding to the initiative taken by the child.

Shared experiences can be a good starting point for conversation

The youngest children make conversation based around what they are seeing, doing and experiencing right here and now. Over time they begin to master conversations that are independent of the specific context, so-called situation-independent conversations. This allows them to talk about objects and persons that are not present, about things they have experienced in the past, and about things they are looking forward to in the future. Conversations between staff and children may focus on something that is happening there and then, on something that the children have experienced together, or on something they are planning to do together.

Adults can provide encouragement during conversation

Adults who are interested in the child’s intentions and in what the child is actually saying should respond with words and actions. When the child is given an immediate acknowledgement and response it feels that it is being understood. The child then discovers how useful language is. In order to encourage the child to convey its wishes and thoughts, the adult should follow up on the child’s initiatives and respond by using words, for example. Example: One of the youngest children is pointing at some toy cars on a shelf. The adult picks up on the child’s signals and says: “Would you like to play with the cars?” “Would you like the small cars here, or the
large cars over there?” Then the adult helps the child get the cars it wants to play with. By using encouraging body language, such as nodding and smiling, and supportive messages in the form of short words such as “yes” and “oops”, the adult can help encourage the child even further.

Adults can add structure to the conversation
Children become familiar with the form of the language through conversing. A supportive adult may rephrase the child’s single words into a complete sentence. If the child says “Ola read”, the adult may respond by saying “Would you like to read, Ola?” “What should we read, then?” This way the adult elaborates on what the child is saying to give it the correct linguistic form. The child then hears the language in the form that it will eventually learn to use itself. The adult thus creates a structure that the child can lean on. Eventually the child will no longer need this support.

Adults can be language role models for children to listen to and copy
Children pronounce words and use them in their own childlike ways. This is a natural step in their language development. When this happens the adult may repeat the word the way it should be pronounced or use it in the correct way. This way the communication is not interrupted by correcting “mistakes”, and both adult and child can continue to focus on the content of the conversation while the language is being modelled. For example, the child points and says “Woof run”. The adult looks at where the child is pointing and confirms: “Yes, look, there is a dog.” “The dog is running.” “It’s running fast!” The adult can also take the opportunity to expand the conversation with an open question: “Where do you think it is going?”

Adults can comment on and describe actions with words
Adults can put the activities they engage the children in, including the very youngest, into words. “And now, let’s put the other mitten on.” “Look, then your other hand is in the mitten, too.” The children hear the words as the action unfolds, and language and action become interlinked. Simultaneously the adults are inviting the children to use words and join in a conversation about what is happening.

It is important to put everyday objects into words
Use names to describe objects such as cutlery, crockery and foodstuffs, and talk to the children about what is happening around the dining table when the children pass something to each other, put food on their plates, eat and drink. When you are on a trip you can talk about the weather, the road you are walking on and about the surroundings. Outdoors you can use words such as tree stump, mushroom, shell, butterfly and snail. It is not sufficient to simply refer to the objects as “it” or “they”. Repeat new words several times to let the children become familiar with them, and use the words in different contexts to increase the children’s conceptual understanding. Also put thoughts and feelings into words, and help the children do the same.

Adults must adapt their language to the children’s language
Staff should reflect on and be conscious of which words they use when talking to the children. Abstract words and expressions can be particularly difficult to understand. Reflect on such words together with the children, perhaps by giving both verbal explanations and concrete examples, or by using visualisation. A kindergarten where the children encounter a diversity of words, and where the words are well concretised, visualised and explained, has a good linguistic environment.

Staff can invite participation in conversations
Some children talk more, and more often, than other children, and some participate more actively in conversations than others. Adults can help more children participate by actively contributing to the conversations themselves. Using supportive messages and questions, the adults can involve the quieter children and could eventually withdraw gradually from the conversation. They should invite all children to participate in conversations, but it is impossible to accommodate everyone all of the time. Whenever possible, try to organise conversations in small groups, perhaps with only one or two children in addition to the adult. When several children take part in a conversation with others, it is crucial that the adult tries to acknowledge all the participants and to involve them as much as possible by using the children’s names, for example. The adult could ask questions to children
who are listening, or give them a chance to comment on what they are hearing. “That was exciting, Khadija!” “What did you find the most exciting, Sara?” The children should be given plenty of time to answer.

Interest from an adult can increase children’s motivation
Adults should concentrate on picking up on the children’s signals during conversation and acknowledging the child who is communicating. When adults show an interest in what children are saying, they are encouraging the children to use more language. If appropriate, keep eye contact with the child who is speaking. Be engaged, give supportive messages, use encouraging body language, and stay focused on the child and what it is conveying. Adults should not interrupt a child who is engaged in a good conversation with others. If possible, wait until the conversation has ended or until it is appropriate to take a break. Children who find that others are listening to what they have to say often feel encouraged to speak up again and contribute more in conversations. This creates a positive cycle. They use their language and thus continue to develop it.

Open questioning helps extend conversations
The adults should use mostly open questions to invite the children to participate in conversation or to make them want to continue conversing. This means that they should be structured in such a way as to encourage the children to respond with something other than “yes” or “no”. In other words, the questions require narrative answers. Surveys have shown that adults tend to ask children closed questions. It is useful to be aware of how questions are asked in order to make the children give elaborate answers and to sustain the conversation. Open questions often start with the interrogatives what, who, where, how or why. Such questions invite the children to join in conversations where they can share their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions and knowledge. Note that the youngest children and those with inadequate language skills may find it difficult to answer open questions. Adults should therefore adapt their questions to suit the linguistic abilities of the children and support them as they seek to give narrative answers. Also give the children a chance to ask their own questions. When the children ask questions they can invite other children and adults to join the conversation, and they can sustain the conversation.

Some conversations are prepared
Most conversations in kindergarten are spontaneous, but sometimes it can be appropriate, interesting and useful to arrange prepared conversations. Staff, perhaps in partnership with the children, should then plan the topic of the conversation, and they should prepare questions designed to invite the children to join the conversation and to inspire them to participate. The children should be given the opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings and opinions in these conversations, too. Examples of such conversation include themed conversations, literary conversations and philosophical conversations. Philosophical conversations are based on a specific problem, and the children respond to questions that do not have a given answer. Everyone should be given a chance to give their input. Such conversations help stimulate the children’s situation-independent language.

Colleagues can work together to improve the quality of conversations
The quality of conversations determines the linguistic benefits to the children. Raising quality is largely about being aware of the opportunities that are available, being conscious of the children’s interests, reflecting on own practices, and being willing to make changes. “What went well, and why?” “What am I less satisfied with?” “What should I try next time?” Shared reflection and discussion between colleagues can help improve the quality of everyday conversations. Colleagues can observe each other while conversing with the children and then talk about their findings. It may be a good idea to agree in advance what to focus on in the given situation. This could be looking at whether all the children are participating in the conversation, or establishing whether the questions are open questions that allow the children to make an active contribution.
Suggestions for reflection and co-operation

A. How do the adults use language – both verbally and non-verbally, together with the children during the day? Do you recognise any of the descriptions given here?
   - Which of them may be relevant to the linguistic environment and to each individual child?
   - How can differing views help you in your continued work?

B. Do your conversations with the children tend to be monologic or dialogic?
   - What are you satisfied with?
   - What would you like to co-operate on further?

C. Watch the film clip Hvem snakker? You can find it on the Reading Centre website (lesesenteret.uis.no) under the headings Barnehage and Leseaktiviteter i barnehagen – Noen filmsnutter til inspirasjon.
   - What characterises a good conversation?
   - Where and when do good conversations take place in kindergarten?
   - What do you do to facilitate good conversations?

D. Work in pairs to gain experience in asking open questions.
   - One of you should try to ask good, open-ended questions during conversations with the children.
   - The other should listen and observe. Then swap roles.
   - Give each other feedback and work together to identify the factors that are the most successful.
When words turn into short and long stories

Good stories can stimulate a child's desire to narrate. Stories can be found in books and cartoons, and stories are used to convey own experiences and knowledge. Hearing good stories helps children to gradually acquire narrative competence and allows them to tell their own stories. Adults who tell stories with enthusiasm and involvement can arouse the children's interest. The more involved the children get, the more likely they are to be inspired to convey their own stories. This way the environment supports the children as they develop their language skills.

When a child narrates, it uses its language actively

Narrating a story requires extensive linguistic competence. To be able to narrate a story, a child needs to know and understand words and expressions that form part of the story. The storyteller must construct meaningful sentences using these words. A story has a structure. It consists of a beginning, the actual action, and an end. In order for the recipient to understand the action or message, the narrator should present the events in an appropriate order. When the child narrates, it uses its language actively. This allows the child to practise finding words, using these words, constructing sentences, communicating meaning, and attracting and retaining another person's attention. Children and adults who listen to each other's stories can give each other an instant response.
The ability to narrate increases with age, maturity and experience

It is important that staff encourage the children to talk about their own experiences or about something they make up, and they should show the children that they are interested in what is being said. The adults should support the younger children when they narrate. As well as using language to the best of their ability, the children also use eye movement, facial gestures and body language. Adults can help move children’s stories forward by using affirmative, clarifying and reflective questioning, for example. Experience of stories and training in storytelling strengthen a child’s narrative competence. With time children eventually manage to tell a story themselves without support.

Let the imagination run wild

Children and adults can take photographs during trips and activities and use these as inspiration for storytelling later on. Choose pictures that show what the children are interested in and activities that they actively participate in. Adults can inspire children to want to tell their own stories by using plenty of imagination and humour as they narrate. Suspense may also be a good approach. Children and adults could prepare boxes together filled with objects that can support the children when they narrate. The children can prepare a box of suitable items for use when they are retelling fairytales. It could contain three toy goats in different sizes, a troll and a bridge, or a leather mitten and all the animals wanting to live inside the mitten. While the children make these items it can be a good idea to invite and encourage them to use language actively and to narrate along the way.

Suggestions for reflection and co-operation

A. How should staff support the children when they narrate?
   • Draw up a list of suggestions, and try out some of them.
   • What did you do?
   • How did it go?
   • What could you try next time?

B. Listen to the children’s stories over time and note down any characteristics.
   • Which changes have you identified?
   • Talk to a colleague about what you have discovered.
Putting activities and experiences into words

The Framework Plan

Shared experiences and activities offer a unique opportunity for children to communicate with each other.

Children and adults should communicate about what is happening

Everyday activities and experiences are always good opportunities for children to be linguistically active. Children communicate with each other using body language, facial expressions and words, and children and adults communicate and talk about what is happening, what they are doing and experiencing. When the children are involved in an activity the adults should put the children's actions into words and invite them to a conversation about the things that interest them. This links activity and language together. Adults should adapt to the children's language before providing additional input on the children's terms.

A good sense of pre-understanding allows children to use their language actively

Before starting an activity or going on a trip it is important that staff and children talk about what they will be doing and what is about to happen. This prepares the children for what is to follow. Focus on key words and concepts. Use physical objects and pictures to introduce them. You can also draw up a plan in the form of a summary with illustrations to describe what is going to happen. Pre-understanding, the advance knowledge that the children have, makes it easier for them to be linguistically active during the activity or trip. Multilingual children can also benefit from having a similar conversation in their mother tongue first.

Children make use of all their senses

When children go on excursions they see, hear, smell, taste and experience things that could be discussed afterwards. During a trip to the local shop or library, say, children and adults can talk about the objects they see, about the jobs of the people working there, and about what the children are experiencing. First-hand experiences often generate interest and enthusiasm. Linguistic activities involve putting experiences into words, playing with words, reflecting, describing, narrating, explaining, questioning and answering. The adults should ensure that they use important and new words repeatedly when they talk to the children. This allows the children to hear the words being repeated and to become familiar with them. Encourage the children to use the words themselves, too. The children's experiences can provide inspiration for both conversation and play during which they make active use of language, e.g. role play.

Children should work through their experiences

Bring the world into kindergarten. The children could collect natural objects and other items they find on trips, such as rocks, tree cones, shells, moss, bits of rope, tickets and brochures. They can make something out of these items or play with them indoors or outdoors once they return to the kindergarten. Children use language when they communicate with each other while being creative or playing. Using the objects as a starting point, the children can recall what they have taken part in. A pine cone could spark a conversation about squirrels eating cone seeds. A shell could be the start of a conversation about which animals may have swum past the shell while it was living at the bottom of the sea. The children recount details from the trip or activity, actively using language to do so. Multilingual children may benefit from using their mother tongue to process and expand their understanding of what has taken place. Subsequently they may be able to put it into words using Norwegian.

Children should talk about their experiences

Children and staff could take photographs during trips and activities. Choose motifs that can be used as starting points for conversation, reflection or questions. Pictures of objects that have caught the children's attention and of activities that the children have been engaging in can stimulate them to narrate, explain and ask questions. Display the photographs on a board, or
Suggestions for reflection and co-operation

A. What do the children talk about whilst on an excursion?
   • Who takes part in these conversations?
   • How and to what extent do the children use the words that are being introduced to them?

B. What can you do to involve quiet children in conversations whilst on an excursion?

C. What can you do to stimulate the language of children who are so busy that it is difficult to initiate a dialogue with them?
Language during play

The Framework Plan

Children often use more imaginative and creative communication amongst themselves than they do with adults. Switching between using the body, movement and words helps develop their spoken language. The children often use varied and complex speech during play.

Play is an important arena for language learning and development

Much of a typical day in kindergarten consists of play that is voluntary and fun, and where the children participate wholeheartedly and with enthusiasm. The youngest communicate with their body language while they play. Slightly older children will often say out aloud what they are doing. “Here I come!” shouts Kim as he sets off down the slide. During play the children employ both verbal and non-verbal communication. They express thoughts, feelings and wishes, they play roles, they plan, discuss and argue, and they handle conflicts and form relationships. Children can listen to and learn from each other through play. Staff can get involved in the children’s play to assist those children who need it, and they can participate in a variety of ways in order to stimulate their verbal language.

Different types of play require different degrees of verbal communication

Adults must pay attention and contribute so that all children are given a chance to take part and put their language to use during different forms of play. Participating in and mastering different games are crucial for acquiring language.

Eeny, meeny, miny moe

Simple rule games and singing games, such as Hauk og due, Bjørnen sover and Bro, bro brille can provide stimulation without the children having to use a great deal of language. The adults could introduce the games, and a large number of children could be invited to take part. The children will be using some language during the game, often repeating phrases that they are given plenty of time to absorb. Some children will also use language spontaneously during the game. The adults can help them do so by making encouraging comments and asking open questions about what the children are doing and what is happening, for example. They can also talk to the children about the game afterwards. “Do you remember when we played Bro, bro, brille? Why did you pick sweets and not ice-cream?”

Side by side

Children will often play side by side without interacting closely. They may chat to each other, but the game does not necessarily grind to a halt even if the verbal communication is not optimal. The children will talk about what they are doing, but they are not dependent on getting answers or giving answers themselves. Adults can also play alongside the children in order to stimulate their language. If an adult occasionally chooses to take on such a role, it is important to hold back a little to begin with in order to establish what is going on and to listen to ongoing monologues and dialogues. The adult can then gently enter the play situation without causing interruption. The adult should listen to how the child talks and comments on its own playing, and he or she should copy the child at the beginning. Next the adult can talk about what he or she is doing, thus acting as a language role model for the child. He or she can help to put the child’s actions into words and to ask open questions such as clarifying or affirmative questions.

Interaction games

Playing together in the sandpit or with building blocks often requires a higher level of linguistic competence than the above-mentioned games. Some children may find such games challenging. An inability to start a dialogue or to use language actively in interaction with others can cause a child to be overlooked and/or ignored during play. Some respond by becoming verbally passive. An adult could gradually approach the play situation that has been initiated by the children and provide some linguistic input. In such situations he or she should try to interpret the children’s intentions and put them into words. Then the adult should communicate with the child to see whether his or her
input is working for the child. Support the child as it expresses itself. In order to make the child’s message comprehensible, the adult can add any missing words. Before continuing it is important to let the child signal its approval of the adult’s contribution.

Role play
Many role-playing roles involve a great deal of linguistic activity. Some children are often assigned passive roles because they are unable to make much of a verbal contribution to the game. When this happens it is important that the adults offer a helping hand and provide input to give all the participants an opportunity to use their language. Talk to the children about the contents of the game. For example, before playing a hairdressing game the children can talk about their own experiences of going to the hairdresser’s. They may need to know the names of the products and equipment in the salon, and they should know a bit about what the hairdresser can do and about what the customers may want. The children can try to communicate in the same way as a customer and hairdresser would communicate.

How do they go about booking an appointment, and which words do they use at the hairdresser’s? What do they talk about during the hair cut? What does a satisfied customer say? What do the customer and hairdresser say when paying and saying goodbye? This could be turned into a game in itself. Read a book about the topic, watch a film, visit a hairdresser’s salon, and talk to the children about what they observe, experience and think. The adults can play various roles, thus acting as language role models. The children must be allowed to imitate and try out different roles, and they could be given support while they do so.

Multilingual children
Multilingual children may find it particularly challenging to take part in games that require good Norwegian skills. An adult, perhaps someone who has a good command of the multilingual child’s mother tongue, can lend a helping hand during the game when the situation calls for it and when the child needs it. With a bit of planning and organising, staff can sometimes allow children with the same mother tongue to be linguistically active together during play, even across different kindergarten departments. This lets the children use their mother tongue during play while also developing their understanding of the world and boosting their command of their mother tongue. It also gives them experience to help develop their Norwegian skills.

Staff can organise play that encourages use of language
Adults can introduce new games, such as group games and rule games adjudicated by adults. Another option is to bring out equipment and toys, both new toys and toys that have not been used for a while, and present them to the children. You can ask the children to give their immediate thoughts, e.g. which opportunities can they spot and which ideas do they have for playing with these toys. The adults can also introduce new play themes. Base the game around a shared experience such as a visit to a farm, a fairytale or a film. This means many of the children will have pre-understanding, knowledge and words that they can employ during the game. The children themselves could suggest play themes based on what they are interested in and curious about. This will often excite the children, and they have the knowledge and experience to allow them to make use of their language. Choose some equipment – perhaps in partnership with the children – and place it where it is easily visible and accessible. Explain what the different objects are called, and have a conversation about them. Organise the play area, and describe it together with the children. The adult could initially participate in the game on the children’s terms and serve as a language role model before partially or completely retreating later on.

Adults can help children use language during play
When adults observe the children’s play they may discover children who are quiet, children who cannot make themselves heard, children who misunderstand or do not understand, children who are always on the move and too busy to talk, and children who are repeatedly assigned passive roles. When this happens the adults should spend some time establishing an overview of the situation and thinking about how they can inject more linguistic activity into the game. It is important for the adults to make contact with the child, to be conscious of their own use of language, to adapt their language to the child in question, and
to provide input, e.g. by introducing new words and expressions that are useful in the given situation. The children may also benefit from hearing expressions and phrasing that form a natural part of the game and that would be appropriate to use when communicating with each other. Adults can serve as language role models. They could choose to explain and demonstrate what the children should say when they are sharing toys or borrowing from each other, what a customer and a shop assistant in a sports shop might say to each other, or how a librarian and a borrower might communicate with each other.

Suggestions for reflection and co-operation

A. Which rule games would be suitable for some of the children at this stage?

B. Listen to the children's language while they play.
   - Who is linguistically active, and who does not say much?
   - Who needs help communicating with the others?
   - What can you do to support children who often play passive roles and say little during play to make them more linguistically active?

C. Observe the children engrossed in play.
   - How can staff stimulate children's language during play?
The world of books

The Framework Plan

Staff are important linguistic role models. Conversation, reading aloud and varied activities as described under the topic “Communication, language and text” are important elements in kindergarten life.

Books can open the door to enjoyable encounters with language

Enthusiasm

Når vaksne les med og for barna, bør dei gjere det på
When adults read with and for children they should do it
with enthusiasm and use voice, facial expressions and
eye movement to establish contact with the children.
This can help underpin the plot, and it can boost the
children’s imagination and give them a good reading
experience.

Books for the youngest children

Å Reading and looking at books with the youngest
children pose different challenges than with older
children. Young children, who mostly communicate
via body language and single-word statements, need
suitably adapted books, and the adult must modify the
way in which he or she reads to suit the audience. It
will often be a case of short reading sessions. Explain,
visualise and concretise words and expressions. Link
the pictures and words in the book to the child’s own
experiences. For example, if there is a picture of a ball
in the book, the adult could ask the child whether it
has a ball at home, or whether it likes playing with
balls. This could be a good starting point for stirring the
child’s interest and inviting it to participate in linguistic
activities and conversations that help develop its lan-
guage skills. Both picture books and simple fiction should
be used with the youngest children.

The first encounter with a book

In order to actively involve all the children, reading
groups should consist of only a few children insofar as
it is possible. When children encounter a new book they
are likely to examine the front page and talk about what
they see and what they think the book is about. The
person reading with and for the children could say a
little about what the book is about. This prepares the
children for what is to come and can provide useful
pre-understanding. It can also help generate curiosity
and make the children want to listen to the words and
study the pictures. It can be easier for the children
to understand the content if the adult makes use of
physical objects to introduce them to central words and
expressions in the book.

The reading begins

The adult reads from the book and shows the children
the pictures. He or she should challenge and encou-
rage the children to ponder, reflect and provide input.
Along the way the children could be asked why certain
things happen, what they think will happen next, and
what the different words and expressions mean. The
children can talk together about the content of the
book, and the adult could ask questions to involve all
the children in the conversation. It is important that the
questions are open so that the children are encouraged
to use their language.

Books can inspire conversations that help
develop children’s language skills

Returning to the book

Read the book again in a day or two, or perhaps even
later the same day. Again it is important to let the
children speak and comment, ask questions and talk
about what they are interested in. This way books can
become a starting point for conversations that stimu-
late the children’s language and allow them to put new
words into use. Perhaps they will also be inspired to link
the content of the book to their own experiences. Let
the children retell the content of the book, maybe with
an adult and even using pictures and physical objects
for support.

The book becomes a companion

Children like reading the same book several times. They can “read” alone, together with other children or
with an adult. They can also fantasise and create their own texts using the book as inspiration. This makes the book a source for active and creative use of language.

**Written language can provide new impulses**

In children’s literature the children will often encounter more complex language than they tend to use themselves. The written language may use a larger vocabulary and a different set of grammatical structures than the children employ in everyday speech. To allow the children to follow the story, it is important to choose books where the language is not too complex. Children’s literature also lets children experience language that is detached from the present situation, so-called situation-independent language. This can help them expand their vocabulary and develop a language that makes them increasingly able to put their experiences and knowledge into words and to express own thoughts, opinions and feelings.

**Books must be easily available**

Children will benefit greatly from having access to a wide selection of books in kindergarten. Many kindergartens have created a book corner or small library. You can display some of the books with the front page facing outwards to allow the children to see the sleeve picture and title of the book. Also remember to place the books where the children, including the youngest, can easily get hold of them. This lets them pick books that they can flick through, look at pictures in, and “read”
alone or together with other children or adults. Another alternative is audiobooks. Listening equipment can also be placed where the children have access to it.

**Books communicate in several languages**

Book corners and book displays should include books in several languages. This lets the children explore books that they might recognise from home, or they could get a parent or a staff member who knows their language to read for them. Multilingual children could benefit from listening to the same book both in their mother tongue and in Norwegian. Working with the local library, staff can organise story time in different languages, and parents could be invited to take part. The kindergarten could work with the local library to borrow books, including books in different languages and bilingual books. The DFB multilingual library (www dfb deichman no) specialises in providing library books to linguistic minorities. The centre offers advice to libraries, buys and lends books and other media in several languages. Books in different languages can be downloaded from the kindergarten section of the Tema morsmål website (www morsmal no).

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**Prosjekt Lesevenner**

*Lesevenner* is a project where school children in the 4th grade read for kindergarten children in their mother tongue. Schools and kindergartens that have been working with the local library on this project have acquired experience that may inspire others.

The librarian first identifies books in languages relevant to the children. The pupils then visit the library and select books in their mother tongue. They practise reading to each other before taking the books to kindergarten and reading to the children there. This makes the pupils role models for the kindergarten children. After the reading session all the children play and eat together.

Watch the film *Lesevenner*. You can find it on the *Skole i praksis* website (www skoleipraksis no) under the headings *Flerkulturell opplæring* and *Filmer*. 
Suggestions for reflection and co-operation

A. Assess the books you have in kindergarten and read reviews of books for kindergarten children on the Reading Centre website (lesesenteret.uis.no) under the headings Barnehage and Bok i bruk and on the Nynorsksenteret website (www.nynorsksenteret.no) under the headings Nynorsk for dei minste and Tekstar og boktips.  
- Which books would you like to read with the children right now?  
- Which books do you want to borrow or buy?

B. Watch the film Språkløftet i Bærum kommune. You can find it on the Skole i praksis website (www.skolepraksis.no) under the headings Ferkulturell opplæring and Filmer. Also watch the film clips Hvem liker bæsj? and Hvem er nysgjerrig? You can find them on the Reading Centre website (lesesenteret.uis.no) under the headings Barnehage and Leseaktiviteter i barnehagen – Noen filmsnutter til inspirasjon.  
- Do the films suggest any activities that you may wish to try out?

C. Read about Lesevenner and watch the film on the Skole i praksis website (www.skolepraksis.no). You can find it under the headings Ferkulturell opplæring and Filmer. (See description on the previous page.)  
- What do you think about this approach?  
- Can you see a need and an opportunity for doing something similar?

D. Reflect on your own reading practices with and for the kindergarten children.  
- Talk to each other about books that children in different age groups have enjoyed.  
- Which books do you prefer reading with the children?  
- What can you do to arouse an interest in books amongst the children?  
- How are the children able to provide active input during story time?  
- How do you explain new words and expressions while reading with the children?
Words and concepts

Working on words and concepts is a natural part of life in kindergarten. Concepts add content to the words. Children gradually acquire new words and their meaning and absorb them into their language. Staff can concretise and visualise new words using objects, pictures, voice, facial gestures, signs and body language to make the content of the words clear to the children. New words and concepts must be introduced in a natural context for the children. The children learn new words and develop their conceptual understanding by exploring and experiencing together with others in different everyday situations. First-hand experiences make it easier for the children to understand words, to remember them and to put them into use. Rich and varied experiences are also important. By giving the children plenty of opportunities for linguistic interaction linked to these experiences, the kindergarten stimulates the children’s conceptual development.

Allow the children to introduce relevant words

Children will often suggest using certain words, perhaps something they are curious about there and then or something they are interested in. Staff can pick up relevant words from the children’s play, from books, fairytales, children’s stories, from excursions, from the immediate environment or from activities. When the children need the new words in everyday situations they are more likely to use them, thus making the words part of their active vocabulary.

Example:
The children are very curious about squirrels at the moment after a squirrel paid a visit to the kindergarten. An adult could read a book about squirrels for a group of slightly older children. She reads that the birds become ill-tempered when the squirrel approaches. The adult asks: “Do you know what ill-tempered means?” Daniel answers: “No?” Clara also responds: “No!” Daniel then makes a suggestion: “To be angry?” The adult says: “That’s right, to be ill-tempered means to be angry.” “If the birds see a squirrel coming close to their nests, they get a bit angry.” He or she can then elaborate by asking a question: “Why do you think the birds become ill-tempered?” Perhaps the book gives the answer. Then you can read on. Alternatively, the children could try to come up with an answer together.
Use new words in meaningful contexts

Adults should put new words to use in natural, everyday contexts and repeat them frequently. Use the new words in conversations with the children, both by uttering the words yourself and by asking questions that contain or involve the words in some way. This helps boost the children’s conceptual understanding. Encourage the children to make associations over the content of the words, to reflect, tell, retell and use the new words in different contexts. Create opportunities for the children to use the words themselves in different situations. This could be during conversations, during play or on excursions.

Children work on their conceptual understanding

If the children make many and strong associations between words and experiences, the content of the words becomes more accurate and ingrained. Having accurately retained a word, the children can more easily recall the word when they need it. It is also likely to be easier for them to learn new words and to acquire further conceptual understanding. The children can process the content of the words by drawing, painting, taking photographs, cutting and pasting, modelling with clay etc. The adults should talk to the children about what they are doing, both at the start, along the way and when they have finished.

Suggestions for reflection and co-operation

A. What are the children interested in, and which topics could be relevant right now?
   • Which words would you like to introduce?
   • How will you introduce these words?
   • Which physical objects and visualisations would be relevant?
   • How could you train the children in using the new words?
   • How should the children work on the conceptual content of the words?

B. Listen to the children’s conversations.
   • How and to what extent do the children use the new words?
   • What can staff do to stimulate the children to put the new words into use?
Linguistic awareness and literary stimulation

Kindergarten should give children the necessary basic skills

A good linguistic environment in which each child is given ample opportunity to engage in rich linguistic interaction with others helps give the child good basic skills for learning to read and write. The language stimulation measures described in this part of the guide and in the section below will help boost children’s language skills and could subsequently help prevent reading and writing difficulties.

In order to provide literary stimulation, kindergarten staff should

- play around with language forms with the children by creating rhymes, making up nonsense words and finding words that sound like each other, for example encourage the children to listen out for sounds and rhythms in the language
- sing songs with the children
- talk about language and linguistic variations such as dialects and different languages
- be conscious of their position as role models
- show that reading is useful and enjoyable
- read with and for the children
- let the children encounter symbols such as letters and make them aware of them
- support the children as they explore written language
- show an interest in what the children are reading, pretend-reading or play-reading
- write and show that what has been written can also be read
- give the children plenty of access to paper and pencils of all colours
- invite the children to use digital tools
- support the children as they experiment with converting sounds into writing
- show an interest in what the children are writing, pretend-writing or play-writing
- create texts with the children
- act as “secretaries” when the children create texts
- read the texts that the children have created
- stimulate the children to use written language during play
Article for inspiration

*Fukt, mörker och skrymslen dit solen aldrig når* is a natural science-based language stimulation project incorporating both reading and writing activities into a meaningful context. You can find more information about the project on the Reading Centre website (lesesenteret.uis.no) under the heading *Barnehage.*

Films

- *En smak av lesing.* You can find the film on the Reading Centre website (lesesenteret.uis.no) under the headings *Barnehage* and *Førskolelek med språk*
  - *Tre filmer til inspirasjon og bruk på foreldremøter.*
- * Gratulerer med ... språket.* You can find the film on the Reading Centre website (lesesenteret.uis.no) under the headings *Barnehage* and *Førskolelek med språk*
  - *Tre filmer til inspirasjon og bruk på foreldremøter.*
  - *Tre filmer til inspirasjon og bruk på foreldremøter.*

Suggestions for reflection and co-operation

A. What can you do to inspire the children to incorporate written language into their play?

B. Read the article *Fukt, mörker och skrymslen dit solen aldrig når.* See above for a description of the article.

- Create a similar scheme for the kindergarten, your department or for a small group.
- Implement the scheme and assess the outcomes.
- Tell others in the kindergarten about what you did and about your experiences.
- Explain why you would recommend / not recommend such a scheme.
Multilingual perspectives

The Framework Plan

Many children have a mother tongue other than Norwegian and learn Norwegian as their second language in kindergarten. It is important that these children are understood and given the opportunity to express themselves. Kindergartens must support the children's use of their mother tongue while working actively to improve the children's Norwegian skills.

Make provisions for good language development in both mother tongue and Norwegian

Staff should support the children as they use, maintain and develop their mother tongue, even though there may be no other children or adults in kindergarten who share their language. At the same time staff should work actively to further the child's Norwegian language skills. It is important to facilitate a linguistic environment that promotes linguistic diversity to allow all of the children to develop their languages in the best possible way.

Allow several languages to be heard and seen

The kindergarten could take practical steps to help strengthen both the children's mother tongues and Norwegian skills. Parents or multilingual staff members could play key roles in this respect.

Examples of how to highlight linguistic diversity

- children's names displayed in different languages in the changing room
- signs in different languages in kindergarten
  - e.g. the department's name and welcome signs
- glossaries in different languages
  - e.g. common words that are frequently used
- word of the week, i.e. a word for the children to learn in multiple languages every week
  - e.g. greetings, saying thank you, counting, and words relating to the topic the children are working on
- picture of the day
  - i.e. a picture of something that has happened is displayed, and a short text is written in several languages
- songs in different languages
- rhymes and verses in different languages
- dressing-up clothes that represent diversity
- games with animal sounds in different languages
- globe and map clearly displayed, and active use of globe and map during everyday conversations

Many children encounter numerous languages in kindergarten

All children benefit from being in a multilingual environment, because by experiencing languages different from their own, they may become curious about the languages spoken by others and more conscious of their own. Children discover that the things around them are called different things in different languages. In a multilingual environment language becomes something that everyone can talk about, reflect on and compare. It helps raise linguistic awareness and provides an opportunity to reflect on language and variations of language. The children may also find that their various language skills are being valued.

Children should be able to express themselves in their mother tongue

All children benefit from interacting with an adult or child with whom they share a mother tongue. Spending time with others who have the same mother tongue allows the child to become curious about and understand. This is important in order for the child to be an equal participant during play and to be able to express its own thoughts, feelings and opinions, all of which allow it to participate better.
Suggestions for reflection and co-operation

What are staff doing to maintain a multilingual perspective?
- Which initiatives have been successful?
- Which initiatives do staff wish to continue with?
- What do you want to try next?

Films
- *Språkarbeid i barnehagen*. You can find it on the *Skole i praksis* website (www.skoleipraksis.no) under the headings *Flerkulturell opplæring* and *Filmer*.

- *Skal vi leke butikk?* You can find it on the *Skole i praksis* website (www.skoleipraksis.no) under the headings *Flerkulturell opplæring* and *Filmer*.

Internet resources
- Website (www.bzzzpeek.com) where children speaking 20 different languages have recorded animal sounds. It is a good starting point for games and conversations about different languages within a multilingual group of children.

- The DFB multilingual library specialises in library services for linguistic minorities and lends books in many different languages. It also has books for sale. (www.dfb.deichman.no).

- The kindergarten pages of *Tema morsmål* (www.morsmal.no) and NAFO (www.hioa.no/NAFO).
Co-operation with the children’s homes should be at the heart of everything a kindergarten does. Everything a kindergarten does should be in the best interest of the child, and close co-operation with the home is important to the child’s language development. Mutual and warm-hearted communication between staff and parents has a positive effect on this co-operation. The relationship between kindergarten and home must be based on openness and equality. Staff are responsible for co-operating with all parents in a way that makes them feel that they are being seen, heard and included. In some cases this means it will be appropriate or necessary to use an interpreter.

Kindergarten is a meeting place for parents and staff. The parents’ closeness to and knowledge about their own child is key to their co-operation with the kindergarten. It is important to parents that staff show an interest in their child and that they are reassuring and reflective. Parents and staff usually meet the child in different settings and contexts. They may therefore have different knowledge of the child’s language abilities. Both parties can benefit from sharing this knowledge. A concerted approach and collective reflection can help create a more complete and nuanced experience of the child’s language skills as a basis for the language stimulation taking place in kindergarten.
Kindergarten-parent co-operation is an everyday thing
Day-to-day contact and informal conversation about the child and its experiences in kindergarten are important elements of the kindergarten-parent relationship. Such conversations often take place when the children are being delivered and collected. The more involved the parents are in kindergarten life, the easier it is to co-operate on the child's language learning. If the parents know what their child experiences and does during a day in kindergarten, they can talk to the child about it and invite it to explain and talk about it.

Parents are a resource
It is important that parents are given plenty of opportunity to tell the kindergarten about the child's language practices at home. This is useful knowledge for the kindergarten. Parents must be made to feel that they are involved and that they are an important resource for their own child. Family interaction and activities are crucial to a child's language development, and some parents may seek advice and tips on how to support their child's language learning. With regard to parents of multilingual children, it is important to support the child's language development both in the language they use at home and in Norwegian. Good development of the child's mother tongue could have a positive effect on their acquisition of Norwegian. Adults who master several languages can play an important role in the partnership between kindergarten and parents.

Parents require information
Staff should tell parents about language stimulation and language development. When informing parents of the kindergarten's language initiatives, staff should stress that children develop at different paces, and that their development does not always follow a given pattern. They should give the parents a good insight into language stimulation in kindergarten. Explain how you work to introduce new words and to generate conceptual understanding. Talk about how you provide language stimulation through conversations and stories. Tell them about topics that the children are interested in, and about which games they play. Let them know what staff are doing to stimulate the children's use of language in everyday activities, during play and on excursions. Use everyday stories as examples of what you are trying to do. This can also give the parents ideas about how to use language with their children and about how they can invite their children to be linguistically active on a daily basis.

Staff and parents must talk about language acquisition
Conversations taking place while others are present, such as in the changing room, must have a positive angle. At the same time it is important to allow private conversations to take place. A central issue is working together to support the child in the best possible way, and it is therefore useful to provide a nuanced description of what the kindergarten is trying to do. It is important to share information and to discuss any concerns at an early stage. Read more about kindergarten-parent co-operation in this context in Part 2 of the guide.

Linguistic diversity is a gift
In addition to the two written Norwegian languages Bokmål and Nynorsk, kindergartens also have a linguistic diversity that includes both different dialects and different languages. It is important that staff explain to parents how this linguistic diversity can be a resource. For example, linguistic variation provides an opportunity to notice and talk about similarities and differences. This could increase linguistic awareness, which is important to both minority and majority language children. Some parents think that their child should only speak Norwegian in order to learn Norwegian better. The kindergarten needs to tell these parents about what it is like learning several languages at the same time and about the mother tongue’s impact on secondary language learning. Stress that it is often important to the child that the parents communicate with it in the language they are most fluent in.

Talk to the parents about books and reading
The kindergarten could tell parents about the books they are reading for the children. The books could be put on display, for example. This lets the parents talk to their children about the books and look at or read the same books, similar books, or books in the same series together with their children.

Introduce books and reading to the parents
Staff can use parents’ evenings to introduce suitable children’s books and talk about how to study books
and read together with their children. It is important to highlight why the kindergarten uses books with the children. The linguistic benefits are key in this respect. Book recommendations – one new book every week, for example – could be displayed on a notice board in the kindergarten. The recommendation could include a picture of the front page and a brief review of the contents of the book. The books should be of such a quality that they will attract the interest of both children and adults. Consider whether the books should be in Bokmål or Nynorsk, or maybe both.

The kindergarten could lend books to parents
Lending books, also in languages other than Norwegian, from the kindergarten’s book collection is a good way to promote co-operation on language stimulation between kindergarten and home. It will introduce books to parents who do not already use books with their children. Parents with multilingual children could be informed that the kindergarten and/or library has children’s books in different languages, and that digital books in many languages are available.

**Suggestions for reflection and co-operation**

A. How can staff best co-operate with parents on language stimulation?
   • Which approaches are you currently taking?
   • What would you like to try out?
   • How is it working?
   • Where do you want to go from here?

B. Plan and hold a parents’ evening about books and reading.
   • How can you continue to work with the parents on this issue?
   • How should you approach parents who do not read with their children, who are unable to read, or who read in a mother tongue other than Norwegian?

**Show films at parents’ evenings**
The Reading Centre has created films intended for inspiration and use at parents’ meetings. They look at written language stimulation for pre-school children. The films can be downloaded from the Reading Centre website lese-senteret.uis.no. You can find them under the headings *Barnehage og Førskolelek med språk – Tre film til inspirasjon og bruk på foreldremøter*. Under the heading *Leseaktiviteter i barnehagen – Noen filmsnutter til inspirasjon* you will find short films such as *Hvem lærer?* and *Hvem leser?* Choose a film that is appropriate for your kindergarten. In order to achieve the best possible outcome, parents and kindergarten staff should discuss the films after watching them. The films are accompanied by a set of questions that could be a starting point for conversation and discussion.
2. Documenting and evaluating language skills

This part looks at how teaching staff document and evaluate both the linguistic environment in kindergarten and the children's linguistic competence. Documentation and evaluation of the linguistic environment and of the linguistic competence of each child will be addressed separately.

An expert panel has evaluated analysis tools
A panel of experts was appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2010. The panel was tasked with producing a research-based assessment of the various tools used to analyse children's language skills in Norwegian kindergartens and with making recommendations on how to ensure quality in the analysis process. The reason was that the government wanted to ensure that more of those children in particular need of language stimulation are identified early and given the necessary help.

The panel's report was also intended to provide the framework for a guide on language skills analysis in kindergartens. This guide, Language in Kindergarten, has been produced in response to this.

The report of the expert panels provides a knowledge base
The expert panel's report (2011) provides a broad knowledge base for the further process. The report points to the role of kindergartens as a central and important arena for taking early and preventive steps to assist children's language development. Using tools for analysis purposes could help support early pedagogical intervention in kindergarten. The panel concludes that the tools it assessed were aimed at providing an individual-based evaluation of each child but that they can also be used as a starting point for reflecting on and evaluating the linguistic environment in a kindergarten and the need for staff training. Knowledge and expertise are essential in order to develop a good assessment culture. The owner of the kindergarten is responsible for the quality of the services that the kindergarten provides. This involves selecting tools and methods when working with language skills, and it implies a responsibility for ensuring that staff possess, or are given access to, the knowledge and skills required to ensure quality.

Staff should be involved in carrying out evaluations
The kindergarten's head teacher and teaching staff have the main responsibility for planning and producing documentation and evaluations. However, other staff members should be involved in this process if appropriate. Adults have different roles in a kindergarten, and the majority of them take part in interaction and communication with the children. A concerted approach will give a more nuanced and complete picture. Everyone should therefore be asked to provide their assessment of the kindergarten's linguistic environment and of the children's linguistic competence in different settings and contexts. The staff members in question should be given training in how to document and evaluate, and they must be made aware of the reasons behind what they are and will be doing.

Documentation provides a basis for reflection and evaluation
To create documentation is to identify the kindergarten's content and working methods, the role of the adults and the children's well-being, learning processes and development. Examples of documentation formats include text, pictures and exhibitions of works. Documentation provides information and can create a basis for reflection and evaluation, which in turn provides a basis for development and for the kindergarten as a learning organisation. Teaching staff should reflect on pedagogical practices and on their own input as regards the linguistic environment in the kindergarten. Documentation also allows the children's linguistic competence to be evaluated and their linguistic development to be monitored. This should be the starting point for planning further initiatives, for improving own and kindergarten practices, and for
developing a high-quality linguistic environment with individually adapted language stimulation for the children. It also gives teaching staff a basis on which to consider and implement preventive measures. A comprehensive overview of the situation also allows targeted efforts to be made quickly.

EVALUATING THE LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT

Kindergartens must offer all children a rich, varied, stimulating and challenging learning environment, regardless of their age, gender, functional ability, and social and cultural background.

Observation could provide a basis for evaluation
Observation may be a useful tool when teaching staff document the kindergarten’s practices as a starting point for evaluating its linguistic environment. Observation of practice provides a basis for reflection and improvement. When teaching staff observe the linguistic environment they may choose whether to use a form to take notes. They could use ready-made templates or create their own observation forms. They may even wish to take a template observation form and modify it to suit current, local requirements. After the observation teaching staff should reflect on their findings and discuss them with each other and with other members of staff. Together they should decide what to concentrate on to create a better linguistic environment for all the children. In order to improve the quality of the evaluations, it may be useful to conduct group evaluations in the kindergarten, or perhaps even in partnership with other kindergartens.

Teachers could observe
- staff members’ language input and participation
- adults’ use of language during everyday routines and different activities
- children’s use of language during different activities
- whether, and how, good conversations form part of everyday life
- children’s participation in conversations
- each other in conversation with children
- how children use language spontaneously while playing with each other
- how staff invite quiet children to use their language
- activities that stimulate language in a multilingual perspective
- how different language stimulation initiatives are promoted
- noise interference in the linguistic environment
- how the kindergarten co-operates with parents on language development in kindergarten

Different types of documentation could provide a basis for evaluation
Everyday stories can provide a good source of documentation when teaching staff evaluate the existing linguistic environment. Such practice examples can paint a picture of the different linguistic activities taking place and of how they take place. Staff can also document what
they are doing and how they are having an impact on the linguistic environment in other ways. For example, they could document how they read with the children regularly and how they use books together with the children. Other examples include whether or how often they use rhymes and verses with the children, how they play with language during everyday activities, and how they communicate with the youngest children. They could describe how they invite the children to join in conversations that stimulate their language, how they make room for the children's own stories, and how they make a conscious effort to listen to them. Reflection could involve looking at what the teachers feel is working well and what could be improved. It can also be useful to think about how the various initiatives can be facilitated and organised so that they are given sufficient attention, become a natural part of kindergarten life, involve all the children, and maintain a high quality.

Children's opinions are an important part of the kindergarten's evaluations. Children are entitled to express their views on the kindergarten's day-to-day activities, and their input is key to a reflective practice. Children express their opinions both verbally and non-verbally. Adults should pay attention to what they are trying to express, including those children who do not communicate with words. The children should be allowed to take an active part in choosing what their day in kindergarten should involve, both directly and indirectly. Some of them approach adults with books they would like to read, and others light up when an adult starts to sing. Some are too restless to sit down and look at a book, while others clearly do not appreciate group time. Some children may indicate that they like it when an adult tells stories, or when they get to tell stories to an adult, while others say or let it be known that they find that adults do not have time to listen or talk to them. Some of them may express that there is too much noise when adults read with them, or that they wish to sing a particular song or play out their favourite fairytale. Take note of what the children are conveying and listen to what they are saying. Their “voice” is important and should provide the basis for changes and improvements in kindergarten. Sometimes it can be a good idea to write down the children's reactions, preferences, wishes and opinions.

Suggestions for reflection and co-operation

A. How does the kindergarten document and evaluate the linguistic environment?
   • What do you want to do to further develop these initiatives?

B. Observe relevant aspects of the linguistic environment in the kindergarten over a week.
   • Talk about what you feel is working well.
   • Select a theme that you wish to pursue together.
   • Talk to each other about how you have taken the children's wishes into account over this period.
   • What can you do to give the children more input when it comes to language stimulation?
to use them at a later date for reflection and development, individually or together with colleagues. Teaching staff should be observant and take notice of topics that the children take an interest in, things that concern them there and then, whether something in nature has aroused their curiosity, or whether they express an interest in playing a particular game. This should provide a starting point for teaching staff when they plan and facilitate games, activities and conversations to stimulate the children's language.

EVALUATING CHILDREN’S LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

**The Framework Plan**

Kindergartens should support and show consideration for each individual child, while at the same time taking into account the interests of all the children.

Kindergarten is an important arena for language acquisition

Most children currently attend kindergarten before they start school, and many of them spend much of their time in kindergarten. This means that they are part of a stimulating linguistic environment and participate in linguistic and communicative interaction with other children and with adults. This gives staff a good opportunity to observe and support their language development. Documentation and evaluation of each child’s language development and competence provide a platform on which to base the kindergarten’s pedagogical approach. By evaluating the children’s language development and competence, teaching staff become well placed to identify children who need particular assistance and to plan and organise systematic language initiatives that will benefit all children as described in Part 1.

Kindergartens should evaluate the children’s linguistic competence

Documenting and evaluating the children’s linguistic competence is the basis and starting point for all further initiatives to develop each child’s language in kindergarten. It is therefore important that the kindergarten works consciously to document and evaluate each child’s language skills. Teaching staff must build on this when they take preventive measures to stimulate the children’s language. Having in-depth knowledge of a child’s linguistic competence provides good foundations for setting individually adapted challenges and/or giving necessary help and support. It is also crucial in order to identify children with particular problems and needs to allow staff to take direct action in the case of children who may have various forms of communication problems, who are not linguistically active, or who have delayed linguistic development.

**The first step**

Teaching staff should observe the language of all children

The first step is to look at all the children. Teaching staff should observe individual children to obtain a picture of the child’s communication and language skills in kindergarten. The guide refers to these observations as comprehensive observations. Other literature often refers to them as unsystematic or arbitrary observations. Comprehensive observations of a child’s linguistic competence involves making an ongoing evaluation of the child’s communication skills, such as its use of language, its interest in communicating, its understanding of language and its spoken language. Such observations should be made of all the kindergarten children as a matter of course, and they are necessary in order for kindergartens to fulfil their social mandate. Kindergartens therefore do not need the consent of parents to carry out comprehensive observations. Teaching staff should not base such observations on a set of predetermined criteria or categories. They should use their professional skills as they watch, listen and observe the child’s communication in everyday situations as it interacts with other children and with adults. Sometimes they are able to form a picture of the child’s linguistic competence at the present moment. Other times it may a good idea to take notes, keep a log or note down practice examples that can be used for reflection and evaluation later on – either alone or
with others. Note that written accounts may contain personal information. Read more about the processing of personal data on page 51.

You could observe the child's level of attention, interest and initiative as regards its
- interaction with others
- understanding of language during everyday activities
- linguistic level of activity
- communicating with adults (verbal and non-verbal)
- communicating with other children (verbal and non-verbal)
- participation in conversation
- conversational competence
- use of language during different types of activities
- use of language during play
- multilingual skills
- conceptual understanding
- narrative competence

Comprehensive observations form the basis for further action

Teaching staff should use their professional judgement and their knowledge of children's language acquisition, multilingualism, language delays and speech and language problems when they observe each child's linguistic activity and competence and reflect on and evaluate their findings. The comprehensive observations and subsequent reflection and evaluation help spell out the issue and give teaching staff a good, comprehensive picture of each child's language skills.

Observation provides a basis for reflection and evaluation. This is the starting point for further action in the form of choosing, implementing and executing measures. As the figure shows, it is not a case of completing a circle or a process. The process is continually repeated.

Staff could review the observations together

In order to improve the quality of the evaluations, it may be useful to conduct group evaluations in the kindergarten. The observations could then be used as a framework for joint pedagogical reflection. You could agree fixed times for these group evaluations and use some of the suggestions for reflection provided in this guide as a starting point. In order to obtain a nuanced and complete picture of how each individual child uses its language and which language skills the child possesses, this process should form a key part of the kindergarten's pedagogical approach. It is also vital in order to identify relevant and effective measures.

Comprehensive observations give direction for the road ahead

For most children, teaching staff will most likely conclude that their language development is on track and that there is no cause for concern. In all such cases the evaluation of the comprehensive observations will form the basis for continued, individually adapted language initiatives in kindergarten. The teachers may now have acquired sufficient knowledge to give the children who need it appropriate support as a supplement to eve-
Kindergartens must co-operate with parents on children's language skills

Initiatives aimed at improving the children’s linguistic skills must take place in partnership and agreement with the home. Teaching staff are responsible for telling parents why the kindergarten documents and evaluates the children's linguistic competence and what it does to support their language acquisition. Parents should contribute by telling the kindergarten about their experiences with the child’s language and about the linguistic environment in the home. This is particularly important if the child has a mother tongue other than Norwegian, something that often makes evaluating the child’s overall linguistic competence more challenging. It is important to establish good routines for an open and good dialogue with parents. Read more about kindergarten-parent co-operation in relation to language skills in general in Part 1.

Suggestions for reflection and co-operation

A. What do you feel constitutes good, comprehensive observations of the children's linguistic competence?
   • How can you support each other as you carry out such observations?
   • How and when can staff come together to reflect on and evaluate such comprehensive observations?

B. Tell each other about good experiences you have had of co-operating with parents on the children's language skills
   • Do you wish try to try out any of what you have just heard?
The next step

The Framework Plan

Some children experience a language delay or other speech and language problems. They must be given early and appropriate help.

The next step relates only to some children

Some children may need particular, individually adapted language support. Children whose linguistic competence differs significantly from that of their peers, or whom the teaching staff want to investigate further, should be observed and evaluated more thoroughly. Children who need it should be given individually adapted challenges, help and support.

Teaching staff sometimes need to investigate further

The comprehensive observations and subsequent reflection and evaluation may result in teaching staff identifying children whose linguistic competence they wish to investigate further. They could be children who contribute little to conversations, children who appear not to understand much language, or children whose communication and language development differ significantly from those of their peers in various ways. In such cases teaching staff should consider, perhaps in consultation with others, whether it is necessary and appropriate to investigate the child's language skills further. The aim could be to identify a need for particular linguistic intervention and to establish how the kindergarten can best support the child and make a contribution towards its language development.

The expert panel's report provides useful information about systematic analysis tools

The eight most frequently used tools for analysing children's language skills in Norwegian kindergartens have been described, analysed, discussed and evaluated by the panel of experts. The results are published in the expert panel's report (2011). The report contains useful evaluations for teaching staff and others relating to systematic tools for analysing the language skills of individual kindergarten children. The tools serve a variety of purposes, target groups and theoretical approaches. For that reason they also have different strengths and weaknesses. No single tool is deemed suitable for every target group and every need. It is therefore important that teaching staff are familiar with a number of tools and thus have a wide selection of tools to choose from in each individual case. When teaching staff choose to use a predefined and systematic tool they must familiarise themselves thoroughly with the associated handbook or guidance notes or attend a course on how to use the material. It is also important to consider whether the tool in question is appropriate in the given situation. For example, the expert panel's report concludes that none of the eight tools it evaluated is suitable for analysing all groups of children. However, some of the tools meet some of the requirements for an analysis tool, each in its own way. There are now more tools available than the eight that have been evaluated, and new tools are likely to be developed. The expert panel finds it improbable that a single analysis tool will ever be good enough and comprehensive enough to cover every eventuality all of the time. Good knowledge of multiple tools is therefore necessary.

Systematic analysis can identify a need for further action

When teaching staff need to find out more about a child's linguistic competence they can carry out a more thorough analysis or assessment. This could involve systematic observations or the use of other systematic analysis tools. If they intend to use systematic analysis tools to analyse a child's language skills in more detail, they must share their thoughts on the situation with the parents. The parents must be informed of the purpose of the analysis. The parents must also give their consent to further evaluation of the child's language skills. You can read more about the regulations and procedures for systematic analysis and evaluation on page 51. Teaching staff can either use existing tools, or they could devise – alone or together with others – a tool that is suitable for the situation in question, such as a simple list of key points, for example. This approach differs from comprehensive observations in that the teaching staff have decided in advance on what to observe and/or investigate further and that the aim is to evaluate the child's language in more depth than
during an ordinary observation. The idea is that subsequent reflection on and assessment of the findings should enable the teachers to identify children who require additional support or children who require individually adapted challenges. With this in mind, staff should consider and plan how to best channel their efforts.

Teaching staff may use tools for systematic observation
Observation forms created for the purposes of finding out more about a child’s language skills are intended to serve as a focus for teaching staff to allow them to concentrate their attention on specific areas of the child’s linguistic competence. The observation forms consist of predetermined categories of language skills that staff should observe. For example, there may be a need to find out more about the child’s vocabulary or conversational competence. Some of the observation forms are intended to offer support to teaching staff as they predominantly observe linguistic competence, while others are designed to assist in observations of multiple aspects of the child’s development and skills. When planning to use an observation form teaching staff should familiarise themselves with a range of observation forms, establish the objectives of each one, and then choose the form that is most appropriate for the child in question. In some contexts staff may find it beneficial to produce their own form. They can then select a few categories that they wish to observe based on the given situation and the children in question. This can be done in consultation with others. The categories can be entered on a simple observation form suitable for the given situation.

Teaching staff must evaluate a range of language analysis tools
Appropriate skill in selecting the right tools and competent use of the chosen tools are key to ensuring that the analysis becomes a good experience for the child and that the results can be used to help the child. Teaching staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to deploy systematic tools for observation and other language analysis tools. Some of the available tools require the user to have teaching qualifications and/or to acquire prior knowledge of the tool, by attending a course or reading a handbook, for example. Teaching staff could benefit from working with others who may possess different knowledge and experience when choosing a tool. This allows new skills to be developed. The results must be interpreted using theoretical and methodological knowledge, relationship skills and sound professional judgement. In its report the expert panel points out that the single most important factor for the successful use of the tools is competency and reflection on the part of those choosing and using the tools. Inappropriate use of analysis tools can be both detrimental and, at worst, damaging.

When choosing an analysis tool it can be useful to familiarise yourself with and reflect on which tools exist or are available
Discussions around evaluating individual children’s language skills

There has been, and still is, an ongoing debate about how to evaluate the language skills of individual children. One particular subject of discussion is the use of predefined, structured analysis tools. Amongst other things the debate has centred on how the use of such tools can serve to undermine teachers’ assessment and professional judgement. It has also been claimed that the use of predefined, structured analysis tools can contribute towards an instrumentalist view of children and their learning and development.

On the other side of the argument it is being pointed out that it is unethical not to do everything possible to evaluate the children’s language skills when we know how important it is to detect problems and take action early. Some insist that predefined, structured analysis tools can assist teaching staff in uncovering more or different facts than they are otherwise able to and that the use of such tools can help improve staff members’ level of expertise. At the same time it is claimed that this type of tools restricts the teachers’ perspective and prevents them from seeing the wider, more complex picture of a child’s linguistic competence. Questions have also been raised over whether or not it is possible to measure a child’s language skills using predefined analysis tools and whether the tools that exist are adequate for all groups of children, such as multilingual children. The right of parents and children to have a say has also been emphasised. Not everyone appreciates this type of assessment. There are no clear or unequivocal answers to these questions and challenges as of yet. However, it may be useful to discuss these perspectives in kindergarten, both amongst staff and with parents. This will raise awareness amongst both staff and parents, and the discussions can help make the kindergarten a learning organisation that continues to develop – to the benefit of the children.

Teaching staff should provide early help and support

Children who do not speak much or who have a language delay or speech and language problem must be given early and appropriate help. It is not sufficient just to identify the children with various speech and language problems. Their language skills will not improve just because teachers have analysed, reflected on and identified the challenges. What it does is put teaching staff in a position to meet the needs of the individual child, to intensify their efforts and to continue with targeted measures. Looking at the evaluation documentation, they should plan relevant measures and think about how best to implement them. The child must be given the best possible support and individually adapted challenges based on its own capabilities. In the main this will involve the same methods and approaches as applied to language stimulation in Part 1. Appropriate language measures for these children will also primarily involve working on words and concepts as well as conversation to help develop their language skills. First and foremost it means intensifying the efforts being made, and it may be appropriate for one adult to concentrate on one or a few children. It is imperative that the children are given plenty of time and opportunity to express themselves. Such additional efforts serve as a supplement to everyday language stimulation.

Teaching staff should talk to parents about the child’s challenges

It is important to remember that once the kindergarten has reached this stage of the analysis and evaluation process, the parents should already have been informed and involved. You can read, or may already have read, about this in the last section on page 45. Information to parents from the kindergarten should generally speaking be given out of earshot of others. Staff should actively intervene and take the parents aside if they initiate such conversations in communal areas when
others are around. Take them to a private room or agree a meeting as soon as possible. The child should not be present, and teaching staff should take overall charge of the conversations. Parents can be vulnerable in situations like this, and they may find it difficult to talk to kindergarten staff about problems or challenges that they or teaching staff feel the child is facing. Teaching staff should be considerate and tread carefully, but they must still convey the message in a clear and comprehensible way to parents. Note that some parents may have a different opinion to the kindergarten.

**Teaching staff must tell parents about analyses and measures**

Parents need to be told of planned systematic observations and of other systematic analyses, reflections and assessments that the kindergarten has carried out. Teachers should take the time to talk to the parents about what they have discovered and reflected on over time. They could also provide everyday examples. When teaching staff have carried out a systematic observation or other systematic analysis they should give parents detailed information about their findings. Then they should provide ample information about the individual measures that have been taken. The conversation should centre around the specific measures that the kindergarten has taken and will continue to take to support the child. It is important to illustrate how the kindergarten approaches this. Parents must also be given a chance to air their views. Perhaps their feedback will cause the teaching staff to review the measures. The conversation should also address how the parents can contribute or support the child. When dealing with parents of multilingual children it is important to stress that systematic analysis will primarily involve the child's Norwegian language development. Emphasise that the child's proficiency in its mother tongue / the language spoken at home is an important part of the child's general language development and that the parents are important partners for the kindergarten. Talk to the parents about their views on the child's proficiency in the mother tongue / language spoken at home. Use an interpreter if necessary. Arrange follow-up meetings.

Conversations about the evaluation of and concerns over a child's language development should cover:
- what the concerns are based on
- the child's strengths
- the child's challenges
- the parents' view
- what the kindergarten is currently doing about it
- what the kindergarten will continue to do to help the child
- the use of systematic observation
- the use of other systematic analysis tools
- everyday language stimulation in kindergarten
- individually adapted measures
- what the parents can do
- follow-up meetings
- information about working with other agencies if necessary

**Parents must be given ample opportunity to give their view**

Teaching staff should stress that appropriate and individually adapted language stimulation for the child should be based on joint decisions made by the kindergarten and parents and that it is important for the kindergarten to co-operate with the parents. Relevant information from parents could include:
- their thoughts and ideas about the child's linguistic competence
- whether and to what extent the parents share the kindergarten's concerns
- any challenges that the parents feel the child is facing
- whether others in the family are experiencing or have experienced similar challenges whether the child's hearing has been examined
- any concerns that the parents may have

**Teaching staff should evaluate the measures that have been taken**

They must continually observe and evaluate the child's language. Once they have been working with the child for a period of time, and the measures have been in place for a while, teaching staff should summarise their observations. They should assess whether their efforts have been working as intended, which changes may be appropriate, and which other measures should be considered.
Teaching staff and parents should discuss the situation regularly
Once the kindergarten has taken the necessary language stimulation measures, and this process has been allowed to take its course for a while, teaching staff and parents should discuss the measures, evaluate them and debate their effectiveness.

Sometimes measures have the intended effect
If the measures appear to have had the desired effect, teaching staff and parents should come together to reflect on what they feel has worked well, how and why. Their thoughts should then lead to a joint discussion and further reflection about what the kindergarten should do next to ensure that the positive trend continues. Teachers and parents should agree on the next step. They should agree on how they will continue to co-operate and when they will meet again for further discussion.

Sometimes measures do not have the intended effect
If the measures do not appear to have had the desired effect and the parents and/or teachers remain concerned about the child, they should come together to discuss whether to approach other agencies for help in investigating the child further and in implementing other measures. Read more about this process in the next section, The road ahead.

Suggestions for reflection and co-operation

A. Discuss the kindergarten's routines for investigating the linguistic competence of individual children.

B. Which language analysis tools are you familiar with?
   • Talk to each other about tools you are familiar with or have practical experience of.
   • What are the kindergarten's routines for evaluating the linguistic competence of multilingual children?

C. Discuss any dilemmas concerning the evaluation of the language skills of individual children.
   • What are your views?
   • How can the various views help improve the kindergarten's current practices?

D. What constitutes a good kindergarten-parent dialogue?
   • Give each other tips and advice to help improve the dialogue between kindergarten and parents about a child's challenges.
   • Discuss what you would do if the parents took a different view of the child's linguistic competence than the kindergarten.
The road ahead – potential referral for assessment

Kindergartens can work with other agencies
The third step only concerns a small number of the children, i.e. some of those described in the previous section. If the teachers are concerned about a child’s language acquisition and have identified a need for particular help and support, the kindergarten may work with other municipal agencies. This will help ensure that the child is given suitably adapted and comprehensive assistance. Municipalities may operate a range of services to help children with particular linguistic challenges. They could include assistance from a teacher specialising in children with particular language needs or from an intercultural counsellor. All kindergarten owners must be familiar with these services. The regulations on consent and confidentiality must be observed when involving other agencies. You can read more about this on page 51.

The educational psychology service is the municipal specialist agency
Every child with special needs is entitled to help. The municipal educational psychology service will assess whether the child requires specialist help. It is important that the kindergarten owner is familiar with the regulations on special needs education and that good routines have been put in place to ensure that kindergarten staff act appropriately in these types of cases. A referral to the educational psychology service requires the parents’ consent. Read more about consent on page 51. In addition to carrying out its own investigations with discussions, observations and analyses, the educational psychology service may make use of and benefit from the kindergarten’s information about the child in question, the assessments that have been made, and experiences from measures that have already been taken. Here the kindergarten must observe the regulations on confidentiality, and the parents must give their consent to any sharing of information. You can read more about this on page 51.

Co-operation and relationship between kindergarten and school
Read the guide Fra eldst til yngst, published by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2008.
REGULATIONS AND PROCEDURES CONCERNING DOCUMENTATION AND EVALUATION

When producing documentation and carrying out evaluations in kindergarten it is particularly important to be aware of the following issues relating to the Personal Data Act and the Public Administration Act:

Personal data
Personal data is defined as any data that can be linked, directly or indirectly, to an individual, cf. the Personal Data Act Section 2, no. 1. Information concerning a child’s abilities and development will be classed as sensitive personal data, cf. the Personal Data Act Section 2, no. 8. The processing of personal data must be legally justified.

Legal basis
The collecting and processing of personal data must be legally justified. Comprehensive observations are required in order for kindergartens to give adequate provision to each child and to fulfil their social mandate. Systematic observation and other systematic analyses involve monitoring individual children and their linguistic competence. Before producing systematic documentation and carrying out evaluations the kindergarten must obtain the parents’ consent.

Objective
Any collection and processing of personal data in relation to documentation and evaluation must be objectively justified by the kindergarten’s activities, cf. the Personal Data Act Section 11, first paragraph, letter B. The objectively justified purpose defines what type of personal data can/should be collected and what it can/should be used for.

Consent
Consent is regulated by the Personal Data Act Section 2, no. 7. The consent must be freely given, specific, informed and in writing. This means that the consent must:
- describe which type of personal data is to be collected
- describe the purpose of the collection and what the personal data will be used for
- state how long the personal data should be stored for
- specify how long the consent is valid for, e.g. for the remainder of the kindergarten year
- describe the right of parents to access collected data about own child
- state that the consent may be revoked

Storage and security
Personal data must be stored as described in the Personal Data Act Section 1.3 and associated regulations. The information system and security measures must be documented. If the data is saved electronically, the computer should be stored in a locked room. As a minimum the data must be protected with a password and timed logout mechanism. Paper copies of data must be protected with a physical lock to prevent unauthorised access.

Deletion
Personal data must not be stored for longer than is necessary in order to meet the objective, cf. the Personal Data Act Section 1.1, first paragraph, letter B.

Confidentiality and access to confidential information
Kindergarten staff must observe confidentiality both by keeping confidential any personal information they become party to in their roles and by preventing others from becoming party to or accessing such information in any other way.

Confidential information may only be disclosed where the Personal Data Act permits exemptions to be made. Exemptions may include using the information in order to achieve the objective for which it was collected, and granting access to staff to the extent that this is necessary to establish suitable work routines, cf. the Public Administration Act Section 13b, first paragraph, nos. 2 and 3.
3. Language acquisition

Heritage and conditioning are both major factors in children’s language acquisition. Children develop an ability to sense, produce and use language in order to understand and communicate. When children acquire language they learn the actual language system and they learn how to use it in interaction with others. Children are born with different aptitudes for learning, including language learning. The social environment is also a key factor in a child’s language acquisition. Children learn the language or languages used in the family and the environment in which they grow up. There are often significant individual variations in language development between children from a given environment or culture.

The language tree illustrates language acquisition. The process of acquiring a language can be illustrated with the help of a tree. Roots, trunk, branches, twigs and leaves are closely interlinked, they all affect each other, and together they form a whole. This is also the case with language. For example, a child’s language skills rely on some basic factors just as the growth of the tree depends on its roots.
Language content, use and form

Language is commonly divided into three different components: content, use and form. Together these three parts form an important element in communication between humans. As the figure shows, they are closely linked and occasionally overlap.

Example showing the interrelationship and overlapping of the three components of language

When the one-year-old girl says “ummy-ummy” whilst looking at her mother and pointing to the dummy on the table she uses all three language components.

- **Content**: The one-year-old has learnt that the word dummy (“ummy”) represents the physical object, the dummy.
- **Use**: The girl uses her eyes in combination with words to make contact and interaction with her mother, and she points in order to direct her mother’s attention towards what she wants.
- **Form**: She has not established the correct pronunciation of the word dummy, but she is about to master the correct form of the word.

There are significant individual differences in early language acquisition

Children of the same age will have varying linguistic skills. However, it would appear that children with the same mother tongue acquire various skills in roughly the same order. This is particularly true for skills relating to language form, such as the ability to pronounce language sounds and master grammatical variations. The differences between children are mostly to do with the pace of development, language content and their use of language, such as the range of vocabulary and conversational and narrative competence. These skills appear to be particularly dependent on the social environment.

Language development

Language development in brief

Although it can be difficult to divide children’s language development into stages corresponding to different ages, it may be useful to give a brief outline of the process in order to help evaluate each child’s linguistic competence. It is important to note that a child’s language development may be more or less advanced than what is described here for the age in question and that this should not necessarily be a cause for concern.

Language acquisition in infants (from 0 to 1 year)

Language development begins long before the child utters its first words. The child and its carers communicate from the moment of birth. The infant will turn its head searchingly when it hears familiar voices, and it communicates by crying, smiling, making facial gestures and movements. Infants produce sounds, and they eventually begin to babble. The sound patterns in the infant’s babbling are influenced by the language/languages that surround it. The child plays with its voice and with sounds, and it can repeat and imitate sounds. Eventually it becomes possible to detect variation and nuances in the child’s tone of voice and explicit consonant-vowel relationships such as “da-da” and “ba-ba”. The child’s carers respond to the child’s signals, both verbally and non-verbally. From early babyhood the child and its carers will “speak” together, and they take turns to communicate. This interaction will typically involve the adult adding meaning to the child’s signals and
responding to them. For example, the father responds to the child: “Oh, you want to come to daddy!” when the child raises its arms and says “da-da”. Such early communication relies on both child and adult focusing their attention on each other. Both of them interpret the signals of the other and adjust to them. This form of early, shared attention forms the basis for further language acquisition and the development of communication skills.

Gradually the child discovers that sounds have content or meaning and that it is useful to employ them in order to attract attention and to achieve specific goals. In the beginning communication is based on what is happening in the present moment. The initial comprehension of a new word is based on the first person, object or experience that the child associates with the word. It is common for children to use the same word for everything that resembles this person, object or experience. For example, a child may refer to all animals as “woof-woof” for a while.

Towards the end of their first year most children begin to point in order to communicate. They also recognise some of the most frequently used words around them. Some children may begin to utter individual words themselves. Children will often comprehend individual words before beginning to use them, and there are great variations in spoken language skills at this age. As infants become toddlers the children and their carers gradually shift their attention towards concepts away from the present moment.

Language acquisition in toddlers (from 1 to 3 years)
By the age of around 1 most children will understand some of the words and expression they hear regularly, but the words have not yet been developed into symbols for concepts so that they can represent reality in their own right. It can be difficult to distinguish between language understanding and situational awareness in young children. The first words that a child understands and uses are linked to here and now situations, and the child needs to be able to see both its conversation partner and the subject of the conversation.

The child’s first utterances consist of only a single word, and much of what the child says will still sound like babbling. Although many of the child’s utterances comprise words that do not exist in adult language, the adult will often understand what the child means. The reason for this is that the child varies its tone of voice and uses different gestures. The child’s communication and the content of what it is conveying are the most important aspects. Form – the way in which the child pronounces the words and masters principles of grammar, for example – is less important during this period. An adult who adjusts to the child’s language interprets the child’s signals, talks to the child about things it is curious about or interested in, and invites the child to actively take part in communication and utter its first words.

The first words that children between the ages of 1 and 2 understand and use tend to be names of family members, everyday objects and events. Children will often understand the meanings of far more words than they actually use themselves. Once children acquire a vocabulary of between 30 and 50 words many of them will experience a so-called vocabulary spurt. This means that their vocabulary expands rapidly. This is because the children become more aware of the fact that a word is a symbol of a concept / that the word has content. During this period they often begin to combine one-word utterances to form expressions with two words.

By the age of 2 most children have a relatively good understanding of language. This implies that they understand the contents of many words and frequently also of simple sentences. It is quite common for the children not to utter a large number of words themselves,

It appears to be a symptom of good care that the infant is not only bathed in water but also in the sounds of language and in bodily contact.

Ragnar Rommetveit
The most important thing during this phase is that they understand that words symbolise concepts, i.e. that the words in themselves give meaning. This means that the children are no longer wholly dependent on the situation or context and that they can understand what is being said without their conversation partner having to use signs, gestures or other non-verbal means of explanation.

By the time children reach the age of 2 or 3 their vocabulary is usually expanding rapidly. Many are able to pronounce words relatively well, although they will usually not have fully mastered pronunciation. Children are often curious about what different objects are called and about the content of different words and sentences. Some will ask questions relentlessly. “What is that?” “What is it called?” “Why is it called that?” Children who ask a lot of questions will often get a lot of answers and thus find themselves in a good learning circle. The key thing is to communicate and interact with others. They use language actively to convey their wishes and thoughts and to get answers.

Children’s utterances at this age start to get longer and more complex, and their syntax begins to resemble that of “adult language”. They tend to discover the conjunction and around the age of 3. They eventually discover simple grammatical principles and begin to inflect words, for example. Their inflections are often rule-bound, e.g. they may say “mouses” and “singed”. These are clear signs that the children are becoming increasingly aware of form and that they are mastering the language.

Language acquisition in older kindergarten children (from 3 to 6 years)

From the age of 3 children become increasingly capable of participating in conversations about things other than what exists or happens right here and now. This means that they begin to master so-called situation-independent language. The children understand the content of words and expressions well enough to know what is meant without any other reference points. This allows them to take part in conversations about things that have happened or are about to happen. Their vocabulary usually continues to develop rapidly during this period. The children use sentences to express their thoughts, feelings and wishes. Some start to use past tense and construct negative sentences.

Many become increasingly interested in the form of language. They enjoy new words and nonsense words, and they use words creatively. They move from using broad and general expressions to more specific expressions. Only from the age of 4 or so are children usually able to understand and use synonyms and antonyms, i.e. words that mean the same and the opposite. This is also when they begin to organise and classify concepts into primary and subsidiary categories. With time the children begin to understand and use words to describe more abstract phenomena, such as differentiated emotional expressions.

By the age of 4 children can usually pronounce most language sounds and combinations in simple and familiar words. Adults who do not know them will usually also understand what they are saying. Although many children have a good grasp of the form of the language by this age, it is important to note that it can still take some time before all children master it fully. Certain language sounds and words with many syllables and particular sound combinations can be difficult for some children to pronounce, including some of the oldest kindergarten children. The same applies to their grasp of grammatical principles and variations.

From around the age of 4 the children’s language increasingly starts to develop and become more nuanced. The children understand and usually make use of a solid vocabulary, and they understand and use several functional words such as pronouns (I, me, my etc.) and prepositions (in, on, over etc.). By the time they reach the age of 4 or 5 their vocabulary becomes richer and their word order more correct. Developing an understanding of and using advanced words and longer, more complex sentences are very much dependent on the children’s environment and on the experience they have gained. Children of this age can normally participate in longer dialogues and tell their own stories.
Only by the time they reach the age of 5 or 6 do they begin to understand figurative language. Many of them will then understand what is meant by expressions such as giving someone a warm hug or having butterflies in the stomach, for example. Many children gradually start to make their language the subject of conscious reflection. They may discover words that resemble each other, identify words that rhyme, divide words into syllables, and eventually detect which sound a word begins with. In other words they become increasingly interested in the form of the language. This is called linguistic awareness and is an important prerequisite for learning to read and write.

**Language acquisition by multilingual children**

All children must be given the chance to express themselves and be understood

Many kindergarten children in Norway grow up with one or more mother tongues/home languages other than Norwegian. Kindergartens must support the children’s use of their mother tongue while working actively to improve the children’s Norwegian skills. Being able to express yourself and find that others are listening to what you are saying is important to everyone. Some multilingual children learn their mother tongue first. Then they will learn Norwegian – when they start kindergarten, for example. Others learn their mother tongue and Norwegian simultaneously. It goes without saying that multilingual children come from diverse backgrounds. There are therefore significant variations in how children cope with their multilingual situation. This depends on both the children themselves and on their surroundings. It is important that the kindergarten and parents work together to support the child’s multilingual language acquisition.

Starting kindergarten is a major transition in the lives of most children

For children with a mother tongue or tongues other than Norwegian the transition they experience when starting kindergarten can feel particularly great because they may struggle to understand the language that mostly dominates the kindergarten environment. Some of these children go through a phase where they do not use the language themselves – a non-verbal phase. This phase may be brief but can also last several months. Children can learn a great deal of the new language even if they do not express themselves in Norwegian, and they are able to understand much of the communication that goes on around them. Staff must work actively to include the children in communication during this period. It is also important that they have a dialogue with the parents about the children’s language skills. This way staff can find out from the parents about the child’s acquisition of its mother tongue, which in turn can help them understand the bigger picture. You can read more about kindergarten-parent co-operation in Part 1.

Children express themselves in different ways

The first utterances of a multilingual child often sound like those of younger children. The linguistic challenges that children face while learning the second language can easily be confused with challenges faced by children with speech and language problems. Many children switch between the languages they know or master – sometimes within the one and same utterance. The language of multilingual children often reveals unexpected capabilities and difficulties. For example, a child may use advanced words or have very good pronunciation but does not know the meaning of frequently used words or basic principles of grammar. This can make evaluating their linguistic competence challenging.

Children need time to acquire language

Adults tasked with evaluating the language of multilingual children and creating a good linguistic environment for them must be familiar with the children’s language history and development in the languages that they master. They must be able to view and evaluate the children’s language in a multilingual perspective. They also need to be aware that it usually takes longer to learn more than one language. For this reason it is quite common to see somewhat slower general language development in these children.
Children with delayed language development and speech and language problems

Children develop language skills at varying paces

It is important to note that there are significant individual differences in children’s language acquisition. Having sufficient knowledge about the children’s language acquisition is therefore very important in order to give each child adequate support. If a child struggles with language, it can be because it has a language delay or a speech or language problem. There are no clear boundaries between typical, delayed and/or anomalous language development. Multilingualism will in many cases make evaluations even more challenging.

Some children experience delayed language development

Children who experience delayed language development fall behind their peers in this area. Many of these children do catch up with their peers over time, however. Others will continue to struggle for longer. It can be difficult to predict which children with delayed language development will go on to experience speech or language problems. For some children, delayed language development is the first sign of something that could later be described as a specific speech or language problem.

Some children experience speech and language problems

If a speech or language problem persists, if it is the child’s primary problem, and if it is also unexpected in light of the child’s development as a whole, then it could be a case of a specific speech or language problem. Only a specialist agency will be able to establish whether this is the case. Speech and language problems can occur in different areas. They can be described in a variety of ways. Speech and language problems are often divided into problems understanding language (receptive problems), difficulties with spoken language (expressive problems) and problems using language (pragmatic problems). But these three areas are closely linked, and they overlap. Whether it is a case of delayed language development or a type of speech or language problem, early intervention in the form of systematic language stimulation is the single most important pedagogical approach.

Some children struggle to understand language

When a child does not understand what is being said, it could be because the child’s understanding of the content of the word, its conceptual understanding, is inadequate. It could also be that the child has not sufficiently developed an understanding of the form of the language, e.g. principles of grammar.

Children who struggle to understand what is being said may feel restricted in many ways. It can be difficult to understand the rules of behaviour and verbal communication during play, for example.

Children who have difficulties understanding what is being said will respond in different ways. Some will have trouble interacting with other children, especially those of the same age. Some will take charge of the game, often without having the necessary leadership skills. Some children will try to ruin the game for the other children, while others become very passive during play or shy away from play altogether. Some children will say little or nothing at all, while others may make a great deal of noise and talk a lot, by shouting during play or imitating words and sentences they hear around them, for example.

If the child appears to understand one situation but misunderstand another, it can be difficult for staff to identify the problem. Is the child struggling with language comprehension, or is it just not listening in that particular situation? It can also be difficult to identify children who do not understand what is being said, because many children compensate well for their problems by relying on their experience and interpreting the given situation or the body language of the person who is speaking, for example. Many will be able to keep up with the kindergarten’s routines because they know the day-to-day rhythm and the signals being given in various contexts.

If a child prefers to communicate with younger children or even adults, or if it uses a great deal of non-verbal communication, staff should investigate the child’s language comprehension further. Children who struggle to understand language will often also have problems with speech, and this is often easier to identify. If a
child experiences problems with its speech, staff need to be particularly aware of the child's language comprehension.

**Some children struggle with speech**
Some children have good language comprehension but struggle to express themselves verbally. For example, they may have difficulty finding or expressing words, or they may struggle with grammatical principles or sentence structure. Signs of this can be that they stop and search for words while they are talking or participating in conversations, or that their sentences are more incomplete than what is normal for their age.

Children with speech problems may also be facing challenges with the phonology of the language. They may skip sounds, mix up sounds, replace one sound with another and/or simplify consonant clusters. *Teletubbies* could become *Tetetabas*, for example, while *flower* may become *fower* and *table* may become *tale*. Long words such as *vegetables* may become *vebbles*. Such difficulties with the sounds of the language are common in younger children, but as the children are nearing school age they could be signs of a specific language problem.

Children with speech impediments such as stammering and cluttering struggle to maintain a normal flow of speech. Many children of kindergarten age suffer from so-called developmental stammering. This means that they search for words and/or have disfluencies in their speech. It will normally pass as their linguistic competence increases. It can be difficult to distinguish between developmental stammering and problematic stammering. Kindergarten staff should be particularly aware of children who try to avoid facing up to challenges by not speaking. Some develop avoidance strategies. They may choose to avoid certain sounds or sound combinations or leave out specific or long words.

Children with severe speech problems often become very frustrated at not being able to adequately express themselves and at not being understood. Some will use excessive body language and repeat themselves, while others become withdrawn and disengaged. Some become angry and uncontrolled, while others mess about to hide it. It can be easy to misinterpret such signals and to believe that a child's problems are primarily to do with controlling their behaviour or with a lack of social competence.

**Some children struggle to use language**
Some children struggle to interpret and use language in social settings despite otherwise having good language skills. This could mean that the children have difficulties adapting their language to the situation in question, or that they have trouble using language appropriately when communicating with others. They may also find it difficult to interpret body language and other non-verbal signals. These children may have problems conducting everyday conversations, and they may struggle with both verbal and non-verbal communication.

**Hearing impairments can sometimes cause speech and language problems**
Children with a hearing impairment will often have difficulties with language comprehension and/or speech. It is therefore important to always take the child for a hearing test if there are concerns about its language skills, even if a hearing problem is not suspected. A health centre or GP can examine the child and refer it to the specialist health service or an auditory-verbal therapist if appropriate.

**Poor Norwegian skills can be interpreted as a language problem**
Most children will have difficulty communicating when they first encounter a new language. They find it difficult when they cannot understand what is being said and problematic not to be able to express themselves adequately. Different children will respond to this in different ways, as described earlier. Other times the opposite may happen. A language problem may go undetected because those who evaluate the child's language put their findings down to a lack of Norwegian skills. Kindergarten staff must therefore be familiar with language acquisition in multilingual children.
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