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Group production by: Berlin Cosmopolitan School Kindergarten & Preschool (Berlin),  
ICEC (Helsinki), Universidad Camilo José Cela (Madrid), Pikler-Ház (Budapest)

# Case Studies

Handbook for Early Years Professionals

1. Auflage

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# CASE STUDIES

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## HANDBOOK FOR EARLY YEARS PROFESSIONALS

"As a team, we will:

Communicate openly and honestly in order to build on one another's ideas.  
Respect each other's differences, but keep the goal clear (for the children).  
Encourage and motivate each other to enjoy the process through humour and  
positivity.  
Use flexibility and critical thinking to collaborate on shared goals."

Berlin, November, 2017

Group production by:

Berlin Cosmopolitan School Kindergarten & Preschool (Berlin), ICEC (Helsinki),  
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ICCC Group

Berlin Cosmopolitan School Kindergarten & Preschool, Invalidenstrasse 130, 10115 Berlin,  
Germany

[www.iccc.group](http://www.iccc.group)

Authors:



Alexander Bloom, Matthew Carlyle, Katharina Ehrenfried, Katherine Habben, Michael Habekost, Carolin Hermes, Julia Mariacher, Lauren Piper

Creator and experimental field, project lead, international kindergarten

Sponsor: EBS Europäische Bildungsstiftung gGmbH, Ruckerstraße 9, 10119 Berlin

[www.cosmopolitanschool.de](http://www.cosmopolitanschool.de)

Contributing Authors:



Sharon Leigh Auri, Hilary Carter, Miriam Fernández-Pacheco Laguna, Marja Kemppainen, Mihaela Nyssönen, Heidi Schucheneegg, Andrew Watson

English-Finnish kindergarten, reflective practice and kindergarten to mirror and evaluate



Zsuzsanna Libertiny, Lilla Márkus, Nóra Máté-Féniász, Szidénia Baraksó

Former infants' home with large knowledge base accumulated during 60+ years of caring for infants and toddlers in an institutional setting



Angeles Bueno Villaverde, Pilar Ester Mariñoso, Isabel Morales Jareño, Jessica Moreno Pizarro

Long-standing experts in multilingualism and language acquisition

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### AUTHORS' NOTE

In this book we use the term family for all kinds of structures where adults take care emotionally, financially and legally of child(ren). We use the word parent, to describe the most significant adult, who is taking care of the child(ren), who has an emotional bonding to the child(ren). We use the word educator to describe the person working with a group of children in an institutionalized setting. We use the word kindergarten to describe this institutionalized setting for early years education. For children we use the neutral form, because it is a change of perspective and we love that, but of course we mean all genders out there.

### INTRODUCTION

The project team members have provided case studies included in the handbooks as well as some new ones for educators to read and reflect upon as they consider how to work with and respond to situations like these in their own classroom. The following case studies offer ideas and reflections of respectful pedagogical methods towards children between 11 months and 7 years old.

These case studies focuses on:

- Fostering reflective practise
- Supporting pedagogical discussions in a team
- Furthering one's own learning as an educator

It is best for the case studies to be used in a professional development setting so that educators can work together to brainstorm situations and think about how these can help them to apply concepts presented in the case studies to situations they encounter with children and families. It is important to be questioning practice and constantly learning as an educator. These case studies provide the opportunity to work independently or with others and challenge oneself to learn and grow as they work towards best practice.

### LEGEND

#### Case Studies:

Further points to consider and discuss.

## Case Study: Rana

Rana is almost 4 years old and has recently moved from another continent and started at a new kindergarten where she is able to speak and understand the main language. The group has two female educators. Rana's behaviour at the kindergarten shows that she is often unable to focus in circle activities and seems to experience difficulty initiating or joining in a play activity in both structured and unstructured play settings. There was once a situation where an educator made a sudden movement next to Rana's head and her response was to quickly cover herself with her arms. The educators noticed when a male support educator was helping in the group and spoke with a loud and clear voice, it was easier for Rana to follow directions.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 years and 9 months</li> </ul>
Home language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• German</li> </ul>



### Key Words / Themes:

- transition
- focus
- cultural differences
- understanding
- supporting prosilience

### Discussion Questions:

What might be Rana's risk factors and her resources?

How can the educators take Rana's feelings into consideration?

Is it a problem for Rana that she is not initiating or joining in with the others? Does she feel left out or not?

What would be the next steps for the educators?

How might the educators communicate with the parents and what could they do to further help Rana's settling in?

## Case Study: Max

Max's family consists of his mother, father, and twin baby siblings. The family has recently relocated to Germany from Israel. Max is completely bilingual in German and in Hebrew.

In Israel, Max had a live-in nanny for the last three years. Max's father moved to Germany before the rest of the family. His mother and the children recently joined him, and the container with the family belongings has not yet arrived. In the first few months, Max's parents both worked while the family was living in an interim house. The family has limited access to age appropriate toys. Max spent 6 weeks at home with his mother and the twin babies because a kindergarten spot was not yet available. Now that Max has entered his new kindergarten, his educators have observed difficulty in his initiating independent

play, sharing, and taking turns. He often engages in play fighting and is one of the most physical children in the group. He often pretends to use a mobile device and avoids any cuddles or gentle physical contact with educators or children.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 months</li> </ul>
Home language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hebrew</li> <li>• German</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -</li> </ul>

Key Words /  
Themes:

- social-emotional competence
- self-efficacy
- family structure

Discussion  
Questions:

How can Max's educators be sure to take his feelings into consideration?

What is a potential hypothesis for Max's behaviour?

What are the potential risk factors for Max as he is settling in?

What are the potential resources to support Max?

What immediate steps can his educators take to help improve Max's situation?

How can his educators work with Max and his family to help him express his aggression or frustration in a healthy and safe way?

What kind of support could be given to his family?

## Case Study: Dominik

Dominik, age 3, has just started at a new English-speaking kindergarten. This is his first time away from home and his mother seems to be very protective of him. He also has some particular dietary 'preferences', only eating pasta and chicken nuggets, which has led his mother to worry that he might be hungry during the day. Dominik's mother speaks Hungarian with him while his father speaks French. The family language is English, but Dominik's most fluent language is Hungarian, and he currently seems to be reluctant to use English with his educators or the other children. During the settling in process, Dominik stayed very close to his mother, hiding his face if approached by other children. For the first week, his mother stayed with Dominik for approximately 3 hours a day, taking him home before lunch.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 years and 2 months</li> </ul>
Home language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hungarian</li> <li>• French</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> </ul>

Key Words /  
Themes:

- settling in
- bonding
- relationship
- multilingual
- communication
- diet

Discussion  
Questions:

How can the educators help Dominik and Dominik's mother feel more comfortable?

How should the question of diet be approached (or should it be and if so, when exactly)?

How could Dominik be encouraged to join in with the children and educators?

## Case Study: Rufus

Rufus is in the process of settling into kindergarten and may stay for the first time in his new group tomorrow. Rufus' dad is worried because Rufus has always only fallen asleep either in his parents' arms or in the stroller. He knows that Rufus will have a bed in the kindergarten and will sleep with many children together. Rufus' father is worried that his child will not fall asleep unless he is being rocked, or that no one will be able to be close to him if/when Rufus needs physical contact.



Age	• 20 months
Home language:	• Finnish
Additional language:	• -

Key Words /  
Themes:

- transition times
- sleep
- rituals

Discussion  
Questions:

How can one take into consideration the individual life habits of Rufus' family?

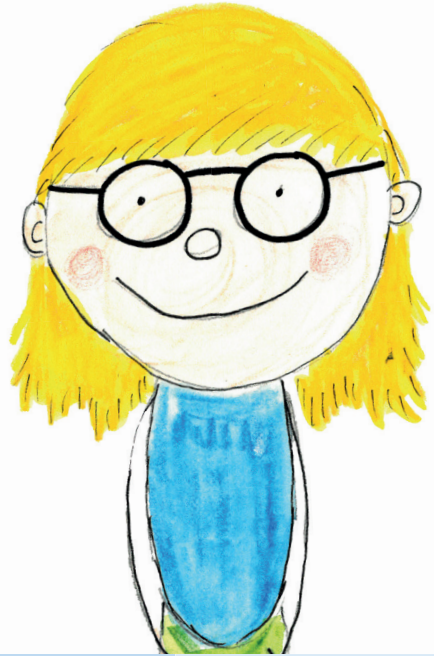
To what extent should educators accommodate Rufus' family' life habits in the kindergarten?

How could Rufus' educators reassure his father?

What could be the educators' plans to help Rufus if he does struggle with falling asleep?

## Case Study: Rita

Rita is an only child and has recently settled into a German-English kindergarten. Rita's parents speak Greek with Rita and can communicate with the teachers in English. Since entering kindergarten, Rita has stopped speaking Greek at home and is speaking English with friends. Rita was born biologically female and identifies as a boy. He first began to exhibit signs of gender oppositional behaviour when he was two-and-a-half years old. Although Rita's parents are very loving, their approach to gender is traditional. Educators have overheard them telling Rita to “behave like a girl” and encouraging him to engage in activities which are typically believed to be more feminine.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years and 4 months</li> </ul>
Home language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greek</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> </ul>



Key Words /  
Themes:

- gender
- identity
- oppositional behaviour
- communication
- counselling

Discussion  
Questions:

What pronoun should educators use when addressing Rita?

How can educators support Rita's parents through these transitions?

What communication barriers might educators face when discussing Rita's gender identity with the parents?

How can the educators help Rita feel seen during the settling in process? What tools do they have available to them?

## Case Study: Anahera

Anahera is 2.5 years old and has recently moved with her parents, Kai and Ria, from New Zealand to Europe. She will soon be starting in an English speaking kindergarten. The languages which are spoken within the family are English and Maori. Anahera has been diagnosed with Down Syndrome and receives several services such as speech therapy and physiotherapy, which are carried out in English. However, thus far, she only speaks about twenty words of the language.

There is also an English-speaking specialist helping Anahera's parents in supporting her, using early intervention to realise her full potential in life.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 years and 4 months</li> </ul>
Home languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> <li>• Maori</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -</li> </ul>

Key Words /  
Themes:

- inclusion
- disabilities
- special needs
- diversity sensitive
- philosophy

Discussion  
Questions:

What extra steps in communicating with Kai and Ria should the educators take before the start of Anahera's settling in?

What steps can the educators take to include Anahera in her kindergarten community?

What tools do the educators need to create an inclusive environment for Anahera?

## Case Study: Raffa

Raffa is a very active 3 year-old girl who started kindergarten when she was 20 months old.

Her two dads are very eager to do everything in her best interest. One dad speaks German and the other speaks French as a home language. They speak German with each other and as a family.

Raffa spent the first 14 months of her life in a shelter in a Chinese speaking country before being adopted by her parents. In Raffa's previous kindergarten, she was often asked by the other children about her mother. At times she shows very extreme emotions which can take her up to half a day to redirect.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 years and 6 months</li> </ul>
Home languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• German</li> <li>• French</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese</li> </ul>

Key Words /  
Themes:

- inclusion
- rainbow families
- adoption
- diversity sensitive philosophy

Discussion  
Questions:

What steps should the educators take in communicating with Raffa's parents before Raffa begins at the kindergarten?

What might Raffa's risk factors and resources be at kindergarten?

What steps can educators take to support Raffa's emotional needs?

## Case Study: Arno

Arno has recently enrolled at an English-speaking kindergarten. Arno's family are refugees, having fled from a war zone where he and his mother both suffered traumatic experiences. The family language is Arabic, and they have very little understanding of English. This has made communication in the kindergarten almost impossible. After joining the group, Arno soon began exhibiting aggression towards both his educators as well as the other children. Sharing is often a problem for Arno and his solution to conflict has been to hit others. After trying several solutions in the classroom, his educators have reached out to his parents in hopes to work together address his physical aggression. However, raising this sensitive topic has now caused Arno's parents to become defensive.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years and 8 months</li> </ul>
Home language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arabic</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -</li> </ul>

Key Words /  
Themes:

- integration
- nonverbal communication
- conflict
- cultural differences

Discussion  
Questions:

How are the educators communicating with Arno's family and with Arno? Is it working? If not, what more should they be doing?

What kind of extra help or resources could be helpful in this situation?

To what extent could a translator help the parents as well as the educators?

What is the kindergarten's role in this situation? How can they help?

How can educators work with the family to help Arno and his family feel more integrated/included in the kindergarten?

## Case Study: John

John works with four-year-old children from many different backgrounds. He tries to be inclusive of every family's cultural heritage and ensures each child has a flag representing their culture or cultures in the classroom. One day a parent from an Iraqi family came to John and was upset that their flag was not included. John informed the family that he does in fact have an Iraqi flag in the classroom.

However, the parent explained that they are unhappy about this because despite their Iraqi nationalities, they identify as Kurdish. John apologized and assured them that he would put the Kurdish flag in the classroom.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 38 years</li></ul>
Home language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• English</li></ul>
Additional languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• German</li><li>• French</li></ul>



Key Words /  
Themes:

- traditions
- heritage
- culture
- sensitivity

Discussion  
Questions:

How could John have prevented this situation from occurring?

What questions could John ask families when they join his class to better understand their cultural background?

What are some other ways John could help the families feel their cultures are represented in the kindergarten environment?

## Case Study: Fola

Fola is a girl who was born in Massachusetts, United States, to Nigerian parents, growing up in first in America and then the UK. She currently goes to kindergarten in London. Fola speaks English with an American accent but starts adopting British words and speaks Yoruba, a language from the group of Kwa languages, with her parents. Fola seems to take on different facets or attitudes whenever she speaks one of the languages mentioned. Fola chooses Yoruba to speak with her parents at home and at family gatherings. She starts speaking more with a British accent but switches to an American accent whenever she gets excited or upset. Sometimes the other children make fun of how Fola pronounces certain words.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years and 2 months</li> </ul>
Home language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> <li>• Yoruba</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -</li> </ul>

Key Words /  
Themes:

- cultural identity
- cultural differences
- emotion based code switching

Discussion  
Questions:

What could the educator do to support Fola in her language development and ensure that she can maintain her self-confidence and her way of speaking?

What could the educator learn from the information that Fola normally speaks Yoruba at home with her family and at family gatherings?

What could influence Fola's language choice?

## Case Study: Momo

Momo was born to a German father and a Korean mother. He seems to be able to hear well but does not speak. At kindergarten, Momo has trouble connecting with other children or educators. He often plays on his own, avoids other children or educators most of the times. He seems to feel uncomfortable in the new setting of kindergarten. The languages spoken at home are German and Korean. Momo speaks none of the languages at kindergarten yet and communicates only with sounds from time to time. His overall body language is very silent and makes it look like he is trying not to be seen or wanting to be approached. His parents have not communicated any worries about Momo's language development or overall development to the educators.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 years</li> </ul>
Home languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• German</li> <li>• Korean</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -</li> </ul>

Key Words /  
Themes:

- transition times
- nonverbal communication
- picture schedule
- timers
- drop off

Discussion  
Questions:

What might Momo's feelings be and what might he need in these moments and in his time at kindergarten?

What can the educators do to work to form a relationship with Momo and his parents?

What can the educators do to help Momo's language development and his ability to understand and communicate once he feels comfortable?

## Case Study: Luca

Luca was born into a German/ Portuguese family, her dad speaks German and her mum speaks Portuguese. Luca started at a German-English kindergarten when she was about one year old. Luca is exposed to German at home with her dad, to Portuguese at home with her mum as well as with her babysitter who she has bonded with and to German and English at kindergarten with educators and peers.

Luca is two years old now and her language development is constantly progressing in all languages mentioned. She understands a lot that is being said and she is starting to respond more by expressing herself verbally. The language she uses to communicate her interests and needs (at kindergarten) is not always clear. Luca chooses to speak German over English in many situations and appears to use German as her main

language of communication at kindergarten. She tries to use English when interacting with the English educator or English-speaking children which is not always clear and sounds like a mix of several languages.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27 months</li> </ul>
Home languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• German</li> <li>• Portuguese</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> </ul>

### Key Words / Themes:

- transition
- focus
- cultural differences
- understanding
- language acquisition

### Discussion Questions:

How might Luca feel in situations when she does not understand or is unable to express herself in the offered language?

What could the educators do to assist in this process?

How can the educators strengthen the relationship with Luca?

How could the educators support the Luca's language development in both languages (English/German) both in the classroom and to help the parents at home?

## Case Study: Yanmei

Yanmei and her mother and father moved to Ireland from China one month ago. Before the move she was in a Chinese/ English bilingual kindergarten in Beijing since the age of two. She is now beginning to settle into her new kindergarten class, and even though she has a broad vocabulary and seems to enjoy answering questions during morning circle, she is often quiet and keeps to herself during play time. Yanmei is the only student of Chinese descent in school.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years and 2 months</li> </ul>
Home languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> </ul>



Key Words /  
Themes:

- language acquisition
- emotional regulation
- cultural frame switching

Discussion  
Questions:

How does Yanmei feel?

What would be the next steps for the educators?

## Case Study: Sofia

Sofia's family has recently moved from Madrid, Spain to Berlin, Germany. She has been in her new German/English kindergarten for a little over a month. Up until the move, Sofia had only been exposed to Spanish. She had a relatively easy time settling into the kindergarten but is now beginning to have trouble during transition times and structured play. She has become very attached to one educator but has not made any other significant relationships with adults or children in the group. When she needs something, she seeks out the one specific educator and if she is unable to make her needs clear, she often gets very upset and it seems difficult for her to calm herself down afterwards. Sofia has a 5-year-old sister in another group in the kindergarten, who has been having trouble since the beginning of the settling in process. Sofia's mother accompanied Sofia's settling in process and her

father accompanied her older sister. The parents now alternate drop off, always dropping off Sofia first as they say this is easier for them. Sofia's sister often prolongs the drop off of Sofia by refusing to let her go.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 26 months</li> </ul>
Home languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spanish</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -</li> </ul>

Key Words /  
Themes:

- transition times
- siblings
- nonverbal communication
- picture schedule

Discussion  
Questions:

How can the educators support Sofia in her language and social-emotional development?

What immediate steps can be taken by Sofia's educators to help Sofia? What long term solutions can be explored?

What strategies can Sofia's parents use at home?

How can the other educators work to form relationships with Sofia?

How can the educators support Sofia to build relationships with the other children?

## Case Study: Dina

Dina is 6 years old and has moved with her Mothers from Sweden, where she attended a bilingual Swedish/ English kindergarten, to France. One of her mother's is Swedish, one is French, so Dina speaks both languages at home, and has high language competence in English as well. Her new kindergarten in France is also bilingual, French/ English, and she settled in quickly as she is comfortable in both languages. When telling her new group about her family, she happily explains that two women can have children and children do not always have a father. She explained, that her mothers decided to get a donation and that this is how she was born.



Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 years and 5 months</li> </ul>
Home language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swedish</li> </ul>
Additional language:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> <li>• French</li> </ul>

Key Words /  
Themes:

- children's literature
- self-identity
- multicultural literature
- diversity

Discussion  
Questions:

How could the educator use the conversation with Dina as a starting point for a more diverse curriculum and classroom environment?

Why is it so important for all children to feel represented in the curriculum and the classroom?

What role could the educator's own upbringing play in the classroom and in conversations with the children?





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Children need healthy environments in which to grow, develop, play and learn. Their environments are complex and ever-changing.

The adult can be a role model, providing children with appropriate, healthy options and behaviour in all aspects of life.

This way, educators and families are helping children develop into confident, independent people who have a strong sense of self-efficacy, empathy and are internationally minded.

