Children's perspectives on language assessments

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Introduction

This paper deals with involvement of child perspectives in a test situation as well as in evaluations and studies in general. The paper is based on experience from a study on language assessments of three-year-olds published in 2010.

The paper has two objectives:
- Describing specific experiences in using different methodologies to involve child perspectives as well as discussing some general methodological considerations with regard to involving child perspectives in evaluations and studies.
- Elucidating a number of children's perspectives on being in a test situation as well as test conditions which may influence the child's performance in the situation.

The paper is structured as follows:
First, it outlines the ethical, ontological and epistemological developments that highlight the importance of involving child perspectives in evaluations and studies in the area of (early) childhood research today. Furthermore, the concept child perspectives is defined.

Secondly, the design of the study is explained.

Thirdly, the paper describes and discusses study results including (a) methodological experiences and (b) results for the children's perspectives on taking part in a test situation.

Importance of involving child perspectives

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the child has a "right to express his or her views freely in all matters affecting the child and that the views of the child must be respected" (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The Convention also states that society shall "assure that the child is involved in decision-making". This means that according to the Convention, children must be involved in decision-making on those issues which affect them. Children must be taken seriously as independent, competent individuals whose views and thoughts are important and necessary to consider, and children must be heard about their own life situation, see the Convention. With the Convention, children have gained status as fellow citizens, providing them with some basic social, civil and political rights. Involving child perspectives is thus justified in ethical and legal contexts.

Danish legislation also reflects this focus on the rights of children. Examples of this are the repeal of the right to inflict corporal punishment (Act no. 416 of June 1997), the establishment of the National Council for Children (1994) and legislation upholding that in connection with a divorce, the child must be involved in cases about custody, the child's place of residence and its contact with parents in a manner that sheds light on the child's point of view (Danish Act on Parental Responsibility 2007).

Ontologically, there has been a change in the perception of children, who are increasingly seen as independent, competent players (in everyday life, in professional contexts as well as legally) (Jørgensen & Kampmann, 2000; Gulløv, 1999).

An adult's childhood memories are not necessarily a valid frame of reference for children's perception of their everyday lives, as the childhood of today is characterised by other structural conditions than the one of previous generations (Dencik, 1999). Therefore the necessity of the child perspective is also epistemologically justified: The very idea of involving child perspectives involves the assumption that children can and must be able to contribute with unique knowledge about their own lives. This is because this knowledge is not available in any other way and gaining insight into this area is necessary in order to optimise children's living conditions. In order to meet the requirements of the Convention to involve the views and perspectives of children, it is thus necessary to try to understand childhood as experienced by the children, i.e. we need to ask them themselves.

At the same time, a wide range of the methodological challenges which have previously been viewed as barriers when using children as informants and perceiving their statements as valid have been recognised to also apply to adult informants. Therefore these challenges are seen as general conditions within research (e.g. questions about the credibility of informants, the researcher's interpretation of the data, asymmetric power relationship between researcher and informant etc.) (Jørgensen & Kampmann, 2000; Hatch, 2007).

Overall within (early) childhood research, one could say that the 20th century has seen a realisation movement towards the necessity of involving children as competent informants and experts with regard to knowledge about their own lives and being a child.

Definition of child perspectives
Involving child perspectives can be perceived as safeguarding what we presume to be children's interests. However, more literally it can be seen as an attempt to establish children's own perspectives on and experiences with e.g. a given situation. This paper applies the concept in this latter sense.

Collecting children's perspectives can be done through children themselves expressing their perspectives and/or through adults observing and "interpreting" what may be children's perspectives in a given situation based on the child's immediate expression either through verbal statements, body language or facial expressions etc. In relation to this, it is important to note that in this study children's non-verbal expressions are perceived as just as valid as their verbal statements. For one thing, three-year-olds are not able to express themselves thoroughly through verbal statements, for another verbal statements also require interpretation as the meaning attached to linguistics phrases by adults and children may differ significantly (Andersen, 2000). In this context, it is also relevant to note that a neutral position is never available for the researcher undertaking the research, since the research is framed from an adult perspective and the data is interpreted related to adults' pre-understandings of children, childhood and logic structures of actions in the research setting (Gulløv, 1999; Andersen, 2000).

Method
In 2007 it became statutory for municipalities to offer all three-year-olds language assessment in Denmark[1]. The majority of Danish municipalities are carrying out language assessments as an individual standardised test, typically conducted by a pedagogue at the child's daycare centre. The test is carried out separately from other activities at the daycare centre. Prior to carrying out the test, parents contribute with their knowledge of their child's vocabulary.

In connection with introducing the provisions on language assessment of three-year-olds, politicians as well as professionals have discussed how children experience and are influenced by taking part in a language assessment and in test situations in general. On this basis, in 2009-2010 the Danish Evaluation Institute decided to implement a study that aimed at:

> 1) studying how children experience taking part in a language assessment (test situation) at their daycare centre
>
> 2) testing and assessing a number of different documentation methods to qualify involving child perspectives from three-year-olds.

Key questions in the study
The key questions regarding elucidating children's perception of the language assessment situation were:
- How do children experience the situation and the activities linked to the actual language assessment?
- How do the children experience the language assessment situation; the entire situation and each part of it?
- Is it possible to identify general patterns in the children's perception of the language assessment situation across language assessments of different children?
- How do the pedagogues act in the language assessment situation? And how does this affect the children's perception of the situation?
- Are there parts of the language assessment or assessment situation to which the children generally find it difficult to relate or become involved in?
- Are there parts of the language assessment in which the children are particularly involved?
- Is it possible to identify ways to present the activities or to conduct the test that seem to promote the children's involvement and well-being in the situation?

The key questions for testing various methodologies to involve child perspectives were:
- What advantages and disadvantages do the various methodologies have when collecting data about children's experiences and perspectives on their own situation?
- What methodological and validity problems are linked specifically to using video footage, questionnaires and interviews as data sources when using three-year-olds as informants?

Study design and data
Six daycare centres took part in the study of a total of 20 language assessments. Data was collected over three months and included all the children in the daycare centres who turned three during the data collection period.

1However, an amendment in 2010 entails that today mandatory language assessments are only carried out for children at daycare centres who are assumed to need language stimulation, as well as for all children who are not in daycare centres.

Two methodologies to involve child perspectives were tested in connection with this study:
- Video footage of 20 language assessments at daycare centres.
- A questionnaire for the children about how they experienced the language assessment as well as video footage of the children when answering the questionnaire.

Supplementary data includes questionnaires, in which the child's experience of the language assessment situation is assessed by the pedagogue who carried out the assessment of the child.

A governing assumption in the study has been that the child's experience of the situation depends on the interplay between the child and the pedagogue carrying out the language assessment. Therefore, we wanted to study this interplay and the relationships unfolding between the child and adult in the language assessment situations recorded on video.

VIDEO FOOTAGE OF THE LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT SITUATION
The six centres were asked to record all language assessments carried out in autumn 2009, where parents had consented to the assessment being included in the study.

Pedagogues at the six daycare centres were instructed in how to show the video camera to the child when the child entered the room in which the language assessment was to take place, and in how to tell the child that the video camera would record the situation. Moreover, the pedagogues were asked to try to avoid calling attention to the camera during the language assessment. The pedagogues were also asked to carry out the language assessments as usual, including interrupting the assessment if the child lost concentration or similar.

Inspired by Bales' Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) (Bales, 1950), analysis of the video footage has focused on actions primarily related to the activity, and on the socio-emotional nature of the language assessment situation.

When preparing the analysis categories used in connection with this study, Bales' IPA was adjusted to the study's subject field. The categories were adjusted in a process where Bales' categories were first tested on the video material. The categories were then revised through a more inductive approach to the material in order to find categories that were relevant in relation to this material in particular and the objective of this study. On this basis, the number of categories has also been increased, so that a total of 28 categories were included in the analytical apparatus. The analysis categories used in this study are shown in table 1.

Table 1
Categories used for analysing video footage of language assessments of three-year-olds

The child	The pedagogue
Actions and reactions related to activities	**Actions and reactions related to activities**
1. The child shows accept of the pedagogue's control of the situation by, for example, trying to do the activity, asking for help to do the activity	8. The pedagogue involves the child's input, e.g. stories about the child's own world or comments on the object
	9. The pedagogue disregards the child's input
2. The child does not try to do the activity	

3. The child indicates that he understands the pedagogue's intention with the activity

4. The child indicates that he does not understand the pedagogue's intention with the activity

5. The child tries to break the logic in the test situation, for example, by trying to turn the conversation away from the adult's questions and intention, by commenting on the object or by talking about his or her own world (e.g. family, friends or toys)

6. The child tries to interrupt the situation

7. The child spontaneously shows enthusiasm or interest in the activity

10. The pedagogue encourages the child, e.g. by signalling that the child is doing well with the activities and is coping well with the situation

11. The pedagogue does not encourage the child

12. The pedagogue repeats the questions or the instructions or helps the child to answer the question

13. The pedagogue rejects the child's lack of cooperation, e.g. by insisting on an answer or by ignoring or correcting the child

14. The pedagogue recognises the child's lack of cooperation, e.g. by talking about it or by integrating the child's input in the onward process

15. The pedagogue refrains from the requirement that the child must answer a question, and accepts wrong answers and moves on to the next activity

16. The pedagogue improvises, e.g. by changing the wording or the activity itself by relating activities to the child

17. The pedagogue instructs the child in the activity or in the language assessment in general

Emotional expressions or reactions	**Emotional expressions or reactions**
A. The child seems comfortable with the situation	H. The pedagogue seems comfortable with the situation
B. The child seems tense and uncomfortable with the situation	I. The pedagogue seems tense and uncomfortable with the situation
C. The child shows confidence	J. The pedagogue shows confidence
D. The child is confused or does not understand what the situation is about	K. The pedagogue seems confused when carrying out the language assessment
E. The child is motivated and interested in the situation	L. The pedagogue seems insecure with regard to tackling the child's lack of cooperation or motivation

F. The child is bored and seems uninterested

G. The child seems hesitant

Where Bales categorises single sentences or actions, we base our categories on sequences, e.g. several coherent sentences and actions.

When viewing the video footage, we registered what actions and socio-emotional expressions and reactions were expressed by the children and pedagogues.

The children's actions in sequences of the language assessment have been assessed in terms of whether or not the children seem to understand the logic of the test and the situation, and their expressions have been categorised in four socio-emotional meta categories:
- Whether they are interested in the situation
- Whether they are reluctant or hesitant
- Whether they seem insecure or uncomfortable
- Whether they seem bored or unmotivated.

The individual language assessment may hold several meta categories; for instance the same child's experience of, and behaviour in, the language assessment may vary considerably from sequence to sequence.

The pedagogues' expressions and actions have been identified in relation to which extent they:
- Follow the guidelines when performing the test
- Adjust the test with a view to involving the child
- Are in control of, and show confidence in, the situation
- Show insecurity and perhaps confusion when carrying out the test
- Respond to the child's signals
- Deal with any lack of cooperation from the child and how.

QUESTIONNAIRES AND VIDEO FOOTAGE OF QUESTIONNAIRE SITUATION

The children were given a questionnaire about how they experienced the language assessment situation. This was completed assisted by a pedagogue in immediate continuation of the language assessment. The questionnaire[2] contains three question categories:

- The child's own description of the language assessment situation.
- The child's emotional experience of the language assessment situation.
- The child's general experience of the being in kindergarten.

In order to have a natural and free conversation and to clarify that this was another situation separate from the actual language assessment, another pedagogue helped the child answer the questionnaire than the one who carried out the language assessment. The children's answers to the questionnaire have been recorded on video, as this enables us to assess the children's reactions to the questions and the validity of their answers.

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[2] The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A

Results

Part a: Results regarding methodological experiences
The following describes experiences and deliberations associated to the applicability of the various documentation methods to collect child perspectives among three-year-olds.

VIDEO FOOTAGE
The footage of the language assessments of three-year-olds has primarily had the advantage that it provides us with a direct snapshot picture of the children's spontaneous verbal and non-verbal reactions (body language and facial expressions) and of the interplay between child and pedagogue in the language assessment situation. Through the footage we have almost gained direct access to the situation we wanted to study.

The video footage is therefore quite realistic and verbal and non-verbal expressions recorded on video have enabled a subtle analysis of the child's perspectives, e.g. because several persons together and/or individually have been able to see and interpret the child's expressions and discuss the interpretation of specific actions and reactions. This seems particularly relevant when gathering child perspectives, because the children's non-linguistic expressions must be translated into linguistic expressions. However, it is also relevant to involve several interpreters, as the child's logic and understanding of the context etc. may differ significantly from the adult's experience of the same situation. In some cases, we have seen that when several persons reviewed the video footage, they did not necessarily reach the same conclusions as there is room for interpreting the children's actions. However, in general, analyses of the footage have followed a similar interpretation pattern.

The video footage provides the observer with an experience of having direct access to the situation. In this connection, it is important to note that the pedagogues in our follow-up interview emphasised that to a large extent they were aware that the situation was being recorded, and that the presence of the camera somewhat influenced the way they acted. The camera also catches the attention of several children. It is difficult to determine to what extent the presence of the camera influences how the children and pedagogues act. However, compared with observations where the observer is physically present in the situation, video footage is definitely less obstructive.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHILDREN
Conclusions in this section are based primarily on video footage of the children's answers to the questionnaire. In cases where relevant, video footage has been compared with the pedagogue's notes and the child's answers as well as the pedagogue's assessment of how the child experienced the language assessment situation. The video footage has been an extremely useful tool in assessing the validity of the children's answers to the questionnaire. The footage provides an insight into whether the child found it difficult to understand the questions and remain focussed, and to what extent the pedagogue has interpreted the child's answers.

The questions about the how the child experienced the language assessment situation are initiated by an open question on how the child felt about being in the assessment room. This part of the questionnaire seems to work best, both regarding how the children experienced answering the questions and regarding the data quality. In the video footage, the majority of children seem interested in telling the pedagogue about what they did during the language assessment. The

answers give insight into what parts of the language assessment the children remember and choose to highlight after the assessment has been completed.

The following questions about whether the child liked the activities, and whether they were fun or difficult, or whether there were too many questions are generally difficult for the children to answer. This may be because the questions are relatively abstract, and it is difficult for the children to answer questions about a situation which took place before the situation they are currently in, even though the questions are asked immediately after the language assessment has been completed.

When viewing video footage of the children's answers to the questionnaire, in several cases the child seems to relate the questions to the current situation and does not separate the current situation from the language assessment situation; the situation we are interested in. This indicates that the answers to the questions have a poor degree of validity.

In connection with the questions about the child's experience of the language assessment situation, smileys have been inserted in the answer categories to test whether they can make it easier for the children to answer the questions and/or increase their interest in the questions. The introduction of smileys in the questions about how the child felt about the assessment situation aroused the children's interest, and several of the children who were otherwise about to loose focus at this point regained their motivation to answer the pedagogue's questions. It is evident that involving smileys to concentrate on is conductive for the child's interest. Apparently, whether the children understand the intention of the smileys varies. Some children seem to understand that the happiest smiley is to be associated with a positive experience and the least happy smiley with a negative experience. Other children say that some of the smileys are happy, and some are grumpy or sad, but they do not seem to link this to their own answers. For other children, the smileys appear to be merely an entertaining feature. These observations correspond to the answers from the pedagogues who helped the children answer the questionnaire. The majority of the pedagogues assess that the smileys did not make it easier for the child to answer the questions.

The questions about how the children felt about the assessment situation are structured so that first the pedagogue asks a question and then asks the child to answer the question by choosing one of three or four answer categories. This way of asking is too abstract for many of the children. Many children answer the question before they have heard all the options, or they point more or less randomly at a smiley: Either the happiest smiley or the smiley which the pedagogue pointed at first or last. However, some of the children's answers also seem consistent with what we would expect after having viewed the video footage as well as having heard the pedagogue's descriptions of the child's experiences in the language assessment situation. Overall there is varying validity of the answers to the questions in this part of the questionnaire.

The questions become more specific again when answering the last part of the questionnaire containing questions about what they think of being in kindergarten. Some children seem to find it difficult to emphasise individual activities they like, and answer: "All of it", whereas others very quickly answer e.g. that they like "playing with Isabella". With regard to the question about whether there is anything they do not like about being in kindergarten, only few children emphasise elements they do not like (if someone hits or if an adult tells them what to do). The other children answer that there is nothing they do not like about being in kindergarten. The answers can either indicate that there is actually nothing the children do not like about kindergarten, or that it is

difficult for children of this age group to express negative feelings in connection with a situation of this type.

In addition, these questions are in the last stage after the children have concentrated on answering various types of questions for 20-35 minutes. On this basis, some children's very general answers indicate that they are no longer interested in the activity. The questions about the children's general experience of being in kindergarten have been included to compare the answers to what activities the children like in their kindergarten with the type of activities the children have just taken part in in connection with the language assessment. The idea is that if the child has answered that the language assessment situation was boring, the answer should be seen in a larger context: that is, in general the child does not prefer sedentary activities such as the ones presented in the language assessment. However, it is not possible to find such a pattern in the children's answers.

The questionnaire did not give the results we had hoped for regarding the children's perspectives on the language assessment situation, as we could see from the video footage that the answers were not consistent. It is difficult for such young children to reflect on the language assessment as a complete situation, however the children's narrative about specific elements of the language assessment situation provided an insight into what parts of the language assessment the children chose to emphasise immediately after the language assessment had been completed.

Summing up methodological experiences
As stated above, we have tested methodologies to involve children's perspectives that capture verbal as well as non-verbal expressions (video footage), and methodologies that only capture verbal expressions (questionnaire). In addition, we have tested a methodology that results in data which in its purest form can be repeated to – and thereby also interpreted by – others than the data collector (video footage). We have tested methodologies that collect data in the context of the studied phenomenon while it is taking place and therefore capture the actual situation we want to acquire knowledge about (video footage), and methodologies used after the situation has taken place, i.e. displaced in time from the episode we want to study (questionnaire for children).

Overall the experience with the methodologies used is that the methodology that captures both verbal and non-verbal expressions and at the same time is used in the actual situation we want to acquire knowledge about, i.e. video footage of the language assessment situation, has contributed with the most subtle and valid data to elucidate the problem of the study. Moreover, a strength of this data collection methodology has been that it made it possible for several persons to see the same situations and to discuss the interpretation of how the children acted in the situation.

Part b: Results regarding the language assessment
The study generated a number of results regarding children's experiences of the language assessment. The results can be divided into results relating to: The children's experiences of being in a language assessment situation, the children's approach to taking the test, the pedagogue's testing skills, and the design of the test.

The children's experiences of the language assessment situation
A general impression of the 20 recorded sequences is that the majority of the children feel comfortable throughout most of the language assessment situation. In addition, most of the children appear as if they are interested in the situation and are motivated to participate in large parts of the

assessment. The majority of the pedagogues who carried out the language assessments, also assess the children to be interested in the assessment situation. However, they also assess that several children found the language assessment less interesting.

Among those children that seem interested in and motivated to participate in the situation, some clearly actually think it is fun, and these children are very keen and perhaps even try to complete the activity before the pedagogue has presented it. For example, this is seen when they spontaneously begin to talk about one of the pictures included in the test material, as soon as the pedagogue shows the picture to the child. Other motivated and interested children seem more hesitant and wait for the pedagogue to take initiative and give instructions.

Another general feature is that the children seem keen to meet the pedagogue's expectations; both in terms of wanting to follow instructions and logic of the language assessment material and wanting to do the right thing. For instance, the child looks expectantly or proudly at the pedagogue when answering a question.

However, some children are bored or seem unmotivated. These children look away, become occupied by other things in the room or think about other things. However, this is usually only expressed in parts of the language assessment. Among the children that are bored, some actively try to interrupt the language assessment. They may show that they want to leave the room or that they cannot be bothered with the test any more by turning their back to the pedagogue or similar. Others try to change the test situation more indirectly, e.g. by changing the subject or by asking the pedagogue a counter question.

For a few of the children taking part in the 20 language assessments, the language assessment situation as a whole appears to be a profound negative experience. These children seem tense or uncomfortable by the situation and apparently find the language assessment situation difficult and sometimes even unpleasant. The children may show this through their body language, or their facial expressions signal that they are uncomfortable, or they say they do not like the situation. The pedagogues who carried out the language assessments of the children, also assess some of the children felt relatively uncomfortable in the language assessment situation.

The children's approach to taking the test
On the basis of the categorisation and the analysis of the children's actions and reactions in the language assessment situation, we have defined four ideal typical positions adopted by the children in the language assessment situation.
- The professional test taker
- The rebellious test taker
- The wondering test taker
- The insecure test taker

At an overall level, the ideal types should be seen as an attempt to illustrate the different positions and response patterns the children may adopt during the language assessment situation. The same child may adopt different positions in the various parts of the language assessment.

One position that can be identified in some of the children is **the professional test taker.** In this position the child seems to understand and follow the test's logic and terms, including that the pedagogue is the person who presents the activities, who controls the interplay and sets the agenda,

the pace, etc., and that the child's role is to follow the pedagogue's instructions. The professional test taker may either be very motivated or interested in the situation or more reserved and hesitant.

The professional test taker may answer some questions incorrectly. The decisive factor is that the child has understood the *intention* of the activity and tries to carry it out.

Another position that can be identified in some of the children is **the rebellious test taker.** In this position the children fail to cooperate with the logic of the language assessment. These children do not accept the structures in (parts of) the test situation, including that the pedagogue controls the process and may try to influence this by e.g. initiating a game, avoiding answering the pedagogue's questions, talking about something else or by asking counter questions. In some cases this lack of cooperation is also expressed in a physical manner where the child tries to stand up or move the objects laid out by the pedagogue.

Some children adopt this position throughout the entire language assessment, whereas others rebel against individual parts of the language assessment.

Common for the rebels is that whether or not they understand the logic, they do not *accept* the logic of the test and the situation, including its terms for interplay between the child and the pedagogue, and they actively try to change the terms.

Some of the children adopt a position that we have decided to describe as the **wondering test taker**. These children do not understand the logic of the test or the pedagogue's intentions with the various activities. In addition, the children also seem to wonder about the interplay structure of the test situation.

Some of the children only act this way at the beginning of the language assessment, because during the test they begin to understand the logic and the pedagogue's intentions. Other children seem to wonder about specific parts of the language assessment or do not seem to understand the language assessment's logic and the pedagogue's intentions at all.

Some of the wondering test takers also adopt a rebellious position and try to change the structures in the language assessment, including the pedagogue's control of the situation. Other wondering test takers seem to accept the terms of the situation and simply try to follow the situation as best they can. Common for the children who adopt the wondering position is that they do not seem very interested in answering the questions of the pedagogue.

A fourth position that can be identified among the children is **the insecure test taker**. The children who adopt this position seem insecure and perhaps even uncomfortable by the language assessment situation. As opposed to the rebellious test takers, the insecure children seem quiet and introvert. Several of them speak in a low voice or whisper and in some situations do not say anything at all. Other expressions for this position are that the children hide their faces in their hands, pull their sleeves, look down at the table or slouch. In some cases, these physical expressions seem like the children want to disappear.

Some of the children are primarily insecure at the beginning of the language assessment, but gradually feel more safe about the situation as the language assessment progresses. Other children seem to become insecure in connection with individual parts of the language assessment or

particular questions. Some children remain insecure or uncomfortable throughout the entire language assessment. Some of the children that seem insecure or uncomfortable seem to understand the logic of the test, whereas others do not. Therefore there does not seem to be a clear connection between whether the children understand the logic of the test and how confident they are in the language assessment situation.

Testing strategies of the pedagogue
With regard to how the pedagogue acts in the language assessment situation, three elements are identified in the language assessments that seem to affect the way the children experience the situation:

- How the pedagogue uses meta communication, i.e. to what extent he or she communicates to the child what will happen and what is happening both before and during the language assessment.
- Whether the pedagogue introduces the language assessment situation as an everyday situation (e.g. a game) or as an atypical situation compared to the other situations the child experiences at the daycare centre.
- How responsive the pedagogue is to the child, i.e. whether he or she responds to the child's input during the assessment situation or whether he or she has a more neutral approach in which the child's input is not included.

These three elements are not to be seen as either-or, but rather as three continuums within which the pedagogue's actions in the language assessment can be described, and which together narrow down the pedagogue's actions in the language assessment situation across all 20 language assessments.

THE DEGREE OF META COMMUNICATION
In several of the test situations, the child was introduced to the language assessment before the child and pedagogue were within camera range, however when this situation was captured on video, we see there are vast differences in how the pedagogue presents the assessment situation. Some pedagogues begin by telling the child about the language assessment, while others do not introduce the child to all the elements of the assessment at once, but rather introduce the individual activities gradually.

There is meta communication about the language assessment situation both before the assessment is initiated and during the assessment. The video footage seems to show, especially with regard to the children who are insecure and wondering, that when the children were introduced to the activities, this seemed to reassure them and give them a greater understanding of the logic of the situation, including the pedagogue's role and expectations to the child.

LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT AS AN EVERDAY OR ATYPICAL SITUATION
It makes a difference whether the pedagogue presents the language situation in an everyday situation, or whether he or she signals that this is a different situation compared to what the child normally encounters in the daycare centre. This applies both to where the assessment takes place physically and how the child is introduced to the language assessment situation.

The footage shows that several of the pedagogues choose to complete the test in a physical setting that is very different from the setting in a normal Danish daycare centre. The language assessment takes place in what is a very unfamiliar setting (e.g. the staff room), the door is closed, no other

children or adults are present, and the child and pedagogue are seated on adult furniture. For some of the other children, the language assessment takes place in their usual playroom, however no other children are present. The child and adult sit on children's furniture. Some pedagogues choose to sit next to the child much in the same way as they would do if, e.g. reading aloud to the child.

When introducing the language assessment, some pedagogues explain that the language assessment means that they are to 'do some activities' together or 'work', thereby clearly informing the child that this is a special situation with a certain framework defined by the adult that is different from the everyday situations in the daycare centre. Other pedagogues opt for a strategy where they try to create a situation as normal as possible by referring to what is going on as a game, or they include some everyday interactions in the test situation. For example, they initiate a game, they talk about, or encourage the child to talk about subjects that are related to the child's own world, or they simply let the child talk freely about the test objects.

An overall impression from the video footage is that the children seem to realise that the language assessment situation is different from the other situations they normally encounter in the daycare centre. In many cases it thus seems as if the children are aware of the fact that this is an atypical situation where other forms of interplay are in force, and where the adult has special expectations to the child, however they cannot always decipher what these expectations are.

Bearing this in mind, it is relevant to consider whether it confuses the child if he or she can feel that this is an unusual situation while at the same time the adult is trying to present the situation as a game or any other everyday activity.

DEGREE OF INCLUSION OF THE CHILD'S INPUT
During the assessment, some of the children initiate a dialogue with the pedagogue. There is a difference in how responsive the adult is to the child's input in these situations.

Some pedagogues are more inclined to include the child's input and thereby improvise in the language assessment situation. This can be by, e.g. allowing the child to react to, and comment on, the objects used in the assessment, or by letting the child play with the objects. It could also be by following the child's associations and by entering into a conversation with the child. Other pedagogues do not include the child's input as much and allow fewer excursions or completely disregard the child's input.

There is also a difference in how often the pedagogue chooses to comment on the child's answer to a question. Some pedagogues praise the child when they give the correct answer by saying, e.g. "well done" or "clever boy", or they correct them by saying "no" when the child answers incorrectly, and possibly giving the child the correct answer. Other pedagogues acknowledge they have heard the child's answer by saying "mmm", but otherwise give no indication of whether the answer is right or wrong. Finally, some pedagogues do not comment on the answers at all.

This means the child's motivation to take part in the test situation is given very different levels of support and this may bear relevance for the validity of the test.

Design of the test
The different types of activity in the language assessment create different conditions for the interplay between the child and the pedagogue. All the activities, with the exception of one where

the child is to repeat words and rhymes, include elements that we must assume the child recognises from its daily life in a Danish daycare centre. However, activities are also atypical compared to the child's everyday activities. For example, the discourse between the child and adult in the assessment situation is different from the discourse between the child and adult in everyday situations.

During several of the assessments, the children's actions and reactions change significantly. For example, many of the children find it increasingly difficult to stay focussed as the assessment progresses and they have had to sit still and concentrate for a long time. For some children, it also seems to be a problem to adjust to the various question-answer structures in the different parts of the assessment which entail that they constantly have to decode different test logics.

Furthermore, analysis of the video footage shows a tendency for the children involved to be most motivated and interested in the parts of the assessment that involved lego blocks and lego figures. This may be because the children are physically active in this part of the language assessment and they can talk about actual toys they can touch. At the same time, we see that for some children it is difficult to decode precisely this part of the language assessment because it includes elements that they normally think of as play things in a test logic which makes it difficult for the child to discern whether it is play or a test.

Also those parts of the language assessment where the child and the adult look at pictures together are a positive experience for the majority of children.

Analysis of the video footage shows that those parts of the language assessment that generally seem to motivate and interest the children are also the parts where the pedagogue improvises the most and includes the children's input and stories from their own world.

The study also suggests that the various types of activity in the language assessment material affect the dynamics of the language assessment as well the child's experience of the assessment situation and thus the child's performance.

Summing up and perspectives
This study of the child's perspective when participating in a language assessment at age three has first off all resulted in a number of methodological experiences with uncovering the perspective of three-year-olds. In particular, the useful experience with using video footage when working with children of this age can be mentioned here.

Secondly, the study has identified a number of areas where the approach taken by the pedagogue when carrying out the language assessment can be qualified, thereby increasing the validity of the language assessment. The study contributes with two types of results that recommend action:
- Children's test-taking strategies
- Pedagogues' testing strategies

The pedagogue can use the identified test-taking strategies in children as focal points, as in the assessment situation it is relevant to consider whether a child gives a wrong answer because the child cannot do the activity, or because the child has a different agenda, e.g. to continue playing with a toy that has caught the child's attention.

Similarly, the different way in which the pedagogues frame and control the processes of the language assessment can inspire to focal points in the efforts to improve how good pedagogues are at language testing, as we have seen that it is especially challenging for the pedagogues who carry out the language assessment to ensure that the test reflects the child's actual language skills and not just how the child sees the situation, as well as the child's shyness or insecurity.

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Conventions and Acts
The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Articles 12 and 13: The right to express opinions and the freedom of expression and the right to information
http://www.boerneraadet.dk/fn's++børnekonvention

Danish Act on Parental Responsibility (Act no. 499 of 6 June 2007)
https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=32014

The act to amend the act on custody and parental responsibility - ban on the right to inflict corporal punishment, act no. 416 of 10 June 1997)
https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=84999

Appendix A

The children's answers to the language assessment questionnaire
This appendix contains the questions the children were asked after the language assessment.

Tables 1-10 show the questions the children were asked and their answers.

Table 1

Can you tell me about what you did?

Answer	Played	Played with the case	Played with the toys	Looked at pictures	Talked	Looked in the drawers	Chose animals	Responses in total
Number of responses	5	3	1	5	3	1	1	19

Table 2

What were you asked to do?

Answer	Play with the case and the animals in it	Play with the animals	Play with the toys	Talk	Point at pictures	The pedagogue indicated that the child "doesn't want to continue"	Don't know	Responses in total
Number of responses	7	6	1	3	2	1	1	21

Table 3

What was it like to be [in the room where the language assessment took place]?

Answer	Fun/nice	Fine/good	Animals	Played	Don't know	The pedagogue indicated that the child "talks about the camera"	The pedagogue indicated that the child is "silent"	A little noisy	Boring	Responses in total
Number of responses	5	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	16

Table 4

Did you like [use the child's own terms from the description of the assessment situation, e.g. "playing" or "talking"] with [name of the adult who did the assessment]?

Answer categories	Yes, I really liked it ☺	Yes, I liked it ☺	No, I didn't really like it 😐	No, I didn't like it ☹	Responses in total
Number of responses	14	5	0	0	19

Table 5

Did you enjoy what you did, or not at all?

Answer categories	It was really fun ☺	It was kind of fun ☺	It wasn't much fun 😐	It wasn't fun ☹	Responses in total
Number of responses	11	0	2	4	17

Table 6

Did you think [name of the adult who did the assessment] asked too many questions, or was it OK?

Answer categories	It was fine ☺	I don't know 😐	There were too many questions ☹	Responses in total
Number of responses	9	3	4	16

Table 7

Was what you did too difficult or was it fine?

Answer categories	It was fine ☺	I don't know 😐	It was too difficult ☹	Responses in total
Number of responses	9	3	5	17

Table 8

What do you think about kindergarten?

Answer categories	I like it	I think it's fun	I think it's boring some times	I don't know	Other	Responses in total
Number of responses	8	3	2	1	4	18

Table 9

What do you like the most about kindergarten?

Answer	Playing with my friends	Playing (in general)	Playing in the playground	Doing things with the adults	Drawing	Having circle time	Going on outings	Other	Responses in total
Number of responses	5	5	2	1	1	1	1	5	21

Table 10

Is there anything you don't like about kindergarten?

Answer	When the adults tell us what to do	I don't know	Other	No/don't know	Responses in total
Number of responses	1	1	5	8	15