



## Brief

# How do kindergarten staff members create conditions for children's community and belonging?

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Belonging can be considered a basic human need. For most people, it is important to have a certain number of lasting, positive and meaningful relationships with other people (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497), and feeling “at home” (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 10). According to *The Framework Plan for Kindergartens* (Kunnskapsdepartementet [Ministry of Education], 2017), kindergarten staff must provide shared experiences and make the value of community visible for children. Thus, the question emerges: How can kindergarten practices develop in order to support community and belonging in children with different backgrounds and individual needs? This study is part of a project supported by NordForsk (grant number 85644) and the University of Stavanger and examines how kindergarten staff facilitate opportunities for children to experience community and belonging. Nira Yuval-Davis' (2011) theory of belonging serves as the theoretical basis of the study. Yuval-Davis believes that belonging consists of two components: The feeling of belonging experienced by the individual, and the politics of belonging, in which the focus is on social processes and belonging as a relational, multi-dimensional phenomenon. According to Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011), belonging is something that is constructed socially through processes that include structures, power relations, and negotiations about boundaries. This approach creates the potential for both membership and resistance as well as inclusion and exclusion. Video observations of staff–child-interactions in Norwegian kindergartens are used as the dataset. Through a variety of free play and activities, the staff members create the conditions for children's community and belonging through being together about something. How the staff promotes the children's experience of community and belonging takes place in the various everyday activities of the kindergarten, for example through organised activities with a

common starting point, by creating an environment in which the children and their activities are naturally attractive to other children, and by directly encouraging children to include others. Time is also devoted to inclusive children's communities. The situations in each kindergarten differ in terms of how easy it is for children to participate and also in terms of what competencies are required to be included. Most situations, however, provide opportunities for children who desire inclusion. Reflecting on and working with belonging can make kindergarten staff aware of such opportunities, and how they can be created and implemented. Kindergarten staff thus play an important role in creating the necessary conditions for community and belonging amongst children. Staff members must be aware of this important responsibility and regularly reflect on it as they strive to improve their practices.

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