GREETINGS AND WELCOMES AMONG TODDLER PEERS IN A NORWEGIAN BARNEHAGE

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SUMMARY

This article focuses upon greetings and welcomes among one and two year old peers who meet regularly throughout a year in the context of a Norwegian barnehage (day care). The results show that about half of the toddler greetings may be paralleled to well-known forms of distant and close greeting across cultures, 21% were found to be essentially childlike and often involved prolonged greeting “ceremonies”, indicating that a specific culture of welcoming may emerge among toddler peers meeting over time. The social significance of greeting in general and especially of toddler peer greeting is discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article traite des salutations et de l’accueil entre pairs concernant les un à deux ans qui se rencontrent régulièrement pendant une année dans le cadre d’un « barnehage » norvégien (crèche). Les résultats de la recherche montrent qu’environ la moitié des salutations de ces tout petits sont comparables à des formes de salutations - de près ou à distance - bien connues dans différentes cultures, tandis que 21% sont essentiellement des « cérémonies » enfantines prolongées de salutations, ce qui suggère qu’une culture spécifique de bienvenue peut apparaître entre les tout petits qui se rencontrent sur une certaine durée de temps. La signification sociale des salutations en général et des salutations spécifiques entre tout petits, les pairs, est traitée en profondeur.

RESUMEN

Este artículo trata de los saludos y bienvenidas entre pequeños compañeros de 1-2 años que se encuentran regularmente durante un año en el marco de un barnehage noruego (guardería). Los resultados del estudio indican que aproximadamente la mitad de las saludaciones de estos niños son comparables a formas de saludo – sean a distancia o próximos – bien conocidas en varias culturas, pero el 21% son esencialmente “ceremonias” prolongadas y específicas para los niños mismos, lo que sugiere que una cultura específica de bienvenida puede surgir en el larga plazo entre los pequeños de 1-2 años que se encuentran regularmente. El significado social de los saludos en general y específicamente entre los niños y niñas muy pequeños está tratado tambien en el texto.

1 The official term for different kinds of professional and skilled care (including day care) in Norway is barnehage, the same word as Fröbel’s Kindergarten. However, the pedagogical content is different. The pedagogical field in question is that of toddler groups of 8-9 one and two year old children, daily cared for and educated by a pedagogical leader and two assistants. The professional responsibility of the leader is based on three years in a college of early childhood education.
**INTRODUCTION**

Varied repertoires of peer interaction, peer routines and even friendships among one and two year old children in toddler groups have been reported in several studies within the context of day care, like that of Musatti and Panni (1981), Corsaro and Molinari (1990) and Whaley and Rubenstein (1994). Musatti and Panni (1981, p. 18), for example, made explicit how “preconsoling” strategies among the children appeared to be based on specifically *childlike* means of communication, like approaching, squatting before the partner, bringing one’s face close to the other’s and smiling, vocalizing, conversing and lightly tapping various parts of the partner’s body, and maybe doing antics as making noises with the mouth, grimacing, or falling ostentatiously, to arouse laughter. Other childlike means of communication and play, like the mutual paper- or table-licking reported by Stambak & Verba (1986) and Eckerman (1993), or the tumbling “touring” of the corridor in groups of 5-6 children in French as well as Norwegian day care (Stambak et al. 1983; Storm-Mathisen, 1995) indicate that a typical social “style” may be traced in interaction and play routines among one and two year old peers (Løkken, 2000b, 2000c).

A video study focusing on glee “concerts” among Norwegian barnehage-toddlers (Løkken, 1989) also included some episodes of the children greeting each other, as in this example with the “camera lady” as the only adult present:

Rita (22 months) and her mother arrive in the outer cloakroom and start undressing. Mona (20 months) runs to the glass door which separates the cloakroom and the playroom. Mona knocks on the glass, looking at Rita. Steve (20 months) and Kevin (31 months) also approach the door, shouting “Yita! Yita!” When Betty (27 months) and Lisa (22 months) have toddled up to the door, too, all the five children jump up and down on the spot, squealing and smiling, some of them climbing and knocking on the door. When Rita enters the play room, the children cluster in front of her. Kevin says: “Oh Yita, vil ha banan? (Care for a banana?)” (Løkken, 1989, p. 84).

In questioning what the children did communicate to Rita in this situation, their acts were interpreted as a group manifestation of the children’s pleasure of seeing her. A post observation view into studies focusing on the phenomenon of greeting in general provides additional moments for further interpretation of what the children’s greeting actions were about.

**THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GREETING**

The fact that greeting others occurs among people across cultures all over the world points to its basic importance in human relations (Kendon & Ferber, 1973, p. 593). Therefore, in reviewing literature on the topic, I was much surprised to find very few recent studies. The phenomenon of greeting has been studied and