International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development 26

Niklas Pramling · Cecilia Wallerstedt
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Play-Responsive Teaching in Early Childhood Education

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Foreword

One of the central problems facing early childhood education is the push down of an academic curriculum. The pressure for the schoolification of play-based settings has become increasingly prevalent in many Northern Hemisphere continents. Sweden – where the content of this book has been conceptualised and studied – is no exception.

Despite the Swedish early childhood education system being unrivalled for quality, this country does not appear to be immune to an academic agenda. Consequently, the research problem that has emerged internationally has been the relationship between play and learning. This is conceptualised differently in many southern countries, mostly because of the need for a more playful curriculum. In these countries, such an approach is thought to contribute to the development of creative and innovative students. Even with differing societal needs globally, the central problem of the relations between play and learning is the same (Fleer and van Oers, 2018).

Contemporary play scholars, such as Elena Kravtsova and Bert van Oers, have theorised the problem in different ways: the former drawing upon cultural-historical theory to conceptualise the transition from play to learning within children's development and the latter drawing upon activity theory to tease out play activity after studying pedagogical practices in the early years of school. This theoretical diversity adds to the tapestry of work being done to examine the central problem of the relations between play and learning. This book written by Swedish researchers focused on early childhood education contributes both empirically and theoretically to this central problem. The authors bring to scholarship a serious study and theorisation of what they have conceptualised as *play-responsive teaching in early childhood education*.

What is intriguing and theoretically important is that the authors do not engage in a dichotomy of play and learning – as is common in the play literature. What will become apparent through reading the pages of this book is that the dialectical relations between play and learning emerge through the pedagogy of the teacher (adult's perspective) and the activities of the children (child's perspective). The authors remind the reader throughout the book to read their work with this in mind. They conceptualise this dialectical position through cultural-historical (sometimes named

as sociocultural) theory. No part of what they introduce should be considered as either play or learning, but rather it should be conceptualised as a synthesis. With this theoretical backdrop, the book unfolds to reveal empirical studies on areas of international significance, such as teachers' ability to play, and the place of children's agency in play and learning.

What role teachers take in children's play is contested, theoretically, empirically and ideologically. The authors of this book argue that it is often the latter that has driven our understandings of play and learning and what teachers should do in early childhood settings. The content of this book foregrounds the importance of studying the relations between play and learning to leave aside the question of ideology.

The empirical studies on play-responsive teaching open up a new narrative on one of the big silences in research (and ideology), that is, the traditional place of child-initiated play and what contemporary early childhood teachers should do in their settings to promote learning. What the authors of this book argue is that play-responsive teaching means that the teachers' participation in children's play requires a high level of responsivity to the children's perspectives. Their role is not just to shadow children and to simply observe them and contribute very little to their play. What is argued is that teachers need to find the ways to introduce the seeds of new directions and give new possibilities for the children's play – but without compromising children's agency and play narrative. That is, teachers need to work with child-initiated play and develop the children's play through the introduction of new content that aligns with the cultural tools of the children's lives – such as literacy. In my own work, learning concepts can also be about social development and emotion regulation. In other countries, such as Australia, this is referenced as intentional teaching. What matters in responsive teaching is children's agency in play. This is seen through how the seeds or opportunities to develop children's learning are always supporting children's play narrative and activity. In my own work, I have referred to this as *concepts acting in the service of the children's play* (Fleer, 2018).

Importantly, the authors argue that responsive teaching involves teachers being close to children's play, so they know when and how to introduce new opportunities into children's play. This can mean being involved in their play, and the authors argue that this is difficult for early childhood teachers. In early childhood settings, there is usually more than one teacher, and this gives different possibilities for teachers than those who are in primary classrooms. Elena Kravtsova has introduced the practice of *pair pedagogy* to support teachers in building developmental conditions for children in early childhood settings. She discusses how teachers can be with the children in their play, can lead children's play by initiating something new, can position themselves as following children's lead or can act in a primordial we position where they join together with the child as though one. In this book, there are also many different ways that teachers interact with children, and we can find the unique ways in which teachers redistribute the agency of adults and children in the rich vignettes of practices in the different centres and corresponding play activities of the children. The data presented go beyond traditional laboratory-based research and into the lives of children and teachers in early childhood settings. As such, a richness of pedagogical practices is illuminated in all of its complexity within the

daily practices of early childhood education. Play-responsive teaching captures and names the complexity of teachers work in teaching in early childhood settings whilst also preserving the integrity of child-initiated play and children's agency. The conceptualisation of play-responsive teaching will help teachers with the challenge of how to responsively introduce concepts into children's play. Therefore, play-responsive teaching as a concept builds upon existing work being done in other countries, such as Russia, the Netherlands and Australia – to name just a few tackling this problem.

The message of this book is that play-responsive teaching is not simply a child-initiated play with the hope of some learning taking place (child's perspective only) and it is also not a teacher-guided learning built into play activities (teacher's perspective only). Rather, the focus is on preserving both the child's agency and the narrative of the play, where children initiate complex play activities and change the meaning of actions and objects in imaginary situations – the Vygotskian (1966) conceptualisation of play – and through this, children realise new understandings. That is, children iteratively move back and forth between 'as is' and 'as if' to deepen their play and to build new conscious understandings about the rules and roles of culture in which they live – where 'what if' thinking can be introduced. What develops in the theorisation of a play-responsive teaching approach is a playful sense-making context in which children appropriate the cultural tools of their community.

This book is timely because it deals with a pressing research problem around the relations between play and learning. It makes an important empirical contribution to the play literature. It also makes an important pedagogical contribution because it is based on jointly undertaken research with practitioners in the context of their practice – so it requires no translation work to make it meaningful to teachers. Finally, the book makes a major theoretical contribution because it shows how dialects from cultural-historical theory can realise new understandings of the relations between play and learning as a synthesis and, in so doing, productively puts forward a new theoretical concept of play-responsive teaching.

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Preface

A pressing challenge faced by contemporary early childhood education is to support children's learning, particularly of what is sometimes referred to as academic knowledge. This political pressure has resulted in much debate on the nature of institutions such as preschool. This debate tends to take form through positioning adversaries in dichotomous poles: *either* preschool is seen as preparation for school (i.e. as preschool) *or* it is seen as a sanctuary from such pressures and being characterised by free play. In the former account, how to promote children's learning can be seen unreflectedly as traditional instruction; in the latter account, preschool teachers, and hence teaching, have no place in children's play. The instructional stance is not responsive to the tradition and practices of early childhood education as characterised by organising for children's learning and development in more holistic play-based ways and in social activities; the free-play stance shies away from the fact that an institution such as preschool has a complex task, not only to cater for children's well-being and social development but also to introduce them to forms of knowledge that they would perhaps not have come in contact with if not participating in this institution. Taking a meta-perspective on this debate, we argue that such simplified dichotomies are inadequate for understanding preschool as an institution with its complex tasks to support children's learning and development. Another premise for our work is that in order not to succumb to simplified dichotomous poles, a concept of teaching (and in extension what we will call *didaktik*, not to be confused with didactics) needs to be developed; the concept of teaching as historically characterised by school cannot simply be reproduced in preschool since it builds on a different institutional framework and goals (in school: lessons, subject matter studies, instructing teacher and receiving children, goal-fulfilment). A third premise of our work is that a concept of teaching relevant to early childhood education (in our case preschool for children 1–5 years) needs to be developed on empirical basis. There are many claims and opinions about teaching in preschool today (in Sweden and elsewhere), but the vast majority of these are based on ideologies and/or philosophies. However, we argue, how we outline (conceptualise and organise for) teaching in early childhood education cannot be based on such grounds. What critically distinguishes empirically grounded conceptions from ideologically/

philosophically based ones is that the former are continuously revisable in light of what actually plays out in preschool and how children and teachers participate in activities and indicate that they take with them from this participation. Empirically grounded knowledge claims are therefore the only ones that are inherently responsive to the nature of the institutional practices about which it makes claims. Most critically, we argue, we need to know more about how teaching as relevant to preschool can take shape in response to play, since play is historically and contemporarily the basis for organising for children's learning and development in preschool (in Sweden and in many other places). Evidently, against this background, traditional schooled instruction will not do.

In the study presented in this book, a group of researchers in collaboration with preschool personnel – preschool teachers, heads and developmental leaders – have tried to take on the challenge of theorizing teaching relevant to preschool as organising for children's learning and development through play.

It should go without saying – but in the current heated polemic about teaching in preschool, it cannot – that what we study and make claims about is *one* part of preschool. As we have already mentioned, preschool has a complex task and serves the need of many stakeholders (children, caregivers, politicians). That we focus on teaching in relation to play does not mean that we do not consider children's care and well-being critical to preschool work. It should here also be pointed out that we do consider teaching important not least to provide more equal opportunities for children and thus, in the long run, for children's well-being and care. It also needs to be pointed out that our take on play is not that it is 'merely for' children's learning; clearly play has a value of its own. Neither do we suggest that preschool teachers should at all times participate in children's play; at times, when immersed in joyful and fulfilling play, children need to be able to do so without being interrupted. What we do claim is that preschool teachers with a task to support children's development and learning in a preschool founded on play need to find ways of giving contributions in response to children's play as well as, at times, contribute to develop children's play. In collaboration between preschool personnel and researchers, we have made a collaborative effort to contribute to generating insight into how this can be done through empirical study.

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Gothenburg, August 2018

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Part I
Theoretical Premises and Research on Playing and Learning

In this first part of the book, we present our task – to empirically study and theorize teaching (and, in extension, *didaktik*) as an activity responsive to play and the tradition and practices of preschool (early childhood education and care, ECEC) – and some premises of our approach (Chaps. 1 and 2). In Chap. 3, we review key research and theorizing on play in early childhood education. In the final chapter of this part of the book, Chap. 4, we present our way or working in terms of what we refer to as a combined research and development project.

Chapter 1
Developing Play-responsive *Didaktik* – Mission Impossible?

"Do not disturb, the child is playing!"

Play lies at the heart of preschool pedagogy. It has been so since the advent of this institution, built on the ideas of scholars such as Friedrich Fröbel, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey. The history of play in preschool, in the twenty-first century, could be described in terms of shifting perspectives (Cutter-Mackenzie, Edwards, Moore, & Boyd, 2014). These are interesting to consider as they create the backcloth for the aim of the research project reported in the present book.

At the time when the first preschools were established, the value of play in childhood was ideologically stated as something essential. Rousseau launched the image of the innocent, naturally evolving child needing protection from adults to be able to play, interact with nature and in this way, be in the process of 'natural learning' (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2014; see also Loizou, 2017). This image has paved the way for the child-centeredness that still is a hallmark of preschool practice. Subsequently, Piaget, the preeminent and for a long time dominating developmental psychologist, further strengthened the view of children discovering the world through unassisted exploration and play. Developmental psychology became the "research evidence base for protecting children's opportunity to learn and develop through the provision of traditionally valued play-based experience" (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2014, p. 16). However, eventually critical voices started to problematize the 'what' of learning; children might learn through play, but *what* do they learn? In line with such discussions, adults' role in children's play has come to the fore as a debated issue, including whether the 'intervention' of adults in children's play are necessary to support 'appropriate learning' (and what is considered 'appropriate' and according to whom or what criteria), or whether such 'intervention' damage children's sense and development of agency.

Today, Cutter-Mackenzie and colleagues (ibid.) argue, what dominates discussions about early childhood education is what they refer to as the post-developmental perspectives. These are characterised by an emphasis on social and cultural aspects on learning and human cognition, and also on the sociology of childhood. The interest in how and why play is used in preschool has increased, and, for example, how peer cultures take form among children (e.g., Corsaro, 2011). The work of the

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Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky is, according to Cutter-Mackenzie and colleagues, the most influential contributor to the development of preschool practice in what they call the post-developmental era. With this development, the role of teachers has been increasingly emphasised, particularly as dialogical partners to children. With reference to Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson (2008), Cutter-Mackenzie and colleagues argue that

> [I]f play is to be considered educative in basis it would have to teach children 'something'. This representation of the 'something' sums up the tensions associated with contemporary perspectives on pedagogical play in early childhood education and illustrates the need for principles on play-based learning to inform early childhood […] education. (p. 19)

This quote in part captures where the present study is positioned in the field of what is today often discussed in terms of play-based learning (e.g., Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Walsh, McGuinnes, & Sproule, 2017). What has driven us in the research project that we will here report is an interest in how teachers can contribute to children's learning of 'something', while respecting the valued practice of child-centeredness and the importance of children's right to play. The three perspectives on play that have been developed through the history of preschool, as here presented through Cutter-Mackenzie et al.'s (2014) review, have all in different ways contributed to enrich the understanding of pedagogical play.

The representatives of what is called developmental pedagogy, Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson (2008), were part of the phenomenographic (Marton & Booth, 1997; Pramling, 1988) research group in Gothenburg in the 1980s at the time when *didaktik*[1] was founded as a research discipline in Sweden (Englund, 2007). The fundamental interest within this research tradition is the *content* of learning – that is, the 'something' of learning. Two main approaches have developed since then in this tradition: the learning of subject matter research, which springs from the phenomenograhic tradition, and curriculum studies. The early research in what (later) developed into phenomenograhy, had a focus on the learner's perspective on 'something' covered in teaching or studying (e.g., Marton & Säljö, 1976; Pramling, 1983). In studies in subject matter learning, a sociocultural perspective has become central, while politically informed theories have dominated curriculum studies. Englund (2007) points out an important feature of the development of *didaktikal* research in Sweden, which he calls 'the communicative turn'. This turn implies that the traditional metaphors of teaching and learning, as transmission and reception of knowledge, respectively, are abandoned in favour of an emphasis on dialogue and communication between teachers and students. Englund argues that 'communicative didactics' presupposes a critical analysis of the choice of content and forms of teaching. This typical Nordic way of understand didactics is related to the German concept of *Bildung*. According to Broström (2012), "a Bildung based approach listens to the children's perspectives and gives them the opportunity to influence their daily lives" (p. 70). This kind of approach, if

[1] The reason for us using the original spelling of *didaktik* rather than the English 'didactics' will be clarified later in this chapter.

applied in preschool practice, requires that children and teachers become engaged in a shared content where the child is both listened to and supported in reflecting, in order to expand his or her understanding. Broström voices a risk of curriculum-based modern preschool: that educational practice may be reduced to adjustment to and training for formal schooling. However, he also suggests that preschool teachers themselves have the possibility to independently reflect on and choose educational content "appropriate for their specific children" (p. 72).

As already mentioned, the aim of the present project is to develop, that is, conceptualize and theorize, what we will refer to as *play-responsive teaching and didaktik*. This means that we take on the challenge to empirically study and theorize the intersection of two traditions to see if, and if so how, conditions for children's learning and development can be supported through play. Play, as we have already briefly mentioned, have in the history of preschool often been associated – and still so today – with 'no interference' by adults and no such things as intentionally introduced content (direction of learning). In contrast, *didaktik* revolves around an interest in the teaching of something (content). However, what we perceive as a contemporary trend in both traditions (i.e., play-based pedagogy and didactics) is an increasing emphasis on dialogue and problematizing of content.

One of our basic premises is that the commonly heard comments such as the one quoted in the first line of this chapter, that adults should not disturb children's 'free' play, are counter to both the institutional conditions of preschool and what we know about learning and development (and, in fact, also about what we know about play). But how, and on what conditions, can teachers and children engage in mutual developmental play activities that facilitate not only social and academic skills but also children's fantasy (imagination)?

The research group conducting the present study has a long tradition of doing research in close collaboration with teachers. However, in the project laying the ground for this book, we have taken collaboration one step further. The teachers are now in charge of the data production. To enable closeness to everyday practice in preschool, beyond particular recurring activities such as circle-time or activities provided in order to produce research data, we have handled over the cameras to the teachers. This is also in line with the general development in preschool where digital technology is a common tool for documentation. The teachers' participation in the empirical work has proved to both open up for new insights and to introduce new challenges. These matters will be discussed in detail in Chap. 4 of this volume.

In this chapter, we will expand on the themes of the book, which we have briefly introduced. More specifically we will be focusing:

- Teaching and learning in early childhood education and care (ECEC)
- Play-based pedagogy
- The continental/German tradition of *didaktik* as distinct from the Anglo-American tradition of *didactics*

We end this chapter with guidance for readers, clarifying the structure and rationale of the book.

Teaching and Learning in ECEC

In Sweden, most children aged from 1 to 5 years old participate in preschool and there has been a long tradition that the state shares the parents' responsibilities for children. Today, a national curriculum for preschool (*Lpfö 18*) governs preschool, stating the teachers' role to support children's well-being, enjoyment and learning (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018).

Around the last millennium shift, a new movement in ECE research emerged, where children and childhood are seen not in terms of their biological conditions, but as constructed by those who have historically interpretative precedence. In this childhood sociology (Corsaro, 2011; James & Prout, 1997), attempts are made to consider children as individuals rather than only as family members. This ambition can be understood as a response to the fact that previously more homogenous social structures are increasingly multicultural and that conditions for children's socialization and development differ depending on, amongst other, gender, class and ethnicity. Another reason to question previously established views on children and childhood is the UN Convention of the Right of the Child, which highlights the importance of all children's equal value, rights and participation. Accordingly, issues such as influence and democracy are also related to children. Today, children's participation is promoted as an important feature of preschool activities. According to normative documents, such as the Swedish national curriculum, preschool activities should express a child-centred humanistic perspective where children have equal right to be listened to and to participate in democratic processes (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018).

Children are increasingly regarded as competent actors on their own terms (i.e., as having agency) and childhoods (in the plural) are seen as social, cultural and historical phenomena. Today, children and adults are considered, at the same time, as *beings* (as agents in the present) and *becomings* (in development) (e.g., James & Prout, 1997; Trondman, 2011; Uprichard, 2008.). A strong change in contemporary childhood requires a preschool in both social and substantive transformation and potentially a partial change in teachers' knowledge and profession. Today, greater expectations are voiced about what preschools can make possible for children to learn and develop knowledge about, which becomes apparent, for example, in some of the objectives of the Swedish national curriculum for preschool (*Lpfö 18*) having recently been clarified: activities in preschool shall involve children with the intent to raise their awareness about and developing skills and knowledge in different domains of knowing (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). Content issues are therefore essential to the task of contemporary Swedish preschool. Hence, children are expected to be able to participate in activities where they are supported in developing emergent skills in specific areas, such as mathematics, literacy, science, technology and the arts.

According to regulations and guidelines, Swedish preschool does not have the goal of children reaching a particular level of achievement, since the directions in the national curriculum are *goals to strive for* (not goals to achieve). Furthermore,

children are meant to be supported in making sense of different content areas, not as traditional school subjects but as dealt with in a holistic, thematic way. Play and care have always been central parts in Swedish preschool tradition (sometimes the notion of 'educare' is used) and with an increased emphasis on learning, there may appear to be contradictory discourses highlighting play and teaching, and social pedagogy and readiness-for-school, respectively (see Pramling, Doverborg, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2017, for a discussion). While education always has been an important part of the task of preschool, in parallel with care for the children's well-being, there are particular challenges in the work of contemporary preschool. These become visible in the emergence (in Swedish preschool) of the notion of teaching now being integrated in the national curriculum.

Different Voices, Arguments and Standpoints

As we have already touched upon, there are fundamental disagreements among researchers about how to define children's play, why children engage in play and what its role for learning and development in preschool is (e.g., Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2014; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012). These are worth expanding on a bit more by reviewing some of the empirical studies made on play and education. The importance of children's play has rarely been questioned, since it long has been recognized to be an important mediator of emergent competences in early childhood (Bergen, 2002; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011; Vygotsky, 1930/2004, 1933/1966), but whether, and if so in what ways, adults should interact with playing children, are more contested. Discussing these matters, Hakkarainen, Brèdikytè, Jakkula, and Munter (2013) identify a Scandinavian model that supports children's 'free play' with a minimum of adults' interventions, while, for instance, in the former Soviet Union, teachers used 'didactic play' to instruct preschool children how to play. An example is presented by Bodrova (2008) who describes a play intervention based on Vygotsky's and Elkonin's theorizing of make-believe play. The teachers were instructed to scaffold children's play by

> using toys and props in a symbolic way; developing consistent and extended play scenarios; being able to take on and to stay in a pretend role for an extended play episode or a series of play episodes; and being able to consistently follow the rules determining what each pretend character can or cannot do. (p. 366)

These strategies are said to both promote make-believe play and at the same time scaffold the development of early academic skills.

How to participate in children's play is, as we have already mentioned, one of the debated issues. Trawick-Smith and Dziurgot (2011), for example, reports researchers' concern about direct adult involvement in children's play, as they tend to take over and correct children's play in ways that might be inconsistent with the children's interests, needs and cultural traditions. In addition, Sutton-Smith (1990) argues that well-intentioned adult play interventions too often lapses into "didactic

play bumblings" (p. 5), ending in over-directions of children's play. Consequently, there are views that adult taking part in play can hinder play engagement.

In her discussion of early childhood, Stephen (2010) identifies two enduring 'big ideas' or discourses among early childhood practitioners in the UK: one about the child in center, that allows children to freely choose how to spend their time in the playroom, and one that emphasizes "play as the medium through which children learn" (p. 18). Stephen (2010) refers to a study of pedagogical effectiveness in the UK (Moyles, Adams, & Musgrove, 2002) based on conversations with ECE-practitioners. The practitioners tended to refer their work to pioneering pedagogical approaches, such as Reggio Emilia or Montessori, rather than to educational theorists even if an examination of the playroom pedagogical practices provided evidences of the legacy of Piaget, in that they for example grouped the children by age and had a focus on the individual child's active exploration. The practitioners placed emphasis on providing resource-rich environments and the roles they saw for themselves were providers and observers of freely experimenting children. Intersecting these issues, in a discussion of play pedagogy and playworlds (Lindqvist, 1995; see Chap. 3 of the present volume), Baumer (2013) argues that

> At the end of the 20th century, in many Western societies, young children's life and play became "segregated" into specifically designated areas of nursery rooms, playgrounds, and theme-parks. At the time, many educators and parents believed that children's play needed to be spontaneous and free from adults' guidance and influence. They recognized the developmental significance of play and assumed that play- and child-dedicated spaces would ensure that children's play was nurtured and protected and that their development was optimized. However, in the absence of parents and educators, children's play spaces became depleted of cultural resources. Commercial toys and other objects of material culture that replace adults' presence are increasingly seen as detrimental for children's creativity and imagination. In contrast to this trend, play pedagogy advocates adult and child joint play, in which adults provide a variety of social, emotional, cognitive and communicative resources to enrich and support children's play. (Baumer, 2013, pp. 1f.)

This historical reasoning, thus, proves an important argument that, despite the best intentions to care for children's play though allotting play spaces, this may have worked contrary, in that the associated distance to adults (and per implication, cultural practices) has actually de-creased the developmental value of play. What is emphasized in playworlds approaches (see also, Ferholt, 2010; Marjanovic-Shane, Connery, & John-Steiner, 2010) – as well as with the perspective we develop in this volume – in this regard is that critical is personnel and children *engaging in mutual imaginary activities*.

Returning to Stephen's (2010) discussion, she argues for a need for caution in these respects (i.e., personnel as observers and organizers of the environment rather than participants) when it comes to the understanding of children's learning:

> There is also a need to guard against practices designed to allow children space to explore tipping over into a laissez-faire approach that removes adults from the learning processes once the environment has been prepared and which can be seen as placing responsibility for progress and change on the young learner. (p. 20)

The idea that adults might ‘interfere’ in children’s play is hence common both among researchers, theorists and practitioners. According to one line of reasoning, once the environment is set up, children are expected to learn by themselves while playing, which, according to another line of reasoning, is to neglect the responsibility of teaching by the adults.

At the same time, many researchers challenge common concern with child-centered, freely explored practices. For example, Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) have demonstrated that settings where there are a balance between child-initiated and practitioner-initiated learning activities provide the most favorable conditions in terms of children’s cognitive, social and dispositional outcomes. This is in line with Pramling et al.’s (2017) reasoning that outlining ECEC in terms of *either* play-free-from-adults *or* instruction-of-subjects, is unproductive as a basis for outlining developmental support for children. There is a pressing need for developing – that is, theorizing on empirical basis – approaches to the development of children’s play and understanding beyond such dichotomous reasoning. In the present study, this is the challenge that we take on.

Early Childhood Education *Didaktik*

While *didaktik* in Sweden emerged in educational discussions in the 1980s (Englund, 2007), the notion of ‘didactics’ has long been used in the field of education internationally (Hopmann, 2007; Hudson & Meyer, 2011; Nordkvelle, 2003). However, it is important to realize that, particularly in Anglo-American countries, the word often has negative connotations, as denoting a traditional lesson approach with an instructing teacher and passive children (Hamilton, 1999). However, there is a different didactics tradition in the Continental European countries. The Czech scholar Johan Amos Comenius is generally referred to as the founder of general didactics in Europe. Already in 1657, he published the book *Didacta Magna* that still is seen as an inspiration and guideline for didactical thinking (Meyer, 2012). In the 1960s to the 1990s, the so-called “*Bildungstheoretische Didaktik*” was dominant in Western Germany with Wolfgang Klafki (born 1927) as the most prominent representative. This is a reason to often spell ‘didactics’ with a ‘k’ to emphasize that it is on the basis of the continental European use of the concept ‘didactics’ that is intended. ‘*Didaktik*’ is here related to its original ancient Greek meaning of “showing” (from “*deiknumi*”) with the intention of making others see or realize something new.

The common core of *didaktik* is characterized as ‘restrained teaching’, based on (i) a commitment to *Bildung*, (ii) the educative difference of matter and meaning where learning experiences emerges within the learning process itself, based on the meeting of a unique individual with the matter at hand, and (iii) the autonomy of teaching and learning, since an emerging experience always is situated in unique moments and interactions, there is no way to fix the outcome in advance (Hopmann, 2007). Hudson and Meyer (2011) argue that it is not only didactics that does not exist in Anglo-American (tertiary) education, but also one of the basic concepts of

continental didactics, '*Bildung*' finds no equivalent. To conceive teaching and learning from such a *Bildung* perspective means to understand the activities as complex nexuses of interaction, educational experience, social learning, moral development and content-related 'acquisition' of knowledge and abilities. Hence, how teachers create conditions and how children face them are a matter of interaction or dialogue. A prerequisite is that the teacher contributes to focusing on content that is meaningful and interesting to the children. Scandinavian didacticians often tend to refer to the Anglo-American work on "reflective practice" (e.g., Donald A. Schön) and the German model of *Bildungstheoretische Didaktik* (Wolfgang Klafki). Hopmann (2007) claims that some Americans, for example Dewey, were well aware of and to a large amount inspired by the continental and northern European tradition of general and subject matter *didaktik*, "but it never made its way into the mainstream of American teacher education" (p. 109). *Didaktik* was replaced by concepts such as 'curriculum' in America, which is arguably a fundamentally different concept.

A notion of didactics relevant to early childhood education has been developed on the basis of empirical research and theoretical accounts by Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson (2011). What they refer to as an 'early childhood didactics', and what this book intends to further develop, reconnects to the etymology of the word and its subsequent development, 'didactics' as 'pointing out and linguistically informing experience'. In brief, this take on early childhood didactics revolves around some key concepts. A point of departure is that an education is at heart a communicative endeavor in the original sense of the word, that is, to 'make common' (Barnhart, 2004). Hence, communication is not seen as one person sending information to another who receives it, but as a collaborative sense-making activity (on different models of communication, see Reddy, 1993). This activity therefore presumes that language is used as a cultural tool in directing someone else's (and one's own) attention (Tomasello, 1999; Vygotsky, 1997, 1998). However, simply sharing attention while being a necessary condition is not a sufficient one for a didactic encounter to take place, in the more delineated sense here referred to. The two (or more) participants also need to coordinate their perspectives on what they attend to, that is, establish intersubjectivity (Rommetveit, 1974, 1992). Often people communicate through pointing – with fingers and gaze as well as through speech (using words such as 'there', 'that', 'this') – what is referred to as deictic references (Ivarsson, 2003). However, while participants may share attention on 'that thing there', they may perceive 'that thing' in very different terms. Where one sees, for example, the geometrical shape of a triangle, the other may see the figure as the roof of a house (cf. Luria, 1976). The two participants may appear to have achieved intersubjectivity. However, as further probing would prove, this is in fact what Ivarsson (2003) has referred to as 'illusory intersubjectivity'. What the two participants (e.g., a teacher and a child) attend to are on a *terminological level* ('that thing there') the same but on a *conceptual level* (what they see – or in, for example music, hear – 'that thing there' *as*) they are uncoordinated and thus focus on different things. For this reason, communicating and also meta-communicating (i.e., communicating about one's communication) are vital to a 'didactic encounter' in the sense here outlined. Consequently, this perspective ascribes the teacher (or

another more experienced participant) great importance to the child's development in educational settings and activities.

Theoretical and Empirical Continuity and Discontinuity

In relation to some of the work produced by the members of the research group who has authored the present volume, it can be illuminative to somewhat explicate the continuities and discontinuities between the work we (some of us) have previously done, both in theoretical terms and in terms of empirical interests. Some previous work of this group has been in the tradition of phenomenography. What is referred to as phenomenography is the tradition emerging in Gothenburg, Sweden, in the 1970s to study the experience and approaches of learners (for a historical elaboration on the emergence of the interest and approach of what later came to be known as phenomenography, see Marton, Dahlgren, Svensson, & Säljö, 1977/1999). Conceptualized as phenomenography (Marton, 1981), for example, qualitatively different ways learners understand what it means to read a text and, consequently, how they read texts were analyzed. The point of departure is an interest in how learners understand a content of learning, or a phenomenon, such as electricity (Kärrqvist, 1985), gravity (Lybeck, 1981), or learning as such (Pramling, 1983) (see also, Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2016, for a more general discussion). Research within this tradition has been much informative about what is today generally referred to as the child's or the learner's perspective (see Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2010, for a meta-discussion). However, this research differs from our present concerns.

Critically, phenomenography takes its point of departure in a *phenomenon* and investigates how it is experienced in qualitatively different ways by learners, while in the present project we are interested in *activities*. Hence, rather than, for example, asking how children experience numbers, in the present project we are interested in what contents are constituted in mutual play activities and how the learning of these contents are supported in such activities. Hence, in phenomenography there is an interest in a particular phenomenon (or content of learning), while in the present study what contents are constituted remains unknown until analyzing the empirical data (the point of departure instead being taken in particular kinds of activities).

On the basis of the approach of phenomenography, variation theory later emerged (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Tsui, 2004). Critical to this theory is the premise that meaning springs from differences, not similarities. With an interest in how powerful learning can be facilitated, that is, how teachers can provide support necessary for making possible for learners to discern phenomena, the 'object of learning' is highlighted. This 'object of learning' is differentiated into 'the intended', 'the enacted' and 'the lived object of learning', referring to what teachers plan for, provide the means for discerning, and how it is experienced by learners, respectively. The conceptual framework of variation theory and its tripartite object of learning are highly functional for investigating what opportunities learners are offered to develop

conceptual insight in in formal education. It may also be used in other milieus, but has been done less so. In contrast to the interest of most studies building on variation theory, in the present study we do not take our point of departure in a particular object of learning. The activities we analyze may or may not be initiated by teachers in order to provide developmental support for children to develop new insight into particular domains of knowing, but many activities will be initiated by children without such aims. Still, in the nature of evolving mutual activity there will be contents constituted; what these contents are and how they come to play a part in continuing activity are something we are interested in analyzing. Hence, sharing the point generally made in the tradition of phenomenography and variation theory, respectively, that there can be no learning without someone learning *something*, what this something is will emerge in activity. Our interest in the participants' perspectives is also continuous with research from the perspectives of phenomenography and variation theory, even if we differ from these perspectives in analyzing participants' perspectives as they responsively come into play in communicative practices.

Like variation theory (Marton, 2015), developmental pedagogy (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2007, 2008) developed from phenomenography. What is here referred to as developmental pedagogy emerged through theorizing the findings of numerous empirical studies conducted in preschool (e.g., Pramling, 1983, 1994; see also Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2016). Meta-reviewing this tradition of research, Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson (2007, 2008) highlight (a) the following important principles, that they suggest are shared by playing and learning: "children's experience as a point of departure", "discernment, simultaneity and variation as key-factors", and "meta-cognition, meta-communicative dialogues and meta-communication as crucial issues" (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008, p. 631), and (b) that play and more aesthetical contents had not been much studied from this perspective. In response to this realization, subsequent research focused on aesthetics/the arts (particularly music, dance and poetry; for some examples, see Pramling & Asplund Carlsson, 2008; Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2013; Pramling & Wallerstedt, 2011). Regarding the absence of studies of play from the perspective of developmental pedagogy, focusing on children's learning in different domains of knowing appear to have resulted in, to some extent, taking play for granted; for example, reasoning about play as the way children make known to preschool teachers that the topics they have worked with have made a difference to the children, that is, engaged them. The identified lack of studies on play in the tradition of developmental pedagogy was one of the starting points in initiating the project reported in the present study. However, and critically, the present project also builds on empirical research and theorizing from other traditions and disciplines (e.g., developmental psychology, sociocultural/cultural-historical theory, zoology and philosophy, see Chaps. 3 and 4 for an elaboration).

Guidance for Readers

In this chapter, we have introduced the topic of our investigation – theorizing how to understand how early childhood education support children's learning and development in a way that is responsive to, rather than counter, play. We have briefly discussed that our line of reasoning reconnects to the continental tradition of *didaktik* (as fundamentally different from the concept of didactics, as traditionally understood in the English-speaking world). In subsequent chapters and finally, as an outcome of our investigation, we will further develop a *didaktik* for ECEC.

The volume is structured in the following way. In the next chapter (Chap. 2), we present our perspective on teaching, learning and *didaktik*. What we refer to as *didaktik* highlights issues concerning content and context, and we therefore discuss these notions more closely. In Chap. 3, we more extensively review empirical research on play and learning in ECEC, highlighting some studies that are of more general interest to our present study (other important studies are introduced in empirical chapters reconnecting to more specific issues raised in these). We review work on conceptualizing and valuing play. We position the present study in relation to some particularly important previous studies. Thereafter (Chap. 4), we present our combined research and development project and we introduce concepts central to our investigation. These have reflexively been developed in close coordination with empirical data. Then follows the empirical chapters (Chaps. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11). These chapters are divided into two parts. In the first part, we present analyses of activities highlighting what we refer to as *teachers' playing skills*. In these Chaps. (5, 6, 7, and 8), we can see how teachers attempt to enter into, and how they participate in, children's play, how stories are used to communicatively frame activities and mutual projects, and how contents are constituted in such activities. In the second part (Chaps. 9, 10, and 11), we present analyses of longer (entire) play episodes to clarify empirically *playing and teaching as integrated activities*. The book is concluded (Chap. 12) with a summary of the most important findings and theoretical elaboration. Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 all build on original data from ECEC settings. These empirical chapters are organized on different basis; some follow a prolonged activity from initiation to conclusion while others build on data from different activities and settings. The book is concluded by a chapter where we discuss the most important findings and how these relate to the research field, and we outline the critical features of the developed approach to supporting children's learning and development that constitutes the key outcome of our investigation.

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Chapter 2
Learning, Teaching, and *Didaktik*

In this chapter, we will introduce the theoretical premises and conceptual resources we build upon and employ to understand and analyze teaching and learning. In the first part of the chapter, we discuss learning and teaching, and in the second part of the chapter we discuss *didaktik* and in particular the concepts of content and context.

The Processes and Products of Learning and Development

Like other key concepts of educational theory, such as learning and development, people tend to have strong opinions about teaching as an everyday concept. However, in research these terms need to be conceptualized in a manner functional to conducting analytical work, and in theoretical elaboration in order to become relevant to the institutional setting about which claims are made. Of further note is that these key concepts of educational theory are conceptualized differently in different theoretical traditions. For example, 'learning' is conceptualized alternatively as 'constructing knowledge', as 'discerning and reintegrating' phenomena, as 'changed participation', and as 'the appropriation of cultural tools and practices', to mention some prevalent metaphors (see Pramling, Doverborg, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2017). As for 'development' and its relation to 'learning', also this is a theoretical matter. In his elaboration on this relationship, Vygotsky (1978) points out that it is generally conceptualized in one of two ways: either development is seen as naturally evolving and as preceding learning or as synonymous with learning. According to the former conception, typified by a Piagetian developmental framework, children's development takes a particular course, making different forms of understanding and thus learning possible at different times. According to the latter conception, there is no difference between development and learning. This perspective is typified by behaviorist theory. To

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these ways of conceptualizing the relationship between development and learning, Vygotsky adds a third one. He does so by differentiating development in two metaphorical 'directions' and by introducing the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD):

> When it was first shown that the capability of children with equal levels of mental development to learn under a teacher's guidance varied to a high degree, it became apparent that those children were not mentally the same age and that the subsequent course of their learning would obviously be different. This difference [...] is what we call *the zone of proximal development. It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*. (p. 86, italics in original)

Hence, according to this reasoning, with an interest in learning and development, it is important to differentiate development into 'actual development', that is, "the level of the development of the child's mental functions that has been established as a result of certain already *completed* developmental cycles" (p. 85, italics in original) and 'proximal development', that is, what the child is able to do with the assistance of a more experienced peer (another child or adult, teacher). The 'proximal developmental level' of the child thus concerns his or her responsivity to developmental opportunities provided in the context of joint activities. In his theoretical elaborations, Vygotsky often employs striking metaphors, yielding poetic images of the transient processes referred to. One example is when presenting ZPD:

> The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. These functions could be termed the "buds" or "flowers" of development rather than the "fruits" of development. The actual developmental level characterizes mental development retrospectively, while the zone of proximal development characterizes mental development prospectively. (p. 86f.)

A traditional metaphorics of development as 'growth' is in this way developed to communicate the conceptual distinction made. Metaphorically speaking, what is traditionally seen as development (and by Vygotsky referred to as 'actual developmental level') is backwards directed, and informs us about what the child has already developed, while the 'proximal developmental level' is forward directed, and informs us about what the child is currently in the process of developing. Hence, elaborating with both concepts of development, and their relationship, allows us to study both the *products* and *processes* of development. This is, arguably, critical to a developmental science, such as educational psychology or pedagogy. Somewhat paradoxically, developmental science has by tradition often not studied development, but the outcomes of developmental processes. This is cogently argued not only by Vygotsky by also by other distinguished developmental scholars such as Heinz Werner and Jaan Valsiner. The latter, for example, suggests that

> the received norms of how science is to proceed seem to eliminate the core of the phenomena–development–from consideration. The study of developmental processes is easily being replaced by investigation into outcomes of these processes. (Valsiner, 2005a, p. 4)

The products of development, for example, allow themselves to be measured. However, these products cannot inform us about the processes of their formation and generation:

> Without any doubt–'outcomes' (i.e. stable states of functioning) of the organism are visible, recordable, and analyzable 'anchor points' for the description of organisms' development. Yet mere description of outcomes is in principle mute to their explanation. (Valsiner, 2005b, p. 395)

This reasoning has clear methodological implications. If interested in children's development, we cannot study what they know before and after participating in teaching, since these products of development will only inform us about what they have already developed, and whether there is a difference in their understanding between these two points in time. In order to get further in our understanding of how children respond to developmental opportunities and what difference makes a difference to such developmental trajectories we need to study the activities in which children are engaged. This ambition therefore premises empirical data in the form of audio or video data. We will discuss methodological issues in Chap. 4.

Elaborating with two concepts of development further has implications for *didaktik*. In Vygotsky's own terms, "'good learning' is that which is in advance of development" (p. 89). There is a partly parallel reasoning to this in another pioneering strand of research in the field of educational psychology, the work of the INOM group in the 1970s. However, they formulate this in terms of 'learning as development':

> The more foundational changes that the concept development imply have been seen as taking place fairly early in life, while changes in thinking taking place in adulthood primarily have been seen as the result of learning. In this way, changes in thinking taking place in adulthood have been described as quantitative changes while changes in thinking in children and youth primarily have been seen as the development of the very way of thinking and experiencing the world and therefore to a large extent described in qualitative terms (Marton, Dahlgren, Svensson, & Säljö, 1977/1999, p. 140, our translation)

However, as they point out, even adults can go through phases of qualitative development (cf. Luria, 1976). Like in the work of Vygotsky rendered above, Marton et al.'s (1977/1999) reasoning has important implications both for research methodology and for *didaktik*:

Writing in the mid- to end-1970s, they argue that

> learning has traditionally been studied quantitatively: under what conditions one learns the most and how the amount of learning relates to the amount of practice (repetition) and its changes over time. However, when it comes to cognitive development there has been a realization that it is not about quantitative growth (more of the same) but rather about qualitative changes in ways of experiencing the world. We do not share this differentiation of learning and development as separate phenomena. Cognitive development is the result of learning. The kind of learning we are interested in concerns the individual coming to experience something in his or her world in a qualitatively different way from before. It is in terms of such qualitative changes that we have tried to describe the outcomes of learning. In other words, in studying learning we have used methods more in line with those commonly used in studies of development. (Marton et al., 1977/1999, p. 161, our translation)

In their case, the primary method was the interview, allowing the researcher to gain access to the process of how learners reason about the problems they face, not merely whether they can give a correct answer (the product of learning) or how much they know (quantitative matters). Hence, there are some similarities but also differences between these two influential bodies of work – the Vygotskian and the INOM group – and the present project. It is with the interest in – and per implication to educational practice contributing to supporting – the kind of learning pointed out by Marton et al. (1977/1999) that the approach we, with the project reported in this book, intend to contribute to further develop, is called developmental pedagogy (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2007, 2008), and why the approach developed in the Netherlands by van Oers (2012) and colleagues is called developmental education. The latter directly builds on the cultural-historical tradition initiated by Vygotsky (se also Chap. 3 of the present volume), while the former was developed on the basis of research conducted in the tradition of the INOM group, here briefly discussed. Some examples of development contingent on learning are narrating (i.e., being able to render, and thus experience, the world in the form of a story) and categorizing objects according to different criteria (e.g., size, colour, texture, shape, material, and/or function).

Teaching and Its Phylogenetic Grounding and Ontogenetic Development

In the theoretical tradition(s) initiated by Vygotsky, development is considered a biological, cultural, *and* social process, not one or the other. The emergence of the kind of interaction we will refer to as teaching can therefore also be understood both from a phylogenetic and an ontogenetic perspective. The former refers to the evolutionary development of human beings while the latter refers to the development of the individual child. From an evolutionary perspective, Barnett (1973), who is a zoologist, has argued that the human species, in addition to previous denominations such as *homo sapiens* (thinking man), *homo faber* (man-the-maker) and *homo ludens* (playing man; Huizinga, 1938/1955), can be characterized as *homo docens*, that is, teaching man. Arguing that teaching is distinct to the human species, Barnett (1973) clarifies what concept of teaching this claim denotes:

> I define teaching as behaviour which has two properties: first, it must induce a specific change in the behaviour of another of the same species: second – and this is crucial – it must be persisted in and adapted until the pupil achieves a certain performance. Adjustment of signals to meet the need of an audience is an objective criterion of empathy (Ruesch & Bateson, 1951). It is a rare phenomenon in the animal kingdom. It is not universal even in our own species, but it is a feature of some pedagogical interactions. [---] [T]he definition requires that there should be feedback from the pupil. Hence I am restricting the term teaching […] to teacher-pupil relationships which are interactive, rather than dogmatic or authoritarian. (Barnett, 1973, pp. 393–394)

Conceptualized in this way, the activity of teaching is intentional, that is, it is voluntary. We may, of course, learn much on our own and with others without them necessarily intending to teach us anything; but the concept of teaching is in this account clearly distinct from the concept of learning. The intention of teaching implies that there is – metaphorically speaking – a direction in the interaction; the intention is to make someone aware of, or able to do, something he or she has not been, or been able to do, before. In the context of our current concern with play-responsive *didaktik*, this poses a particular theoretical challenge, since play is theoretically premised to be open-ended in nature, that is, it is not clear at the outset of the activity where participants will end up. It should, however, here be noted that neither in activities denoted 'teaching' is it clear beforehand where participants (learners) will end up; this is due to the open-ended nature of the relationship between teaching and learning. There is no linearity or causality between teaching and learning. The learner always makes sense of what he or she experiences (cf. below, on *seeing as*). However, in teaching, the *intention* is to direct the learners towards some form of experience (e.g., that their experience can be rendered, and thus experienced, in narrative form, that communication can be conducted through text, or that objects can be categorized according to many criteria, to reuse our previous examples of conceptual learning). Still, the outcomes in terms of learning from participating in such activities remain an open and empirical question.

In his conceptualization of teaching, Barnett (1973) points out another feature of such activity: its persistent and adaptive nature. This characteristic implies, first, that teaching is not one-offs; rather, some persistency and continuity are required. That is, teaching by its very nature means not abandoning one's efforts if the learner does not understand or does not immediately become able to do something intended to be developed. Second, Barnett's reasoning implies that the nature of the process of teaching changes in response to the response of the learner(s). As we further understand this, this means that teaching cannot be ascribed one participant – the teacher – only. Rather, teaching understood in this way becomes a joint activity (van Oers, Janssen-Vos, Pompert, & Schiferli, 2003), encompassing all participants (and, to some extent artefacts if present; see e.g., Lagerlöf, 2016; and Skantz Åberg, 2018). Phrased differently, teaching requires as a minimum a response from another participant (e.g., a child); without any response, teaching is reduced to information transmission. The latter does not qualify as teaching from the present perspective. Hence, teaching is a joint responsive intentional activity; it is intentional from the position of the one taking the role of teacher (something that even children can take in intentionally teaching other children, see Kullenberg & Pramling, 2016, for empirical examples), but not commonly from the perspective of the learner (i.e., it is not reasonable to presume in many activities, for example play, that the child participates in order to learn something).

As all forms of cultural activity, if seen from a Vygotskian perspective, teaching is grounded in natural development (Veraksa, Shiyan, Shiyan, Pramling, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2016). One biological disposition this activity builds upon is the emerging ability in young children in interaction with more experienced cultural participants to engage in 'joint attention' (Tomasello, 1999). This ability develops

early; even very young children can be observed to indicate, through some rudimentary pointing and/or sound-making ("da", serving the communicative function equivalent of "there"/"look"), what they have seen also for others to see. Through the other participant's confirming (and perhaps developing) response, joint attention is established. In fascinating research, Tomasello (1999) has shown the emergence of joint attention in ontogeny:

> Six-month-old infants interact dyadically with objects, grasping and manipulating them, and they interact dyadically with other people, expressing emotions back and forth in a turn-taking sequence. If people are around when they are manipulating objects, they mostly ignore them. If objects are around when they are interacting with people, they mostly ignore them. But at around nine to twelve months of age, a new set of behaviors begins to emerge that are not dyadic, like these early behaviors, but are triadic in the sense that they involve a coordination of their interactions with objects and people, resulting in a referential triangle of child, adult, and the object or event to which they share attention. (p. 62)

With this emerging ability, children come to 'tune into' the attention of the communicative partner, and try to get the partner to tune into their object of attention, using pointing and other deictic references (Ivarsson, 2003) to do so, as we have already mentioned. This "simple act of pointing to an object for someone else for the sole purpose of sharing attention to it is a uniquely human communicative behavior" (Tomasello, 1999, p. 63). The disposition to engage in some form of proto-communication with others that children are born with thus develops during their first year to the ability to engage in triadic relationships. This triad, consisting of child, another person, and some shared object of attention, metaphorically speaking, constitutes the molecule of education. It is in the 'space' of this triadic relationship that teaching as a cultural activity 'takes place'.

While sharing attention is thus constitutive of what, through teaching, can become an education, and thus critical to the latter, it is not sufficient to this end. For two, or more, people to merely share attention does not necessitate them sharing perspective on what they attend to. For example, looking at a box of objects, teacher and child may share attention on certain objects and appear to agree that 'those are similar', 'those differ from those' etc., that is appearing to perceptively differentiate and categorize or organize the objects in the same way. However, these acts of attention, sustained by deictic references (pointing, and local words such as 'those', 'that', 'here', 'there') may, in fact, constitute what Ivarsson (2003) refers to as 'illusory intersubjectivity'. To the teacher, the objects referred to may be perspectivized in terms of geometrical shapes while the children in the group may perceive these in terms of their colour, size, material, and/or any other features. Without clarifying, through explicating what one intends with 'that', 'those' etc., teacher and children may thus appear coordinated but in fact they talk past each other. This makes it difficult for the teacher to contribute to children's development, lacking the essential responsivity we discussed in extension of Barnett's (1973) conception of teaching.

The Concept of Embedded Teaching

In her study, Dalgren (2017) analyses how preschool teachers and children interact with each other, and how from these interactivities, preschool-*pedagogical* practices are established. The latter refers to "situation-transcending sociocultural practices ('traditions')" (Linell, 2014, p. 186). That is, from everyday social interaction, preschool-pedagogical practices (or traditions) are constituted. Dalgren (2017) shows that these practices are grounded in recurring activities, such as having a meal and playing on a teeter. She refers to these processes of generating preschool-pedagogical practices from interaction in mundane activities as ones of 'embedded teaching' (see also, Tate, Thompson, & McKerchar, 2005). This notion refers to "incorporating teaching strategies into everyday activities (e.g., play) or routines (e.g., diapering)" (p. 206) and is understood as standing in contrast to what is referred to as "direct instruction", with the latter understood as characterized by "structured conditions that have been specifically designed for teaching target skills" (loc. cit.). What Tate et al. (2005) and Dalgren (2017) refer to as embedded teaching is an attempt to conceptualize how preschool teachers can organize for and support children's development in an institution based on play, themes and social activities very much different from the lessons and time-schedules of school. Hence, the concept of 'embedded teaching' is generally analogous to what we refer to as 'play-responsive *didaktik*'. However, we would argue that the distinction made by Tate et al. simplifies matters in a way that hides the heart of the matter. According to their reasoning (in the quotes above), it is implied that if teachers structure activities with the intention of supporting children to learn about, for example, a particular domain of knowing, this is a case of direct instruction. However, in the nature of a play-, group-, and theme-based institution, with goals to strive for, not only in pre-planned activities can teachers support children's development. And the kind of mundane activities mentioned by Tate et al., such as play, may in fact have been orchestrated by teachers at the phase of initiating a new (kind of) play or during a play activity through participating as play partners. Hence, while the concept of 'embedded teaching' is generally harmonious with what we refer to as 'play-responsive *didaktik*', the distinction made simplifies matters in a way that makes it less functional to address teaching activities in a play-based setting such as preschool. That is, we argue that the latter kind of activities by their very nature live in a metaphorical space of tension between the open-endedness of play and the directionality of teaching. It is how this field of tension plays out in actual mutual activities that the present project aims at contributing to empirically investigate and theorize.

The 'What' of Learning and *Didaktik*

Since in this study we are interested in how children's learning and development are supported in play activities (including how children are supported to learn to play in new ways), how we conceptualize what is sometimes referred to as 'the *what* of learning' needs to be clarified. In clarifying this matter, we will also make some distinctions between our present study and some of our earlier work. To refer to the *what* of learning in this study we will use the term 'content'. In some of the earlier work of members of our research group, the concept of 'learning object' has been used. There is a particular developed terminology around this object in variation theory (Marton, 2015; Marton & Tsui, 2004) and it works well for the analyses generally conducted within that perspective. In contrast, in the present study, we will refrain from referring to the *what* of learning in terms of 'object of learning'. Instead, we will use the notion of 'content'. Granted, in terms of its metaphorical qualities, this notion shares with 'object of learning' an unfortunate reification (see Säljö, 2002, for a discussion of things ontologies). That is, the metaphorical quality of these notions both imply that the what of learning is a thing, while what children learn in preschool and school tends to be matters(!) such as perspectives, ways of communicating, new plays/ways of playing, learning how to learn, and much else that are difficult to perceive as things. The 'contents' we are interested in in our present study are those that are constituted in interaction between participants in play activities. Even if a teacher may plan for, and metaphorically speaking 'plants', for example, conceptual challenges in a play frame, what we are particularly interested in is, if so, whether children respond to these challenges, that is, if they become a matter of negotiation and/or use in continuing activity.

A problem with the metaphorics of 'content', which it shares with 'object', is that it implies that it can be neatly captured, as if it were something that once-and-for-all is fixed/set. However, even such well-defined contents of educational discourse as scientific concepts are by their very nature revisable and developmental. A problem with the implied reification of the metaphorics of 'object' and 'content' is that discussions about learning tend to be reduced to whether children 'know or should know the correct answer or not'. These questions are such simplifications that they become banalization. As we have frequently pointed out, learning is a dynamic process of sense making; what someone learns is not a simple copy of what is taught or rather instructed.

Etymologically, the word 'content' denotes "what is contained"; 'contain' from Latin *continere*, "hold together" (Barnhart, 2004, pp. 213 and 212). Metaphorically, the word 'content' implies what is inside something (some kind of container). The latter – that is, a container – is a common but problematic metaphor for context (see our discussion about this below). However, the etymology of the word 'content' as 'hold together' allows us to conceptualize content as being contextually constituted and as such being part of constituting contexts. There is a dialectic between alluding, or more directly relating to, what one engages with to other experience, thus contextualizing what one engages with in terms of something more familiar; at the

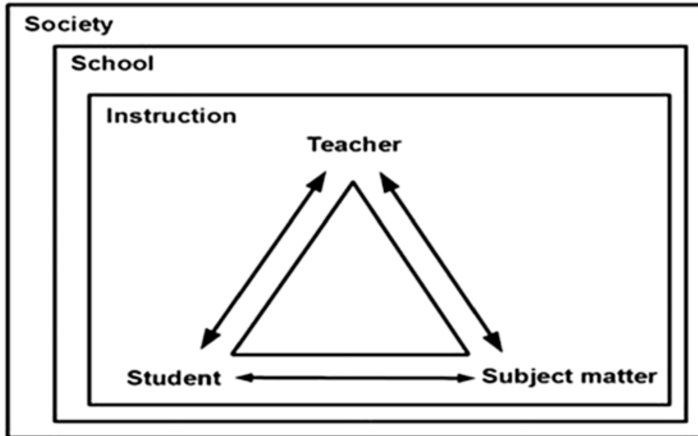

Fig. 2.1 The expanded didactic triangle. (Hudson & Meyer, 2011, p. 18)

same time, constituting what is attended to in certain terms (as such or such, an example of, similar to…) contributes to constituting context(s), that is weaves together (cf. that which 'holds together') past and present experience in sense making.

Didaktik is complex in that it involves at least two persons and something that one intends the other(s) to discern. The teacher and the child(ren) are commonly seen as two counter-parts in a *didaktikal* triangle (see Fig. 2.1), but in terms of inter-subjectivity, as a vital part of communicating and playing together, it is not obvious that it is only the person known as "the learner" who learns. It is equally important that the teacher is responsive to learning about the child's perspective and knowledge as made visible in interaction. Teaching in our conception premises the importance of participants establishing temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity, that is, not only that they share attention on something, but also that their perspectives are coordinated sufficiently for them to go on with a joint activity. Still, participants enter shared activities with qualitatively different ways of understanding and leave the same activities with partly other and different experience. Hence, participating in mutual activities is not premised to result in participants developing identical concepts.

Context and Contextualizing

The basic model of *didaktik* is the triad constituted by teacher – student – content. In line with such a model, fundamental to what we refer to as teaching is that two (or more) participants share attention – and we would add, (partially) perspective – on something 'third' (Tomasello, 1999). In terms of the basic model of *didaktik*

(teacher – learner – content), how a teacher enters into the relationship the learner has with the content is critical.

In an attempt to develop the didactic triangle, Hudson and Meyer (2011) have proposed a model (see Fig. 2.1) encompassing not only relations between teacher, child and content, but also instruction and social contexts.

According to this model, the triadic teacher-student-subject matter relationship is at the core of the instructional process, and the triangle can be understood as the center of other relationships. The first expansion is to add the classroom. Focusing on the instructional process, however, is not enough. There is a second necessary expansion, acknowledging schools [preschools] as subsystems in our society (Hudson & Meyer, 2011, 18).

The triangle is useful to our understanding, but some meta-comment is necessary. This graphical representation, like all other such representations, builds upon particular metaphors. Critically what is at stake in this kind of representation is the theoretical notion of context. That representations are metaphorical in the sense that they present something as if they were something else that they in a literal sense are not, make it analytically necessary to clarify how they are conceptualized. Phrased in other terms, it is analytically important to clarify what features of what is being represented is represented by the model and what features of the model are not representative of what is being represented. This is a classic problem in the philosophy of science (and in philosophy more generally) (see e.g., Hesse, 1966, for an introduction).

In terms of context, there is an important theoretical distinction to be made between different metaphors. Traditionally, context is represented and conceptualized as "that which surrounds" (Cole, 1996). This concept of context is "often represented as a set of concentric circles" that stand for different "levels of context" (p. 133). This concept and model of context is, as Cole points out, perhaps most familiar in developmental research from the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner on the ecology of human development (see e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1986). An inherent problem with this conception is that context becomes a number of containers, making it difficult to account for (a) context as a dynamic phenomenon and (b) the nature of the relationship between these, beyond one simply containing the other in a succession. That is, this conception of context makes it problematic to account for phenomena such as learning, development and interaction as evolving and developmental ones, and the relationship between contexts tends to be seen as a matter of 'influence'. However, in order to account for dynamic activities such as learning we need conceptualizations that do not constitute phenomena in static terms, and suggesting that there is 'influence' between the 'levels of contexts' provides no explanation; instead it provides a form of black-boxing. With an interest in learning and development and related phenomena, we need to be able to account for how relationships matter. From the perspective we take in this study, the mechanism of the relationships between, for example, the individual and the institutional setting is communication (Wertsch, 1998).

Even if being cognizant of the inherent problems with metaphors for contexts in the form of boxes within boxes – what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) refer to as

'container metaphors' – these tend to be used. One example is the frame-analysis perspective of Erving Goffman. In his writing on frames, relevant to the present project, he writes about frames being laminated (Goffman, 1974/1986), that is, one or several frames can be contained within a wider frame. An additional problem with the container metaphor for context – and its alleged 'influence' – is that it yields an image according to which every participant is equally 'influenced' by the context. However, we know from research that all participants (whether children or adults) in an activity do not exit the activity with identical understanding. Rather, they not only enter the activity with different experience and participate in the activity in different ways; they also leave the activity with partly different experience. The container metaphor for context is not responsive to these facts.

In order to avoid the identified problems with container metaphors for contexts, van Oers (1998) has made an important distinction between 'context' and 'contextualizing'. The latter is responsive to the learner's perspective and to human activities as dynamically unfolding. Contextualizing refers to the sense made by participants, that is, what they see something *as*. For example, if one child sees an image as looking like a space ship, while another child sees the same image as a house, and the teachers sees it as an example of watercolor painting, the participants contextualize what they see and do in different ways. Etymologically, the word 'context' goes back to the Latin word "*contexere*, which means 'to weave together'" (Cole, 1996, p. 135). Elaborating on this meaning of context – and one of its constituent metaphors, 'rope' (cf. 'textile') – Cole argues:

> When context is thought of in this way, it cannot be reduced to that which surrounds. It is, rather, a qualitative relation between a minimum of two analytical entities (threads), which are two moments in a single process. The boundaries between 'task and its context' are not clear-cut and static but ambiguous and dynamic. As a general rule, that which is taken as object and that which is taken as that-which-surrounds-the-object are constituted by the very act of naming them. (Cole, 1996, p. 135)

This reasoning per implication puts to the forefront the analytical issue of how we account for context in empirical research, highlighting the need for interactional data where we can access and analyze participants' perspectives and how they invoke and orient toward contexts through their verbal and other actions.

Summary

In this chapter, we discussed how the key phenomena of educational and developmental research often are transformed from processes into products, and how this reminds us of the value of interactional data and analysis. We also introduced the concept of teaching – as arguably characteristic of human life –, a concept that with the current study we intend to contribute, making it relevant to preschool (early childhood education). Finally, we discussed *didaktik* (as distinct from didactics) and how it, among other things, highlights content and contextualizing. In discussing

the latter concept, we reconnected with critique against so-called influence models.

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Chapter 3
Playing, Playworlds, and Early Childhood Education

In this chapter, we introduce the notion of play, and explain why it is critical *not* to delimit this term to something *sui generis*. Rather, following scholars from different traditions – the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein, on the one hand, and the theoretical work of van Oers, on the other, we will argue for the need for a more open-ended take on play. This matter is discussed in this chapter.

A Brief Note on Play Theories

The phenomenon of play has interested scholars from many fields (evolutionary theorists, philosophers, developmental researchers, and others) for a long time. There are therefore a number of play theories, that is, theoretical accounts on what play is and why it exists. In meta-discussions of such theories, they are commonly differentiated into classical and modern theories. Classical theories take different form, viewing play in terms of energy: surplus energy ("play is essentially 'blowing off steam'", Mellou, 1994, p. 91; see also Henricks, 2019) – exemplified by the work of Friedrich Schilller and Herbert Spencer – or the opposite view of energy deficiency ("play as an activity deriving from an energy deficit," implying that "the purpose of play is to restore energy expended in work"; Mellou, 1994, p. 92). Other classical theories view play in terms of instincts: play as practicing for adult activities ("strengthening instincts needed for the future"; Mellou, 1994, p. 92) or play as recapitulation in ontogeny (the individual's development) of phylogeny (the development of the species), exemplified by Karl Groos and G. Stanley Hall, respectively (for a discussion of modern evolutionary-based theories of play, see Bateson, 2011). These classical theories are generally what Mellou (1994) refers to as "'armchair' theories, based more on philosophical reflection" than on empirical research. Still, Henricks concludes his discussion; "it is best to see the classical theories as inspirations, or beginnings, of analysis. The quest of the classic theorists,

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which was to define play's nature and comprehend its general implications, remains very important" (Henricks, 2019, p. 380).

Modern theories (i.e., theories developed during the last century) include psychoanalytical theory, according to which play is important to a child's emotional development, having "a cathartic effect, which allows children to rid themselves of negative feelings associated with traumatic events" (Mellou, 1994, p. 93), metacommunicative theory, emphasizing that in play, children "learn to operate simultaneously at two levels: (a) the make-believe meanings of objects and actions; and (b) their own identities, the other players' real identities, and the real-life meanings of the objects and actions used in the play" (Mellou, 1994, p. 95). Finally, there are theories concerned with play and cognitive development, exemplified by Piaget and Vygotsky. Central to modern theories of play is that they add the question of what role play plays in the child's development. The discussion about the claims and bases of these modern theories primarily revolves around the question of whether there is any relationship between play and learning (cognitive development, creativity). Some theorists present such relationships while others remain skeptical, arguing, for example, that the benefits of play found in studies are "mainly due to the interaction involved in tutoring whether the context was a fantasy one or not" (Mellou, 1994, p. 97). We note that the theories here briefly presented actualize conceptual issues we discuss in the present volume, including context (and contextualizing) and learning – if, as we do, and in line with a sociocultural perspective, arguing that people learn from all activities they participate in, then surely play constitutes no exception to this rule; the question is then instead *what* they learn and *how*. With the exception of the first classical theories mentioned above (energy theories), all play theories here discussed conceive play as related to learning, but in different ways and explained differently.

These play theories all have what could be referred to as essentialist conceptions of play. That is, they are concerned with the matter of "what play is" (Burghardt, 2011, p. 10); necessitating definition clarifying "what are the commonalities undergirding all play types" (p. 10). In explicitly discussing this theoretical ambition, Burghardt (2011) argues that such a definition is necessary in order to be able to "distinguish the essential from the inessential" (p. 13). He thus proposes (here cited from its latest incarnation) that play is behavior that:

1. appears incompletely functional in the context expressed
2. is voluntary, rewarding, pleasurable, or done for its own sake
3. is in some ways modified structurally or developmentally as compared with its functional counterpart
4. is repeated in recognizable but not necessarily invariant form
5. is initiated when the animal is not under more than mild stress due to poor health, bad environmental conditions, social upheaval, or intense conflicting emotional states such as hunger, thirst, wariness of enemies or predators, and so on. (Burghardt & Pellis, 2019, p. 13)

As we discuss in the present volume, there are certainly objections that could be made to several of these criteria. We will not repeat these here. Arguably, the fact

that this definition is made to include other animals than humans, makes it too abstract to be functional in clarifying the nature and processes of human play; the latter including cultural tools and practices and their transformation.

As we have already mentioned, the play theories here briefly discussed are all what could be referred to as essentialist perspectives, that is, theoretical positions from which play *sui generis* could (and needs) to be defined. Our perspective constitutes a rather radical departure from this common ground amongst different play perspectives, in that we paradoxically argue that it may be, and with our interest is, instrumental to study play *without* defining it (as something in itself, encompassing all instances and delimiting these from adjacent phenomena). Our perspective, of course, does not imply that perspectives defining play are in the wrong; on the contrary, with an interest in, for example, particular forms of play, it is critical to define the object of study (e.g., rough-and-tumble play or role-play). But our interest is not in particular forms of play (or what play is) but rather how participants themselves make known to each other (and thus, per implication, make this visible to the analyst) how they 'take' actions and activities (shifting between acting *as if* and *as is* – we develop this reasoning elsewhere in this volume).

Rather than attempting to define in any clear-cut manner what play *is*, we will thus suggest another way of approaching this phenomenon in our studies. Play has eluded scholarly definition for a long time, not in want of attempts to do so (see e.g., Burghardt, 2011; Burghardt & Pellis, 2019; and Sutton-Smith, 1997, for meta-discussions). Rather than defining beforehand what play 'is', in a manner that encompasses all activities referred to in these terms and at the same time distinguishes these from adjacent kinds of activities, we will build on the philosophical insights of Ludwig Wittgenstein and primarily consider play as the participants' concern. In his later philosophy, Wittgenstein argued that some concepts are better seen in terms of what he calls 'family resemblances' (1953, §§65–67). According to this reasoning, there are no for the 'family' exclusive features that are shared by all 'members', that is, features that are common to all 'members' and at the same time unique to this 'family'. In his elaboration of this idea, Wittgenstein uses the example of 'games':

> Consider for example the proceedings that we call 'games'. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? – Don't say: 'There *must* be something common, or they would not be called "games"' – but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all. – For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. (ibid., §66, italics in original)

Like 'games' in this example, 'play' could be considered a family (see also Cook, 1997, and Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012, where this is also discussed in these terms). Instead of trying to delimit what games or play really have in common and what separate them from adjacent phenomena or activities, Wittgenstein thus suggests considering these in terms of 'family resemblances':

> I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour

> of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: 'games' form a family. (ibid., §67)

Hence, while there may be 'family resemblances' among the 'members of a family', such as eye colour or height, these are not necessarily shared by all 'members' of the 'family', nor exclusive to this family (also in other 'families' there may be brown eyes or tall people). This reasoning proves challenging to the traditional way of defining a concept. However, the metaphor of family resemblances, we argue, is more functional than such an approach to understanding, and in a study managing, the activities generally referred to as 'play'. Theoretically, this implies that while there may be features that are shared by most instances of what would typically be referred to as 'play', we cannot presume that all such instances will share these features. Rather, we may expect a 'criss-cross' of various features to intersect irregularly. Hence, some features may be presumed to be characteristic of play activities children engage in, but not necessarily unique to or common to all these (and other play activities). This more complex understanding of play than defining beforehand 'what it is', has two implications for our present concerns. *First*, it is important in the nature of theoretically informed empirical research to make explicit the theoretical premises and conceptual resources mediating (Wertsch, 2007) our analysis of data, and, *second*, to be open to the matter of play as the participants' own concern. The latter means that what we are primarily interested in is how the participants themselves make known to each other that they speak and in other ways act *as if*, that is, play with reality, and when they do not do so (speak and in other ways act *as is*).

Building on Wittgenstein (1953), on family resemblances, and van Oers (2014), on how activities are formatted – that is, the understanding that any activity can be playfully or procedurally formatted –, we, thus, argue that it is important *not* to define play (what it *is* or *should be*); this would prevent us from being open to how features of the family of play (to speak with Wittgenstein) come into play in initiating, during and concluding mutual activities. Then how do we identify play if there is no traditional definition of it? In the nature of family resemblances, there will be features that recur, but these are not exclusive to the phenomenon in question. In our case, what we look for is shifts between engaging in an activity *as is* and *as if*, the latter an important indicator of play; but in line with our reasoning and Wittgenstein's family resemblances, *as if* is not exclusive to play; also theoretical work in science or fiction, such as novels and movies, render the world *as if*. And play can be initiated without engaging *as if*, at least initially, instead being signaled among potential participants through meta-communication (e.g., 'Let's play…'). The distinction of *as is* and *as if* does not constitute a dichotomy – a mode of thinking we, with educational thinkers such as Dewey and Vygotsky (see also, Pramling, Doverborg, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2017), critique –; when we empirically studied children's and teacher's activities we found that established works of fiction/plays (i.e., *as if*) can come to gain standing by the children *as is* (i.e., as something set that cannot be played with). Still, shifts between talking and in other ways acting *as is* and *as if* are functional in identifying play without needing to try to, in traditional terms, define play. Rather than ask if an activity *is* play (as

defined by certain criteria distinguishing it from non-play), with our approach we can thus analyze different participants' perspectives on activity and how this may fluctuate (participants and activity may fall in and out of play) and be re-negotiated as participants orient toward each other's perspectives (intersubjectivity) and respond to suggested reorientation or development (alterity; see Chap. 4).

The Development of Play: Actions, Objects, and Meaning

In his work on play, Vygotsky has been particularly concerned with two issues: *the origin and development of play*, and *the role of play in the development of the child* during the preschool age. He localizes the origin of play in emergence of unrealizable desires in the preschool child. As an infant, the child's desires (for food and comfort) were possible for the minder to realize. However, during the preschool age, Vygotsky reasons, the child develops desires that cannot be realized (immediately). In response to these unrealizable desires, play emerges in the child. Hence, according to this reasoning, play is understood as "the imaginary, illusory realization of unrealizable desires", with imagination being a "new formation which is not present in the consciousness of the very young child" (Vygotsky, 1933/1966, p. 8). However, the child is not premised to know the motives of his or her play, which are considered generalized affects rather than isolated, particular desires. What is particular of play activities, in this perspective, is the creation of an imaginary situation. Creating such a situation "is possible on the basis of the separation of the fields of vision and meaning which appears in the preschool period" (p. 8). We will discuss what this means and implies, below. Vygotsky also connects his discussion of play to the matter of the freedom of play. In doing so, he emphasizes that "there is no such thing as play without rules" (p. 9). For example, if "[t]he child imagines herself to be the mother and the doll the child, [then] she must obey the rules of maternal behavior" (p. 9). Hence, in our somewhat alternative terms, within the frame of a particular kind of play (e.g., family play), certain rules co-constitute the play. Vygotsky formulates this thus: "In play the child is free. But this is an illusory freedom" (p. 10). Even if the child is free to decide what to play – this is, however, we may add, contingent on her cultural experience (see further, Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012) –, in the nature of this play, there are certain play rules without which it would not be this play.

The ability to engage in imaginary situations, Vygotsky (1933/1966) further suggests, liberates the child from situational constraints. The behavior of the very young child – the infant – "is determined by the conditions in which the activity takes place" (p. 11). This discussion has clear bearing on the issue of the material basis of play, as much discussed in contemporary educational philosophy; however, without falling into the pitfalls of much of these more recent discussions. Vygotsky writes about "the motivating nature of things for a very young child" (p. 11). With reference to Kurt Lewin's work, he suggests that

> things dictate to the child what he [or she] must do: a door demands to be opened and closed, a staircase to be run up, a bell to be rung. In short, things have an inherent motivating force in respect to a very young child's actions and determine the child's behavior. (p. 11)

The reason for this deterministic nature of things (material objects) on the young child, Vygotsky argues, is that perception, affection and motor activity have not yet been differentiated. Hence, for the child to perceive, feel and tactilely engage with objects are not separate: "every perception is in this way a stimulus to activity" (p. 11). Not separating what he or she sees, on the one hand, and grabbing, touching, pressing the object, on the other, means that the child's behavior is contingent on the nature of the physical environment. Vygotsky illustrates this unity of perception and activity with the example of a child "when asked to repeat the sentence 'Tanya is standing up' when Tanya is sitting in front of him [or her], will change it to 'Tanya is sitting down'" (p. 12). This also means that there is no distinction made between the word for something and what it refers to. Language has not been discerned as something in itself; rather it is fused with what it is used to talk about. The field of meaning and the field of perception are one and the same for the young child. It should here be pointed out that it is not entirely clear at what age the child develops the ability to distinguish between perception, affection and motor activity, and thus between the visual field and the field of meaning; it may also be the case that children due to other experience and forms of socialization are able to do so earlier today than in Vygotsky's time, but our concern here is not with when children are able to do so, but *that* they do so and the important implications this has for the development of play and learning in and from play.

Some time during the preschool years, the child develops the ability to separate the field of vision (what he or she actually sees in the milieu) from the field of meaning. This separation occurs in play when actions are separated from objects, and meaning comes to arise from ideas rather than from objects:

> Thought is separated from objects because a piece of wood begins to be a doll and a stick becomes a horse. Action according to rules begins to be determined by ideas and not by objects themselves. This is such a reversal of the child's relationship to the real, immediate, concrete situation that it is hard to evaluate its full significance. (p. 12)

This is not done easily; rather the ability to make this separation develops, requiring some object to first function as a pivot; that is, the stick may become a horse, but only later can the horse be enacted in play without a physical object (e.g., a stick), entirely in the imaginary sphere.

At first, the child perceives objects as they are designed. However, with the development of his or her speech, the child is able to sever the meaning of the object from the object, allowing her to constitute a new meaning. Hence, from the object having 'decided' the meaning, the meaning (it comes to serve in play) decides the object (i.e., what it is; e.g., the stick is a horse). Doing this kind of transformation of objects – ascribing them new meaning – is something the child first does without realizing that this is what she does;

> just as a child, before he [or she] has acquired grammatical and written speech, knows how to do things but does not know that he [or she] knows, i.e., he [or she] does not realize or master them voluntarily. In play a child unconsciously and spontaneously makes use of the fact that he [or she] can separate meaning from an object without knowing he [she] is doing it; he [she] does not know that he [she] is speaking in prose just as he [she] talks without paying attention to the words. (p. 13)

Hence, awareness in the child of what he or she does develops during the course of playing. Vygotsky formulates this in terms of action and meaning, arguing that for a young child "action dominates over meaning and is incompletely understood; a child is able to do more than he [or she] can understand" (p. 14). This reasoning thus implies the importance of engaging children in mutual activities and through this participation become aware of what they know – as well, we might add – that others may know differently (cf. Pramling, 1996).

> Just as operating with the meanings of things leads to abstract thought, in volitional decision the determining factor is not the fulfillment of the action but its meaning. In play an action replaces another action just as an object replaces another object. How does the child 'float' from one object to another, from one action to another? This is accomplished by movement in the field of meaning – not connected with the visible field or with real objects. (p. 15)

When the child is able to separate object from meaning, allowing her to give the object a new meaning in the context of play, the environment to large extent loses its 'motivating force' (see above). The child becomes able to play with reality, rather than being 'steered' by it. It is vitally in this creative space that play takes place; the mundane world can be transformed into imaginary realities.

In his discussion of the development of play – and the child's development through playing – Vygotsky makes use of the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD):

> The play-development relationship can be compared to the instruction-development relationship, but play provides a background for changes in needs and in consciousness of a much wider nature. Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development. Action in the imaginary sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives – all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development. (p. 16)

In the context of this discussion, he also introduces the concept of 'leading activity': "The child moves forward essentially through play activity. Only in this sense can play be termed a leading activity which determines the child's development" (p. 16). Saying that play is the 'leading activity' of the preschool-age child, and that studying is the leading activity of the school-age child, means that this is the dominant form of developmental engagement at a particular cultural community at a particular time, not that the child does not learn anything while in preschool ('merely playing').

While the ability to separate the field of vision (and thus the dependency on material objects) from the field of meaning is integral to the development of play, Vygotsky also discusses how "the child starts with an imaginary situation when initially this imaginary situation is so very close to the real one" (p. 16). At this stage

of starting to play, "[p]lay is more nearly recollection than imagination – that is, it is more memory in action than a novel imaginary situation" (p. 16). This means that when children start to play (a particular kind of play, e.g., going to the supermarket to shop food), she does so in a manner primarily imitative of what she experienced going there with her caregivers. Gradually, however, she starts developing the play, introducing novel features and perhaps actors, more clearly separating the play from its experiential basis. This reasoning implies the importance to the development of children's play to (a) allow them to make rich experience from and with which they can play, and (b) therefore also the importance of more experienced participants (caregivers, preschool teachers, siblings, friends) who can provide new cultural resources for imagination and play. Imagination in this perspective is therefore not something primarily internal (the ability to imagine is, however, gradually appropriated so that the child becomes able to engage in imagination without overt action), but a means for broadening a person's experience (Fleer, 2011), making possible for the child to engage in what she herself has not experienced firsthand. Building on Vygotsky's work on play (1933/1966), Fleer in addition makes the point that children's play is 'bidirectional', that is, "When children give new meanings to objects in their play they move away from reality, but when they test out the rules of society through role play, they move towards reality" (Fleer, 2011, p. 231). We will return to this line of reasoning when we present Fleer's study more in-depth, as well as when we discuss Vaihinger's theoretical work (1924/2001).

Key-References in Research on Play

In this section, we review some studies of more general interest to our present study. These are studies that, in part, share our research interest, and also work that highlights more fundamental issues such as how adhering to play as fundamental to children's learning and development is contingent on sociocultural traditions. Other important research, that we build upon, is instead presented in the context of particular empirical analyses.

A quite well known study, conducted by Lindqvist (1995) bears some more detailed commentary since the present study in several ways aligns with it. The purpose of Lindqvist's study was to study "in what way the aesthetic subjects, mainly in the forms of drama and literature, can influence and enrich children's play" (1995, p. 19). A basic premise of her study is that it is "a reaction against the preschool approach to play as a 'free' activity and an expression of children's self-regulation," instead arguing for the need to regard "play as a cultural activity which concerns both adults and children" (p. 5). The influence of drama and literature on children's play is studied in the context of what Lindqvist refers to as "an extensive didactic project" (p. 18), where a drama pedagogue introduces a number of stories within the framework of a theme called *Alone in the Big, Wide World*. These stories

included *Pippi Longstocking in the South Seas* (*Pippi Långstrump*), *Alfie Atkins* (*Alfons Åberg*), *Peter No-tail* (*Pelle Svanslös*), Samuel Beckett's *Act Without Words*, and Tove Jansson's *The Invisible Child*. After dramatizing, children with their 'pedagogues' played with the characters and themes.

Discussing play, Lindqvist (1995) asks, "Why is play not clearly defined in preschools?" (p. 23). While agreeing with her that it is important to recognize play in early childhood education, the question, as posed, builds on a problematic premise: that play can be defined in a clear-cut manner (that play essentially is something). In contrast, and as we discussed earlier in this chapter, we argue in line with van Oers (2014) that any activity can be more or less playfully formatted (implying that play is part of a continuum rather than a separate entity) and with Wittgenstein (1953) that what we call play is characterized by family resemblances rather than inherent properties uniting all such activity while at the same time distinguish these from adjacent kinds of activities (see also, Pellegrini, 2011b, on play as being both "ephemeral and versatile" rather than a "unitary construct", p. 4). Hence, from our perspective, the question is not what play is, but rather how play (in many of its varied forms), so to speak, come in play in shared activities in early childhood education (and how teaching can be responsive to these actions).

Reading Lindqvist's study is fascinating; it provides many vivid and engaging descriptions of the emergence of play through dramatizing. However, while illuminating, the mode of presenting data in the form of narrative descriptions makes it less functional for closer analysis and critical scrutiny. It is, for example, not possible to see how many of the claims made are actually grounded in represented empirical data, and it is not possible to re-analyze the data presented with an interest in the more specific processes of interaction (e.g., the fluctuation of intersubjectivity and what it means to the trajectory of play), as we do in the present study. It is therefore, unfortunately, not possible to discuss how to understand the similarities and differences between the findings reported in her study with the findings of the present study. What we can clarify, on a more abstract level, is how these two studies relate to each other. We do so in Table 3.1.

As can be seen in Table 3.1, while there are clear similarities between Lindqvist's (1995) and our study, there are also important differences: not least that we are interested in developing a concept of play-responsive teaching for preschool, while she is interested in the 'influence' of culture in the form of aesthetics on children's play (the problematic notion of 'influence' is discussed in Chap. 2 of the present book). What we share is an appreciation of play in preschool as culturally and institutionally embedded and, hence, where the personnel (referred to by Lindqvist in terms of pedagogues but by us as preschool teachers) have important roles to fill as participants in shared imaginary activities (playworlds). However, as we argue, it is also important that there is some shifting and relationship building between these imaginations (*as if*) and *as is*.

Table 3.1 A schematic presentation of some of the similarities and differences between Lindqvist (1995) and the present study

Lindqvist (1995)	The present study
Interest in how the aesthetics subjects (primarily drama and literature) "can influence and enrich children's play" (p. 19)	Interest in the processes of play-responsive teaching in early childhood education
Particular theme (Alone in the Big, Wide World) introduced by a drama pedagogue	Ordinary activities[a] introduced by the preschool teachers or the children themselves
Talk about 'content' (the theme, alternatively "the literary text (the story)" (p. 219)	Talk about 'content' as what is constituted in talk in play activities
Talk about teaching ("it is the dialogue between child and adult that teaches the child the cultural, aesthetic forms", p. 214); however, the term 'teach(ing)' is never conceptualized	Talk about teaching as play-responsive directed coordinated activity (this is basically what we develop and theorize in the present study, see Chap. 12 of the present volume)
Builds on an "influence" (e.g., pp. 19, 70 *et passim*) model to account for the relationship between drama and literature and play	Builds on a mutually constitutive relationship among participants in activity (and provides a critique of an influence model; see Chap. 2)
Problematizing 'free play'	Problematizing 'free play'
A didactic project (didactics is not explicitly conceptualized in the study)	A combined research and development project in early childhood *didaktik*
Builds in part on Vygotsky (particularly *The Psychology of Art*)	Builds in part on Vygotsky (particularly his work on the cultural development of the child)
Empirical data (primarily) in the form of video observations	Empirical data (primarily) in the form of video observations
Studying "*planned* dramatizations and *organized* play sequences" (p. 68, italics in original)	Studying spontaneous, by children initiated, as well as by preschool teachers initiated, play

Descriptive/narrative rendering	Transcripts and Interaction Analysis
Emphasizes the importance of adults sharing playworlds with children	Emphasizes the importance of adults sharing imaginary (*as if*) activities (playworlds) with children and shifting between and relating such *as-if* worlds with *as-is* experience and forms of knowing
Outcomes of the study emphasize children's play as developing (on the basis of teaching) and adults/pedagogues becoming more "play-minded" (p. 18), and thus, the importance of adults/pedagogues to children's play	Outcomes of the study emphasize playing as something learnt (this goes for children as well as adults), thus also the importance of the preschool teachers to children's play, and a conceptualization of teaching as play-responsive activity within an early childhood education *didaktik*

[a]What is here meant by 'ordinary' preschool activities is mundane, non-exotic, activities in which children and teachers engage (see Chap. 4 for an elaboration). In contrast to much work of a developmental kind, we do not study experts from outside preschool entering and conducting activities; the latter is particularly common in studies of arts education, where musicians or artists come and do things with children (Marjanovic-Shane, Connery, & John-Steiner, 2010; cf. also Lindqvist's, 1995, work, where a professional drama teacher comes to the preschool). Ordinary, in our present account, also means that activities are in line with the institutional arrangements, conditions and regulations; concretely, this means that there are no tests or evaluations of individual children's knowledge, that knowledge is not compartmentalized (Bruner, 1990) and transmitted as subject matters in delimited lessons. Hence, the activities we analyze could be considered 'ordinary' in the sense that they are not alien to early childhood education (preschool) in Sweden, where we conduct our research (and in other countries). Of course, from some cultural horizons, this kind of ECEC may appear alien.

An additional note that could be made in the context of this discussion is that since we do not discuss the concept of the child, it may appear that we premise a universal child. There are three points we would like to make in response to this concern. *First*, being responsive to children means to be open to differences among children in experience and knowledge; hence, this perspective premises that children in a group differ, and furthermore that this is a fundamental asset in all participating children's development (see Pramling, 1996, for an elaboration). *Second*, our analytical focus is not on particular children but on activities (and these encompass the group of children with their variation, the teacher, and cultural tools made use of). *Third*, it could be argued that we presume – albeit in a very particular sense – a universal child, in the sense that we argue that the theoretical perspective we develop and its practical implications are not exclusive to particular children, but would be beneficial for all children.

Developmental Education/Basic Education

There are many overlapping ideas between Developmental Education (DE), as developed in the Netherlands by Bert van Oers and colleagues, and our present work and perspective (in Table 3.2, we point out some important convergences as well as note some differences). Briefly, DE (or Basic Education as it is referred to with the younger children; the approach of DE is for primary school at large), is an approach, grounded in Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory.

Evidently, there are many mutual points of reference between the work of van Oers and colleagues and our present work, and their contribution is duly appreciated and acknowledged. It may also be pondered over the fact that despite grounded in a particular theory versus in empirical study in ECEC settings (and primarily in another theoretical tradition), many conclusions drawn are the same and the two

Table 3.2 Similarities and differences between Developmental Education/Basic Education (DE/BE) and Play-Responsive Early Childhood Education and Care (PRECEC)

Developmental Education (DE) (van Oers, 2012b), for younger children (4–8 years called Basic Education (BE); Janssen-Vos & Pompert, 2012; van Oers, 2012a)	Play-Responsive Early Childhood Education and Care (PRECEC)
"[A]ims at broad development of children's agency, and at facilitating children's appropriation of a wide range of cultural tools in different curricular areas (literacy, mathematics, art, technology, moral thinking etc.)" (van Oers, 2012a, p. 290)	Widen the child's cultural experience through giving her access to an increased repertoire of cultural tools and practices (per implication facilitating the child's agency)
Founded on theory	Founded on empirical study in preschools
Built on Vygotskian cultural-historical theory	Built on Vygotskian cultural-historical theory (sociocultural perspective) and – and primarily – other theoretical traditions: phenomenography, variation theory, and developmental pedagogy
Implemented in primary schools	Founded on actual activities in preschool; no need to transform knowledge to be applicable in ECEC settings
Emphasizes teaching to be based on playfully formatted activities that make sense to the child	Emphasizes being responsive to play (and that formatting may fluctuate during the course of activity, and, importantly, that such shifts between what we call *as if* and *as is* are critical access and development nodes for this form of educational work with young children)
Descriptive (on rare occasions: de Haan, 2012; Roof, 2012; van Oers & Poland, 2012, conversational data are represented; however, these snippets of data are not analyzed in terms of interaction), in fact, "the need for more detailed" "empirical evidence" is explicitly emphasized by van Oers (2012a, p. 294)	Interaction Analysis of empirical data

approaches appear like intellectual siblings. What provides the basis for our contribution with the present study is that we do Interaction Analysis (IA) of empirical data from everyday preschool activities. IA allows us to illuminate in detail the nature of the processes of teaching in play-responsive ways (e.g., how children and preschool teachers participate in, and contribute to such activities, how these activities emerge and develop, and how and what contents come into play and are appropriated). Through this analysis, we are able to contribute to the important work of, for example, Lindqvist (1995) and van Oers and colleagues (as summarized in van Oers, 2012b). That many conclusions drawn by these three studies at least to some extent converge provide mutual strengthening of claims made and a basis for conceptual generalization.

Another scholar conducting key work in the domain to which we intend to contribute, Marilyn Fleer, in a number of publications, has researched and theorized children's conceptual development in play-based settings. In one particularly relevant study (Fleer, 2011), she clarifies how engaging children in imagination is critical to play and the conceptual development of what is sometimes referred to as academic content. As van Oers and his colleagues' work (see above), and in part our work, Fleer's work is theoretically grounded in Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory. Arguing that imagination and play traditionally have been seen as individual achievements, disconnected from reality, Fleer emphasizes that such conceptions make it difficult for early years teachers to contribute to children's play and development as well as making it difficult for scholars to theorize these processes. Instead building on Vygotsky's work, imagination is understood as a means of broadening a child's (as well as adults') experience; that is, imagination allows us to experience what we have not seen or heard ourselves (cf. Luria, 1976). Imagination and play also builds on the child's experience; there is thus an important dialectic between experience and imagination and play (ibid.; Vygotsky, 1930/2004, 1933/1966). Rather than being disconnected from reality, Fleer (2011) argues that imagination move children toward and away from reality, and that it is always related to reality. Imagination moving the child toward reality can be exemplified by role-play; in exploring social roles children learn about real life. An object becoming something else can exemplify imagination moving the child away from reality (Vygotsky's famous example of the broom becoming a horse; Vygotsky, 1933/1966; or a table becoming a tree-hut). Since we only in part build upon the same theoretical ground as Fleer (2011) our terminologies are not entirely overlapping; however, they are compatible (cf., e.g., moving toward and away from reality with shifting between acting *as is* and *as if*). Through moving in and out of reality (or in our terms, shifting between speaking and in other ways acting *as is* and *as if*) – as children do in play – they develop an awareness of this distinction between imagination and reality, Fleer argues. This allows children to investigate as well as liberate them from their immediate surroundings (Fleer, 2011; cf. our discussion of agency in Chap. 12 of the present volume):

> With this background play experience, children can engage with the concrete materials deliberately introduced to them as representations of ideas that teachers wish children to examine – such as when a one-centimeter block is used to represent a rudimentary measure-

> ment tool in mathematics. Giving new meaning to a block (i.e. a measurement device) is not such a huge conceptual leap for children when they have had experiences in imaginary situations giving new meanings to objects in play. [—] Through making conscious the distinction between imagination and reality in play, children are conceptually primed to work with real objects and imagined (or abstract) ideas which represent reality. Thus allowing for a profound penetration of reality whilst at the same time becoming liberated from earlier […] forms of cognition. (p. 231)

Hence, according to this reasoning, it is through engaging children in imaginative play activities that early childhood education fosters the foundations of conceptual development, and hence, also academic learning. This perspective therefore implies particular pedagogical roles played by teachers:

> Rather than the teacher noticing what the child has found, or the children being encouraged to see what else they can find, the teacher considers what might be the core concept that would be necessary for the child to build relational knowledge between what they find, the habitat in which it is found, and the food sources available [Fleer's empirical example is in the domain of ecology]. That is, the teacher reduces the complexity of the material world to the essence of a core concept. A core concept that will help the child make meaning of their surroundings. Importantly the teacher must help the child see the interdependence between habitat, species and food source. It is an understanding of the relations between these that creates theoretical thinking for the young child. (p. 233)

This is a pedagogical role quite distinct from commonly held assumptions about not intervening in the child's own exploration of the world (cf. Hedges', 2014, critical discussion, referred to later in this chapter). Fleer's (2011) study also contains an excellent illustration of the everyday importance of conceptual understanding (reminding us, lest we forget, that concepts are not merely relevant to the scientific/academic disciplines):

> What is important here for building children's theoretical knowledge and thinking is how the child's relationship to the material world changes. [—] For example, young children who accompany their family on shopping trips, helping to find groceries, will develop everyday understandings about a shopping centre, knowing that if asked to find a toothbrush, that this item will be found somewhere along one of the aisles. They are likely to run up and down the aisles until they find it. However, if a child has a concept of a shopping centre being a classification system, then their actions are likely to be very different – that is, they are likely to find the toiletries section first, and then locate the toothbrush. This is a more direct and theoretically informed approach. Having a concept of a classification system as a theoretical model is a highly imaginative activity, allowing for a transformation of how children think and act in the material world. (pp. 234–235)

Developing children's conceptual understanding is important to the child's everyday life, not only to his or her subsequent academic success; it allows children to act and experience the world in more purposive and functional ways. Importantly, Fleer's work (2011, see also 2010) provides ample ground for understanding how engaging children in imagination and play are critical to such development, and also therefore should remain as foundational to early childhood education practices rather than be replaced by direct instruction (see also our discussion in Chap. 12 of the present volume). While recognizing the kinship of our work and Fleer's work, what we can contribute to this literature is close interaction analyses of the processes of play activities where a number of different contents are constituted and concepts actualized (and perhaps appropriated).

The Diversity of Beliefs about and Practices of Play

In an extensive and thorough review of international research on adults' beliefs about play, children's play with parents, and children's own play, Roopnarine (2011) conceptualizes play as "both culturally framed and unframed activities that are subsumed under the umbrella of 'playfulness'" (p. 20). This conception is elaborated thus:

> As distinguished from conventional definitions of play, playfulness is a more universal phenomenon and includes childhood and parent-child unframed play activities that co-occur during caregiving and in children's encounters with different individuals and objects within specific developmental niches. (p. 20)

This notion of playfulness appears in line with how we approach play in the present study. However, while Roopnarine includes what she refers to as 'framed and unframed activities', that is, both activities initiated as play and playfulness that enters other kind of activities, we would argue that when children (or adults) introduce playfulness into what has been initiated as activities other than play, they in fact, at least temporarily, reframes the activity as play(ful). Still, the openness to identifying and analyzing playfulness beyond activates clearly initiated in terms of play is necessary, we adhere to, when investigating what we refer to as play-responsive teaching.

An important finding of Roopnarine's review is that parents differ in their view of the merits of play. Parents from what is referred to as European or European-heritage cultures, and particularly among higher-educated middle-class backgrounds, differ in being positive to "'concerted cultivation' during socialization (constantly coaching, creating opportunities) compared to low-income families who believe that children naturally acquire certain skills" (p. 21), including play support. Regarding the latter,

> here was a positive relationship between play support and parental education, and an inverse relationship between parental education and academic focus, suggesting that parents with higher levels of educational attainment were more likely to endorse play as a means for learning early cognitive and social skills than those with lower levels of educational attainment. (p. 23)

That is, higher-educated parents are more positive to play as a means of facilitating children's development – and children's development more generally than promoting particular learning outcomes – than lower-educated parents. Among the latter group, "economic and social pressures may lead parents to choose didactic approaches over play in early education in order to minimize the risk of attendant to school failure later on" (p. 22). It is important to realize that what is here referred to as 'didactic approaches' denote practices based on traditional school instruction, and therefore practices markedly different from what we, in the present study, refer to as (play-responsive) *didaktik* (see Chap. 2 *et passim*).

Not surprisingly, but importantly, variation in parental beliefs concerning the value of play corresponds with the frequency, nature and quality of parent-child play (Roopnarine, 2011), with parents in European and European-heritage

communities engaging, for example, in playful activities with children and objects in ways that involve labelling more than parents with other cultural backgrounds.

The role – if any – of play in education is, of course, controversial (e.g., Pellegrini, 2011a, 2011b).[1] In their extensive review of studies on play in education, Fisher, Hirsch-Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer, and Berk (2011) deduce this controversy to a more long-standing debate on how children learn. They argue that historically there are two traditions to this question, what they refer to as "the 'empty vessel' approach" and "the whole-child perspective", respectively (p. 342). The former is presented thus:

> Arising from the essentialist and behaviorist philosophies, some believe that there is a core set of basic skills that children must learn and a carefully planned, scripted pedagogy is the ideal teaching practice. In this 'direct instruction' perspective, teachers become agents of transmission, identifying and communicating need-to-know facts that define academic success. Learning is compartmentalized into domain-specific lessons (mathematics, reading, language) to ensure the appropriate knowledge is being conveyed. Worksheets, memorization, and assessment often characterize this approach – with little academic value associated with play, even in preschool. (p. 342)

In terms of Swedish preschool, we argue, such an approach is not feasible; in Swedish preschool there are no worksheets or assessment of children's knowledge (this is not allowed according to law), neither is knowledge compartmentalized into the instruction of particular subjects as such (themes rather than lessons constitute the form of facilitating children's experience and learning). In addition, the notions of direct instruction and transmission of knowledge are unproductive to understand how teachers and others facilitate children's development and learning, as we extensively discuss in the present volume; see also the important distinction we make between 'instruction' and 'teaching' in Chap. 12).

In contrast to the 'empty vessel' approach, described by Fisher et al. (2011) above, they present what they refer to as 'the whole-child approach', in which children themselves are ascribed an active role in their learning, where meaningfulness is critical, and "play, in particular, represents a predominant method for children to acquire information, practice skills, and engage in activities that expand their repertoire" (p. 342). A recurring concept in discussions and theorizing emphasizing children's active participation is agency (Clarke, Howley, Resnick, & Rosé, 2016; see also, Chap. 12 of the present volume).

While our present position is aligned with the latter conception (i.e., what is above referred to as 'the whole-child approach', as distinct to an 'empty vessel' approach), it is important to remember that dichotomies like the above distinction are simplifications necessary for some analytical purpose. In actual practice – as necessarily investigated empirically – one would not expect to find clear-cut examples of either one. While sympathetic with the latter, rather than the former perspective, something that is under-communicated in the latter is the important

[1] Burghardt (2011) renders experience that "it is often necessary to avoid the label 'play' when seeking to integrate playful activities into school curricula. The lay view that play is not serious, and thus not important to 'real' education, is still all too common" (p. 10; see also the discussion of Vaihinger (1924/2001) in the present volume for a powerful refutation of such objections).

roles of more experienced peers and in particular teachers in children's learning and development. Hence, rather than arguing for one or the other position (perspective), it is critical to theorize teaching in play-based activities in more nuanced ways than what dichotomies allow.

Reviewing studies on play and learning, Fisher et al. (2011) conclude that "the findings show that play can be gently scaffolded by a teacher/adult to promote curricular goals while still maintaining critical aspects of play" (p. 342). What they refer to as 'playful learning' consists of two parts: free play and guided play. The latter has two aspects: adults enriching children's environment with toys and other objects relevant to a curricular domain (e.g., literacy), and adults playing along with children, including critically, asking questions and "the teacher may model ways to expand the child's repertoire (e.g., make sounds, talk to other animals, use it to 'pull' a wagon)" (p. 343). Hence, while children's play provides the basis for this form of pedagogy, "teacher guidance will be essential" (p. 343). Teacher guidance, as Fisher et al. point out, "falls on a continuum" (p. 343), that is, the question is not whether or not the teacher participates (or should participate) but the extent to – and more critically, how – she does so.

The example of developing preschool children's shape concepts can illustrate the merits of this form of pedagogy. In the study, children were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: guided play, direct instruction or control condition. In the guided play condition, children were encouraged to "discover the 'secret of the shapes'" and adults asked what the researchers refer to as 'leading questions', such as how many sides there are to a shape. In the instruction condition, in contrast, the adult verbally described the shape properties to children. In the control condition children listened to a story instead of engaging with shapes. Afterwards the children were asked to draw and sort shapes.

> Results from a shape-sorting task revealed that guided play and direct instruction appear equal in learning outcomes for simple, familiar shapes (e.g., circles). However, children in the guided play condition showed significantly superior geometric knowledge for the novel, highly complex shape (pentagon) than the other conditions. For the complex shapes, the direct instruction and control conditions performed similarly. The findings suggest discovery through engagement and teacher commentary (dialogic inquiry) are key elements that foster shape learning in guided play. (p. 345)

Hence, there is no difference in learning outcomes between guided play and direct instruction when it comes to relatively simple content, but when it comes to more complex content, guided play outperforms direct instruction; in fact, as found, when it comes to complex content, direct instruction was no better than what the control group performed (i.e., in this case, direct instruction made no difference to learning outcomes, on a group level). As clarified by Fisher et al.'s reasoning, teacher participation is critical to the success of guided play, not least to engage children in talking about the matters at hand and how these may be understood.

In their extensive review of research on play and learning, Fisher et al. (2011) show how correlational, interventional, and comparative research all show the benefits of learning on the basis of play. They give examples from domains such as language and literacy, and mathematics, as well as social and self-regulative skills.

Particularly dramatic play is emphasized as developing children's language and literacy skills, requiring play partners to make known to others their intentions and play scenarios, and for participants to synthesize their ideas and suggestions into a shared narrative.

While there are many commonalities between the explanatory framework of Fisher et al. (2011) and our present study, differences in research traditions also emerge. This is evident when Fisher et al. ask, "What are the optimal combinations for literacy development (e.g., the number of literacy learning activities, length of time per activity, time devoted to free vs. guided play)?" (p. 349). These are all quantitative matters, that is how much of X and Y are optimal to support children's development. In contrast, from our theoretical point of view, what we need to ask is qualitative questions, for instance, what qualities of teacher-child interaction, and children's interaction, are critical to scaffold children's development in various domains of knowing; what modes of participation by more experienced participants such as teachers promote children's play, and through play, learning beyond play; in what way can conceptual resources necessary for the development of play be planted within the framing of ongoing play, and how may these conceptual resources be planted in establishing a mutual play frame for children to play in and beyond? These are all questions that require a different kind of analysis and, in part, different kind of empirical data, to the questions posed by Fisher et al. Asking the kinds of questions we pursue in the present study requires detailed interactional data from everyday activities in preschool (for further discussion, see Chap. 4).

Analyzing and discussing discourses on play and learning in early childhood education, Hedges (2014) argues that "reluctance to incorporate content in children's learning arises from non-empirical traditions and ideologies" (p. 192). A historical precursor to what is today often voiced as objecting to ambitions to support children's learning in early childhood education, is Rousseau (see also, Chap. 1 of the present volume):

> In the eighteenth century, Rousseau promoted play as a natural form of children's healthy development as playful, innocent and optimistic human beings. The role of education was to let these instinctive abilities unfold without adult interference. The type and extent of content knowledge learning developed in this apparently effortless way remained unspecified and Rousseau's ideas were developed without any empirical basis (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). Yet these ideas have been the origins of a long-held child-centered ideology related to play as a spontaneous activity that ought not to be interfered with. (p. 193f.)

In terms of a common set of metaphors, children's abilities have thus come to be seen as 'unfolding' (as if prewritten on a piece of paper that, when unfolded ('de-veloped'), reveals what is already there waiting to be recognized. Accordingly, teachers and other adults should not 'intervene' in the allegedly natural scheme of things. As Hedges (2014) points out, such a stance risks making content knowledge invisible and unattended. In contrast, and recognizing the importance of allowing children to develop insights into many domains of knowing, Hedges argues that some critical questions to such approaches are "when adults might provide input into children's spontaneous play, what the substance of that input might be and the pedagogical framing for such contributions" (p. 196). The questions are well aligned

with the interest of the present project. Building her reasoning on research by Fleer (2010) and others, Hedges (2014) concludes that "playful and integrated pedagogical models depend on teachers' ability to recognize and act on possible links between play and content in a genuine way. This is in contrast to trying to slip content disingenuously into children's play, emphasizing content as if it were the only end-goal of play or teaching content didactically" (p. 200f.). (As we have already clarified what we refer to as *didaktik* in the original German/continental tradition is markedly different to what in the English-speaking world is referred to as didactics.) In our study, we intend to analyze such 'links' between, primarily playing and teaching, and thus in extension with learning.

The Sociogenesis of Forms of Play and Its Implication for ECEC

As cogently argued, and based on empirical study (e.g., anthropology), by Elkonin (2005), even traditional toys and forms of play with a long history that appear to be unchanging have in fact changed over time. The development of toys and forms of play is further intimately interwoven with the child's changing place in society. The origin and development of role play constitutes one illustrative example. Basically, Elkonin's line of argument is this: In a traditional society, there is a low level of division of labor and people live and work together. This also means that child rearing is not separated from socialization to work. Phrased differently, the world of children and adults is to a large extent the same. Without a clear division of labor, every child needs to learn what adults know, and after a brief period in which the child is a 'child', he or she starts to work with adults. The child learns through participating in the world shared with adults (work).

With new conditions of living – agriculture and animal husbandry – more complex forms of production emerge. These forms of production are associated with the invention of new tools (e.g., the plow). This leads to a greater division of labor in society, and children's world becomes increasingly separated from the world of adults (work). With the emergence of such new tools, children can no longer practice the mastery of these; a plow, to continue with the example given, is far too heavy for children to handle and a miniature plow cannot be put behind an ox to plow the earth. It is at this point in time that what may be referred to as 'real toys' emerge, that is, objects that represent real work tools but that cannot be used in such a way. While we do not focus on toys per se in the present study, Elkonin's historical elaboration also incorporates the emergence of new forms of play, which has more direct relevance to our present concern.

When children can no longer share or prepare for adult activity (work), children start to role play. That is, when no longer able to participate in adults' work, children start playing what they perceive adults doing. Hence, Elkonin concludes, role play develops in the course of society's historical evolution as a result of changes in the

child's place in the system of social relationships. It is thus social in origin as well as in nature (Elkonin, 2005), rather than something evolving naturally irrespective of socio-cultural situation.

To reiterate, the historical development of role play illustrates how new forms of production (work) is associated with new tools. The invention of such tools necessitates an increased division of labor in society. This results in children starting to interact more with other children than with adults, and that childhood as a developmental phase is prolonged (cf. Dewey, 1916/2008). Observing what adults do but children cannot (due to, e.g., lack of physical strength), children start role playing what adults do. This separation of children from the everyday life of adults eventually leads to the institutionalization of educational arrangements (preschool, school) since children's learning and development need to be catered for in other ways than through participation in adult work. With this separation from the immediate work of the closest adults, opportunities for choosing from a wider repertoire emerges. That is, the child no longer by necessity develops the same kind of skills that its caregivers and extended social family have, but can be introduced to also other skills and forms of knowing. Increasingly, the child's repertoire of forms of knowledge is critical to establishing socially just institutions (Pramling, Kultti, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2019). Facilitating such more multifaceted development is done through introducing children to forms of play (e.g., what roles they can play in society beyond those immediately available to each child) and cultural tools of various kinds (e.g., crayons, pens and paper, hammer, nails, saw, etc.) associated with forms of activity.

Elkonin's work provides an important reminder that adults, such as preschool teachers, are critical to expanding the experiential basis of children's imagination (what children can imagine possible to do, engage with; cf. Fleer, 2011) and that such more experienced co-participants are critical to making sure children are given ample opportunity and support to develop their play and are introduced to new forms of play (and thus to new forms of skills and knowledge).

Engaging the Youngest Children in Teaching Activities *as Is* and *as If*

How preschool teachers interact with the youngest children in preschool in ways that make visible some of children's experience and allow them to start appropriating new perspectives was studied by Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson (2010). Studying evolving activities, with small groups of children aged 1–3 years, around some simple objects (buttons, containers and a blanket), what repertoire(s) children were introduced to and engaged in was analyzed. These encompassed:

- Co-fantasizing (where the buttons were used as props in evolving playful fantasies).
- Enacting aesthetic sense and sharing joy (i.e., attending to sensuous experience: how the buttons feel and sound)

Table 3.3 A schematic meta-illustration of two forms of activity: one more static in nature (cultural reproduction) and one more dynamic (human development). Adjusted from Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson (2010, p. 28)

Static (cultural reproduction)	Dynamic (human development)
As is (size, colour, shape etc.)	*As if* (pretend play, what something looks like, metaphor)
The objects *per se*	The activities afforded by the objects (e.g., sound-making)
Conventional	Unconventional (creative)
Remain with what is at hand (the buttons)	Go beyond (associate, re-connect to what is outside) the present objects (and situation)

- Exploring what something is and/or how it can be used (i.e., attending to the colour, shape, size of the buttons, or that they can be rolled and be put on clothes)
- Speaking and in other ways acting in metaphorical terms (where the buttons become, or remind of, e.g., snowballs, leaves, fruits and vegetables)
- Receiving and giving acknowledgement (i.e., showing each other what one sees, and receiving confirmation and perhaps a name for the object; cf. Tomasello, 1999, on joint attention)

In some of the studied groups, all these forms of activity were present; in some other groups this was not the case. These activities show different ways that teachers can engage children in joint activities supporting children's identity as knower (receiving acknowledgement and confirmation) and support their further development (e.g., becoming aware of new ways of making use of the objects at hand and the perspectives from which these can be perceived: *as is* and *as if*). The kinds of activities analytically discerned are clearly not mutually exclusive. For example, speaking and in other ways acting in metaphorical terms may, through others' responsive engagement, develop into continued co-fantasizing. However, the nature of these activities may for analytical reasons be schematically described as distinct, with one seen as a form of 'cultural reproduction' and the other as 'human development' (Bruner, 1996), that is, where one is focused on introducing children to and passing on established forms of knowing, the other is focused on generating their ability to think anew and make novel sense (see Table 3.3).

It is important not to read this schematic elaboration as dichotomous, that is, as if *didaktik* was a matter of one or the other. Rather, during the course of an activity, there may be shifts between these, temporarily privileging one or the other. It is also important not to read this in normative terms, that is, as if one was better than the other. Rather, from an analytical perspective, it is clear that children in their development need to be engaged in both strands of activities, and thus be given ample opportunities and support to learn what something is (as established, shared knowledge) and what something may be (as if it were). The importance of this variety of experience, and appropriating a repertoire of different perspectives (cf. Pramling, 1996) can be emphasized in terms of what developmental psychologist Katherine Nelson argues constitutes a distinguishing human characteristic: our 'hybrid mind' (Nelson, 1996, 2009), that is, the human ability to render the world and our experience in a great variety of ways: narrative, paradigmatic, mathematical, musical, poetical, embodied, and many others.

The discussed example also serves to highlight that *didaktik* is not restricted to teaching in the mode of *as is*; this form of joint activity may also be carried out in the mode of *as if*, and importantly – as we will argue and show empirically in this study – to go between these modes of sense making.

Summary

In this chapter, we have reviewed key theory and research on play and its relation to teaching and learning. Particularly, we have acknowledged the work of Vygotsky, Elkonin, Lindqvist, van Oers and colleagues, and Fleer. We also presented meta-studies, including work on socio-cultural variation in caregiver beliefs about play, learning and development. Finally, we have discussed work showing empirically how teaching is not restricted to *as is*, but also can encompass *as if*.

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Chapter 4
A Combined Research and Development Project

The present project is a combined research and development project. This means that researchers (with preschool teachers and heads) intend to generate new knowledge about, in our case, play-responsive *didaktik* while, at the same time, researchers providing in-service education of preschool teachers and heads. We have a long tradition of conducting such combined projects, dating back to the early 1980s (see Pramling, 1996, and Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2007, for presentations and meta-analyses), and many subsequent projects (see e.g., Björklund & Alkhede, 2017; Palmér & Björklund, 2017; Pramling Samuelsson, Asplund Carlsson, Olsson, Pramling, & Wallerstedt, 2009). There are many gains with such projects, as we will discuss later in this chapter. However, first we will discuss matters of method and methodology, clarifying practical and analytical procedures, transcription, and ethics. The present volume builds on theoretically informed empirical research. This means that the claims to knowledge we present are both empirically grounded and theoretically mediated.

Empirical Data, Transcription and Analytical Procedure

With the interest in how play-responsive *didaktik* relevant to early childhood education (in the Swedish context: preschool) plays out and can be theoretically understood, we need to have empirical data of children (and teachers) playing. In our previous research we have often asked teachers to orchestrate, that is, organize for, children to be able to discern and understand something in a domain of knowing (see Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2013a, for a meta-discussion). These studies have proven highly informative as to what developmental challenges and support teachers, and other children, have offered the developing child. However, they have not been particularly responsive to children's play (other than containing some space for and elements of children's playfulness, see e.g., Björklund, 2014;

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Björklund & Pramling Samuelsson, 2013; Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2013b). In furthering our knowledge about how to provide developmental incentive and support in preschool, as a fundamentally play-based institution, we need other kinds of empirical data. Therefore, in the present project we have the ambition of studying play activities with an interest in how teachers through different means provide developmental incentive and support to children. However, documenting children's play is more challenging to research than organized, planned activities where a teacher sits with a group of children with the ambition to make children discern and become aware of some form of knowing. Play activities tend to occur more spontaneously and may take place over different spaces making it difficult to document. Still, studying play activities is critical to making sure that research on play-based *didaktik* is ecologically valid, that is, that the knowledge claims generated are actually grounded in the setting and activity about which claims are made.

Therefore, in the present project we have generated three kinds of empirical data. In order to be responsive to the phenomenon investigated, we have asked the teachers to document activities. This allows us to generate data of more spontaneously occurring activities. We have asked the teachers to document activities where they intend to contribute to children's play and learning by:

- Entering as participants – play partners – in children's ongoing play
- Being attentive of recurring plays (play patterns) and contribute to developing these further, and
- Establishing new play frames (narratives) for children to play in and from

Asking teachers to do so allows us to generate rich empirical data of different kinds of play activities to which teachers intend to contribute in different ways. Asking teachers to *enter as participants* means that teachers try to take a role in children's ongoing play and in this way attempt to provide some developmental incentive to discover new relationships or forms of knowing. Asking teachers to be *attentive to recurring plays* means that if teachers notice that children tend to play a particular kind of play, she can try to provide additional means of playing that play in a more developed way. This is particularly important if she notices that some children always are given marginalized roles in the play. To give an example: if children recurrently play shop, buying and selling goods, the teacher could attempt to make children aware that the merchandise sold comes from somewhere, that is, is bought from another place, they are produced/manufactured somewhere, their prices differ, they are stored according to some criteria in the shop in order for costumers to find what they are looking for etc. If children's conception of a shop or store is merely a place where you buy things, their play may be developed simply by making them aware that it could also be conceived of as a categorization system, that is, what is sold is not merely put on shelves in a random manner; there are sections where dry food is located, vegetables in another, meat in one and, like perishables, in a cooler section (and why that is). This basic conceptual knowledge (Fleer, 2011) can provide incentive to develop their play. Other contributions may concern the fact that what is sold is packaged in certain ways, serving many functions (conservation, transportation, aesthetics and so on), which may also engage children in developing

their play (how to advertise a product, for example). Finally, asking teachers to *establish a play frame* means to try to engage children in a narrative (a make-believe world or scenario) within and from which they can they play on. Hence, we ask teachers to try to initiate play activities, through establishing a narrative play frame, as well as being responsive to what children recurrently and presently play. What we are interested in is how these activities develop, not whether the teacher or the children initiate them. It is the nature of the developing plays and narratives that are theoretically premised to be decisive for what developmental incentive and support children are given in these kinds of early childhood education and care activities.

As we have already argued, there are important gains with generating empirical data in this way. However, there are also problems; the most critical being that the films documenting the evolving play activities have often begun before the films begin. This means that in many cases we will not know (other than through teachers' remembering) how they were initiated; the exception, of course, being the alternative where teachers try to establish a narrative frame for children to play in and from. Another problem is that data may be somewhat fragmentary, that is, we may not have the activities documented from initiation to conclusion. This is due to their often longevity, making it practically difficult to document the activity in its entirety. Of course, it is not always entirely clear-cut at what point an activity is initiated and concluded, respectively. From our theoretical point of departure, these acts are understood as responsive, that is, it is when someone responds to an initiation to play that it is seen as commencing, and similarly, is concluded when others cease to respond to play actions.

One initial problem with our approach was to fully share our research questions with the participating preschool teachers, in the sense that at first the teachers tried to produce films they thought we would like to see, rather than having a more open approach, where we do not beforehand know what will be of most interest to analyze. There appeared to be some initial frustration amongst some teachers that the researchers did not simply say what they wanted the teachers to do. However, clarifying that research entails not knowing beforehand what we set out to study were gradually accepted by the teachers. With our interest in teaching in the context of playfully-formatted activities (van Oers, 2014), the preschool teachers are integral actors in the activities we analyze (e.g., how they make attempts to enter ongoing play, how they plant contents in play). This entails that one contribution of our study will be to develop knowledge about the play competences of preschool teachers rather than about play as such (but as we clarify, with van Oers, 2014, and Wittgenstein, 1953, we do not conceptualize play as something separate, but as a feature of activities) or so-called free play (without preschool teachers or other adults). Hence, our interest in teaching in this way sets the boundaries for our research focus.

As we have already presented, we generate data in the project through asking the preschool teachers to document activities through video observations. The project is a combined research and development project, and we work with the data and the knowledge-building process in particular ways. The set-up is the following:

Researchers, preschool teachers and preschool heads have regular meetings. At these meetings, preschool teachers present their films, through providing some background information and showing their films. This is done in smaller groups of approximately 10 participants. Having reviewed a film, all participants share and discuss what they have noticed of relevance to our mutual interest in play-responsive teaching and *didaktik*. Having reviewed all films, all participants reconvene and discuss what the initial analyses have made visible. Thereafter, the research group presents the (next) theme to be pursued through empirical investigation; presenting theoretical tools for understanding features of children's play and how teachers may be able to contribute to these. Initially, preschool personnel and researchers met, reviewed and analyzed films regularly for a year before the project proper commenced. When the project begun in earnest, three themes were introduced to structure in-service education and empirical investigation. These were:

- Intersubjectivity
- Communicative framing/narrative
- Meta-talk

These themes were chosen on the basis of previous research having indicated their importance to understanding evolving activities with children and teachers (e.g., Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2011). Practically, the researchers gave a lecture as each theme was introduced, followed by a discussion with the preschool teachers and heads, employing empirical examples, to make sure there was enough consensus to use these concepts as thinking devices in our further exploration. Finally, each meeting was concluded by the preschool teachers being asked to generate empirical data of one of the three alternatives discussed above to bring to the next meeting. After the meetings, the researchers transcribe the films, which are collected into a corpus. These transcripts then provide the grounds for in-depth analyses by the research group, resulting in studies consisting of case studies (e.g., Björklund, Magnusson, & Palmér, 2018; Lagerlöf & Wallerstedt, 2018) as well as more global and thematic presentations (e.g., the present volume). This structure, of introducing themes and conceptual resources, and generating and mutually analyzing and discussing data have then been reiterated with the addition of new participating preschool teachers and heads.

The experiences of the participants – preschool teachers and heads, and researchers – have been very positive; looking at and together reviewing and discussing empirical data generated in the participants' preschools provides a productive node for interaction, exchanging experience and generating new insights. This way of working also means that the knowledge generated does not have a 'translation' problem; no additional work to adapt the knowledge to current practices is necessary, since it is already founded on and generated in those practices. The knowledge generated is ecologically valid; meaning not only firmly based in the practices about which it makes claims but also useful to the everyday work of preschool teachers in supporting and organizing for children's development.

The transcripts are analyzed on a turn-by-turn basis, that is, how activities are sequentially organized by participants (Derry et al., 2010; Wells, 1999). Every

action – verbal as well as conducted with other semiotic means such as pointing or handing over a toy – is read in response to previous action(s) and at times anticipating coming responses. In order to clarify the sense made by participants, a minimum of three consecutive actions (operationalized in the transcript as turns) are necessary; someone acts (e.g., initiates a play), another participant responds (agreeing explicitly or implicitly through going on in the suggested way), and the first participant (or another participant) responds, explicitly agreeing or disagreeing, or implicitly agreeing through going on with the activity. If agreement is not received, explicitly or implicitly, the participant initiating the activity will need to restate the suggestion, make a new suggestion, or engage in meta-talk, elaborating on how or why the suggestion is worthwhile. Through analyzing how participants respond to each other's responses, it is possible to clarify how they make sense and make their sense known to each other. Hence, the participants' actions are analyzed in terms of their perspectives, for example, whether and if so how they make clear to each other that they speak and in other ways act in make-believe terms (*as if*), and coordinate their actions accordingly, or not, and how and why they shift between this *as-if* mode and an *as-is* mode, theoretically premised to be critical to the matter of providing developmental support in play-responsive activities (for further elaboration, see below in this chapter).

As we have already mentioned, the video observations we have access to have been selected by the preschool teachers themselves. The gains of this approach were discussed above. A potential problem with such a procedure of generating data that we have not discussed is that it may create an incentive in the teachers of selecting to share documentations where they in a sense 'succeed' with what they try to accomplish. This may be even more emphasized if they know that the head of the preschool will also see their films. In order to counter this risk, we have at times put the heads of the preschools in a separate group, where they with some of the members of the research group discussed their concerns about, for example, how to organize for working with developing children. We have also recurrently talked with the teachers about this, emphasized the importance of also gaining examples where, for example, intersubjectivity is *not* established between participants, since this may be much informative as to why activities develop in one or the other way, and we have explicated the meta-message that it is in contrasts that things appear. Looking at the corpus of data, and taking part of the reflections of the preschool teachers about these, it is clear that they have in fact not only selected films where things go as planned, but also films where they themselves think that they in some sense did not achieve what they intended.

There is, of course, a further selection process, taking place when researchers in their in-depth analysis single out excerpts from the transcripts for presenting analyses and studies. As Derry et al. (2010) elaborate, there are different criteria according to which such selection can take place. They make a distinction between two ways of selecting data from video: "(a) to locate and analyze data for the purpose of finding patterns within and across events; or (b) to use video clips more holistically to support an evolving narrative. In practice, many research projects blend both selection logistics" (p. 14f.). Also in the present project have we used

both forms of selection; with the more holistic selections being analyzed in the form of case studies (Björklund et al., 2018; Lagerlöf & Wallerstedt, 2018) and, at least in part, the patterns of interaction across films being analyzed in the present volume.

A note on transcription: In the transcripts, we use literal conventions such as initial upper-case letter, comma and point, despite these features not being present in spoken discourse. We do so in order to facilitate reading comprehension. Names written in upper-case letters in the transcripts denote the teacher(s). Text in italics indicate talk in play (i.e., in character) as distinct to talk about play (or outside of play).

Prevailing ethical guidelines of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association have been followed (EECERA, 2015; cf. Farrell, 2016, for further information and in-depth discussion; also the guidelines of the Swedish Research Council). This means, among other things, that participation is voluntary, that all participants (and, in the case of the children, their caregivers) have given consent for participation, and that no identifying information will be provided when reporting the study.

Intersubjectivity and Alterity

Attempts to make sure that participants not only share attention but also perspective, that is seek to establish intersubjetivity (Rommetveit, 1974) is, as we have already argued, a critical feature of activities denoted teaching. As theoretically elaborated by Rommetveit, intersubjectivity is a process, not a state, constantly under negotiation among participants in an activity; it is at best temporarily sufficient, that is allows participants to 'go on' with an activity (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953). Without such intersubjectivity, participants will talk past each other and effectively engage in distinct activities (Bendroth Karlsson, 1996; Skantz Åberg, 2018); and what one partner does may not make much sense to the other(s). Attempts to establish intersubjectivity is generally done through engaging in some form of meta-talk (Lagerlöf, Wallerstedt, & Pramling, 2014), that is, explicating and clarifying what one means, what perspective one takes on the matter at hand.

In the nature of communication, there is an inherent tension between participants making attempts to coordinate their communicative efforts – that is, establish temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity – and different understanding among them. That is, what participants take with them from communicative encounters will not be identical; rather, participants enter activities with partly different understanding and they leave the activity with partly different understanding. This is independent of the nature of teaching, even if the activity can be more or less powerful to support children developing certain insights or forms of knowing. Theoretically, intersubjectivity is thus paired with the concept of alterity (Wertsch, 1998). This concept and the relationship to intersubjectivity are thus elaborated:

> The general point to be made about intersubjectivity and alterity […] is not that communication is best understood in terms of one or the other in isolation. Instead, virtually every

> text [communicative activity] is viewed as involving both univocal, information-transmission characteristics, and hence intersubjectivity, as well as dialogic, thought-generating tendencies, and hence alterity. (Wertsch, 1998, p. 117)

Intersubjectivity can be understood as what participants do to establish some mutual ground, allowing them to coordinate their actions into one shared activity or project (e.g., a play project). Alterity indicates that whether temporarily managing to establish such intersubjectivity or not, different perspectives, voices and understanding will be at play during mutual activities. How these differences are managed – negotiated, picked up, suppressed, challenged – will be critical to how the activity (or activities) engaged in will develop, their trajectories. Making children aware, through making visible, that there is a naturally occurring variation in the group in terms of experience and understanding constitutes a key practice of the tradition to which we intend to contribute with the present study (see e.g., Pramling, 1990, 1994, 1996).

From these theoretical premises, that is, that communication lives in the dynamic tension between processes of attempting to establish intersubjectivity and alterity, situations where participants come to explicitly negotiate how to understand what they do, or are going to do – for example, what play to play or how a particular kind of play 'goes' – will be illuminative instances of how meaning is created in mutual activities. Hence, occasions when participants shift from talking and acting within an activity, for example a play, and when they 'go out of' that communicative frame or narrative to, through meta-talk, clarify what they mean and intend are of particular interest for studying play-responsive *didaktik*. Meta-talk may also be employed when activities are initiated and play frames (narratives) are suggested and developed (see e.g., Lagerlöf, Wallerstedt, & Pramling, 2013). How such narrative frames are constituted will open up for particular forms of actions, contributions and participation, rather than others. However, in the nature of evolving activity, through processes of alterity, there will always be the possibility that also the narrative 'within' which the play is played out will come up for re-negotiation and transformation. If and if so how this is done is also of great interest to research on play-responsive *didaktik*, in indicating what participants orient toward and how different understandings and intentions come into play, and potentially generate new understanding. Informed by these theoretical premises, initiating narrative frames for children to play within, and potentially beyond, is one thing we have asked the teachers participating in our study to do (see above).

In line with, and building upon the theorizing of Rommetveit (1974), Linell (2014) points out that "Intersubjectivity is not automatic, inevitable or complete" (p. 180); "The other, whoever (s)he is, is not quite as oneself". This reasoning highlights "*alterity*, the role of the other as being *different from self*. Communication is not always about striving for mutual understanding or consensus" (ibid., italics in original). "There is a positive value in alterity, in the lack of complete intersubjectivity. Without differences, there would often be no point in communicating" (ibid.). "Asymmetries of knowledge are a driving force in social interaction" (p. 181). Without differences in experience, we would in principle not have anything of value

to tell one another. That is, it is our different experience that constitutes the basic premise for our communicative activities, that is, what at a fundamental level makes it interesting for us to communicate (Pramling, 2016). However, this difference must also be understood in relation to the simultaneous process of striving towards some temporarily shared understanding, otherwise all communication would simply be attempts to submerge the interlocutor under one's own understanding. Rather, trying to clarify what one means and understand what the interlocutor (or play partner) means with what he or she says is also a driving force in communication. As Wertsch (1998) emphasizes, and we have already mentioned, there are always processes of intersubjectivity and alterity in communication (cf. Matusov, 1996). However, the relationship between these processes and the development of the activity in which they take place may be fundamentally different (e.g., trying to establish mutual play vs. trying to convince someone of one's political opinion).

In his elaboration of the concept of 'intersubjectivity', Matusov (1996) emphasizes that this process is one of coordinating actions, not necessarily sharing perspectives. He argues that in psychological research a distinction has been made between "three sequential movements of joint activity: the beginning, the intermediate, and the end" (p. 29). According to this distinction, the first phase concerns what he refers to as participants having some "common backgrounds", constituting a precondition for communication; the second phase is characterized by participants "creating a common ground of engagement" (encompassing some mutual understanding of the situation); and the end phase concerns "a common outcome of the joint activity, what is learned in the activity by all the participants" (loc. cit.). Phrased differently, we can say that what is here referred to as the first phase concerns what Rommetveit (1974) has argued in terms of "intersubjectivity has to be taken for granted in order to be achieved" (p. 56), that is, we have to presume something to be able to start communicating with each other (cf. Wittgenstein, 1969). What Matusov (1996) refers to as the intermediate phase of intersubjectivity concerns the negotiating work with which we are particularly concerned, as it highlights how different perspectives come into play and are responded to in mutual activities. Finally, what Matusov (1996) refers to as the end phase, premised to be "a common outcome of the joint activity" is not feasible from our perspective. We cannot presume that there is such a common outcome from participating in a joint activity. Rather, we know from research (see e.g., Marton, Dahlgren, Svensson, & Säljö, 1977/1999, for clear examples) that learners not only enter an activity with (partly) different experience and knowing but they also leave the activity with (partly) different experience and knowing. There is no causality or linearity between participating in an activity – whether a teaching activity or any other activity – and learning, what sense participants make of the activity.

Matusov (1996), critical of the assumptions of the three phases of intersubjectivity briefly rendered above, points out that "differences, disagreements, and misunderstandings among the participants are no less relevant to the joint activity than similarities, agreements, and understanding" (p. 29). As we have already discussed, this is certainly the case; without such alterity, there is not much incentive to go on communicating. However, even to participate in an activity that at heart concerns

disagreement, such as an argument, interlocutors must presume some intersubjectivity, that arguing is what they do and that this entails certain practices (responding, perspectivising, finding discrepancies in the other's rendering, trying to convince the interlocutor of one's position etc.). The relationship between processes of intersubjectivity and alterity thus also needs to be understood as situated; if returning to our example of a teacher intending to make children aware of geometrical shapes (see Chaps. 1 and 2 of the present volume), participants (teacher and children) may have different perspectives on the physical objects at hand. They may perceive these in terms of their size, colour, material, and/or other features. However, if the teacher intends to make children aware that there are certain geometrical shapes, it is important that this is made known in the activity. This does not mean to simplify the world into disregarding other characteristics of the objects at hand, such as colour or size, but it entails making known that despite their difference in colour, size etc. there are some mutual properties, in this example, their shapes. In other activities, for example, trying to establish a play project (see Matusov, 1996, on 'playcrafting'), participants may disagree as to what to play, how to play, and what role each child is to have in this play. At this stage of the activity, alterity will be highlighted. However, in order to actually go on with a play project, being able to play a mutual play, some intersubjectivity needs to be established. Still, in the nature of this process, intersubjectivity will be temporary and sufficient to go on with a joint activity; it is not theoretically presumed that all participants understand the play in the same way. However, the participants themselves may presume – that is, take for granted – that they have agreed on what to play and how to play, but during the play activity instances of alterity is likely to come to the fore, as evident in participants shifting from talking and in other ways acting *within the play frame* to meta-communicating *about it*, before returning to the play frame and continue playing, initiating a new play or end playing together.

Language as Constitutive and Perspectivizing

Language is particularly important to our present endeavors; language not understood as a reflection of, or as a set of labels for, objects in the world. Rather, language is understood as constitutive (Vološinov, 1929/1986). Through language we bring into being phenomena in certain terms rather than others. This means that we do something with language. This perspective also means that communicating always implies perspectivizing, that is, we always take a perspective when speaking. Vološinov (1929/1986) expresses this with a pair of ocular metaphors; arguing that language 'refracts' rather than 'reflects' phenomena, that is, with language we see something *as* something. In the Vygotskian tradition, this feature of language and language practices would be conceptualized in terms of 'semiotic mediation' (Wertsch, 2007). That language is constitutive further means that we cannot speak without (temporarily) establishing some 'object' of reference; we speak *about* something. In contrast to a common argument that children not speaking the

majority language first need to learn the language before they can learn about different domains of knowing, this perspective thus means that these two processes are inherently intertwined; since we cannot speak without speaking about something, appropriating a first and/or second language at the same time means learning about something (Kultti & Pramling, 2016). This realization is particularly important in contemporary preschool, with the advent of many children not speaking the majority language. This intertwined relation between language and 'object of reference' is critical with an interest in play-responsive *didaktik*: What 'objects' are constituted in talk, and how are these perspectivized/semiotically mediated (Wertsch, 2007), negotiated and perhaps shared and appropriated by children, are integral to clarify through empirical research.

Language is both the means of communicating with others and of communicating with oneself (i.e., to think). What communicative resources – in the form of categories, distinctions, concepts, metaphors, narratives etc. – the child is introduced to and supported in appropriating will thus be decisive for his or her knowing. The child's knowledge development is understood as contingent on the social practices she gets to participate in and experience. This is conceptualized by Vygotsky in his famous law of sociogenesis:

> [E]very function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, in two forms – at first as social, then as psychological; at first as a form of cooperation between people, as a group, an intermental category, then as a means of individual behavior, as an intramental category. This is the general law for the construction of all higher mental functions. (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 169)

And as he further argues, "speech, being initially the means of communication, the means of association, the means of organization of group behavior, later becomes the basic means of thinking and of all higher mental functions, the basic means of personality formation" (p. 169); thus "[t]hrough others, we become ourselves" (p. 170). Hence, even our personality, what in a sense is unique to us, is constituted in interaction with others (cf. Mead, 1934/1967; Nelson, 1996). Engaging children in shared communicative activities will be critical to what opportunities and support they are given in preschool, including their emerging identity as knowledgeable (as 'musical', 'mathematical' etc.). The nature of these activities will be characteristic of the *didaktik* privileged in the setting; for example, whether there is a strict line of demarcation between perceiving and talking about phenomena *as is* or *as if*, or if this line is permeable, allowing participants to go between these modes of talking and in other ways acting during shared activities (cf. Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2010, discussed in Chap. 3 of the present volume).

While not necessarily shared by all the activities participants consider play, some theoretical concepts and reasoning will provide entry points into the data. These are *freedom from* versus *freedom to* and the *open-endedness* of play; the distinction between *playfully-formatted* and *procedurally-formatted* activities; the distinction and relationship between *as if* and *as is*; and the relationships between *actions, objects and meaning* as young children develop their play.

The Freedom of Play and Open-Endedness

One of the hallmarks of early childhood education is what is typically referred to as 'free play'. This concept is often employed as a rhetorical strategy in public debate about the nature, tradition, and future of preschool, and how it allegedly differs from school. Hence, 'free play' is generally used as a *normative concept*, that is, it provides an ideal for how stakeholders want preschool to be, rather than necessarily building on analytical work of empirical data as indicative of what actually characterizes this institution for promoting children's development and well-being. While matters of how we organize for and promote children's development in an institution such as preschool is a 'hot topic' to which it may be difficult to remain distant, to conduct research, and on this basis provide knowledge about how to design developmental activities in this setting, it is critical to take an analytical stance and ground claims in empirical data generated in this setting (rather than, for example, in laboratory settings).

In his theoretical elaboration of play, van Oers (2014) differentiates the notion of 'free play' into two concepts: *freedom from* and *freedom to*. As he emphasizes, in normative discussions about 'free play', children's right to play free of adult 'interference', as it is often labelled – clearly indicating the negative connotations of teacher participation in these kinds of activities – is emphasized, that is, what he refers to as *freedom from*. However, he further argues, the freedom of play may be differently understood; as the freedom to pursue activities in unforeseeable directions, that is, being responsive to the inherent *open-endedness* of activities we call play. This latter conceptualization of the freedom of play is what he refers to as *freedom to*. That children are free to explore and pursue what they engage in without needing to know beforehand where it will lead them, that is, where their play may end up, does not, van Oers emphasizes, preclude teacher participation in these activities. Rather, it remains an open and empirical question whether teachers do so and, if so, what this means to the trajectories of these activities and children's participation and engagement in them. The latter lies at the very heart of what we intend to study in the present project. The distinction between the *freedom to* and *freedom from* of play thus provides a useful heuristic tool for analysis. This issue is further complicated in the present case with the ambition to study teaching in this context, since the latter implies outlining some form of trajectory (i.e., having an intention to make children discern, make sense of and appropriate some form of knowing, take part in some domain of cultural experience), while the former by its very nature is premised to be open-ended.

Rather than singling out play as a particular kind of activity, van Oers (2014) argues that "in essence, all activities can be accomplished in playful versions or in more strictly proceduralised versions" (p. 62). That is, any activity can be, what we above referred to as, communicatively framed and engaged in *as if* or *as is*, more or less strictly separated or with 'permeable dividers' (for empirical illustrations of such differences in early childhood education, see Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2009). Whether framing activities as make-believe (*as if*) or not (*as is*),

teachers may or may not participate in these. As van Oers (2014) concludes, mirroring our reasoning above, “all sociocultural activities are essentially seen as basically interpersonal endeavours in which more people actually or virtually participate. Hence there is in principle no objection to adult participation in play as long as the play format for the children themselves is not destroyed” (p. 63). How participants – children (and at times, teachers) – communicatively frame, engage in, and negotiate the nature of mutual activities, and what this means to the continuation of these activities and what children are supported in appropriating are therefore important to analyze from these theoretical premises.

As If and *as Is* and Learning from Fiction

In his early elaboration on the importance of what he refers to as fictions to human sense making and learning, Vaihinger (1924/2001) singles out ‘as if’ as the ‘driving force’ of play and aesthetic activity. He argues that engaging with fictions – what we know is not actually the case (*as is*) – allows us to do things we could not otherwise do, such as imagine what is not there to be seen. Thinking and in other ways acting *as if*, from this perspective, is indicative of humans as sense making agents; we invent worlds, we do not merely reflect or mirror existing ones (cf. Bruner, 1990). Thinking *as if* and imagining how it could be allows us to create order and make sense of experience. A similar idea was later taken up by narrative scholars, emphasizing how by retelling our experience we can transform these into a form allowing a more developmentally productive identity (cf. Lave & Wenger, 1991). From engaging with fictions – that is acting *as if*, for example in play – we can experience possibilities and their potential consequences. These imaginary actions require some cultural tools and insight into how these may be used to such ends (see elaboration below). This reasoning thus implies that through engaging with *as if* (imagination, fictive worlds) we can learn about the world *as is* (conventional knowledge), including what consequences our actions may have. It is therefore important not to consider *as if* and *as is* as dichotomous poles, with the former contrary to the latter. Not only individuals can learn about the world of experience through play and other activities engage in *as if*, also collective knowledge building in science, Vaihinger emphasizes, is contingent on conscious fictions. We may add that also cultural projects such as social justice is dependent on fiction; if we could not imagine the world differently than it is, we would not know what a just society could mean and what needs to be done to work towards achieving it. Hence, engaging with *as if* is critical to understanding and managing *what is*. On an overarching level, this reasoning reminds us that matters such as play and learning, or play and teaching, cannot productively be understood as dichotomous, contrary matters. Rather, and, we argue, understanding and orchestrating for children’s development in preschool presumes that we learn more about how these relate; how can teachers teach in play without transforming play into non-play, and what can children learn in play and from play, are critical to illuminate in order to further

collective knowledge about the developmental potentials of early childhood education. The ‘play of fantasy’, that is, engaging in imaginary *as-if* activities or explorations, “far from serving to deceive reason,” Vaihinger (1924/2001, p. 338) concludes, “guides and aids it”. Reconceptualized in this way, play (*as if*) is premised as critical to developing knowledge (also of an *as-is* kind) rather than contrary to the latter. Furthermore, as argued by Sutton-Smith,

> Given that there is nothing more characteristic of human achievement than the creation of illusory cultural and theoretical worlds, as in music, dance, literature, and science, then children’s […] full participation in such play worlds can be seen not as a defect, or as compensation for inadequacy, but rather as participation in a major central preoccupation of humankind. (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 54)

Engaging with the World *as Is* Through *as If It Were* Across the Lifespan

Like Vaihinger (1924/2001), as we have already discussed, also other more contemporary scholars have emphasized *as-if* modes of engaging with the world (*as is*). One example is Josephs’ (1998) study of the development of self (identity), built on empirical data of adults visiting their former partner’s grave and there engaging in a dialogue with the deceased. The grave-related dialogues engaged in by the participants in her study, she argues,

> proved to be structurally and functionally similar to symbolic play: Like a child, she required certain real life props, which then became part of her constructed as-if world (e.g., the flowers, the tombstone, etc.). Rather than being an act of ‘animistic thinking’ […] this as-if functioning is understood as a constructive and adaptive way of making sense of one’s world and regulating one’s emotions. Thus symbolic functioning is a way to cope with reality and at the same time a way to construct a new reality. (p. 191)

Engaging in imaginary *as-if* activity thus, according to this reasoning implies both world-making (Goodman, 1978) and self-making (emotional and identity work), that is, both one’s world and oneself are in a sense transformed through engaging in *as-if* activities (whether pretend playing or engaging in imaginary conversations).

In their commentary on Josephs’ study, Göncü and Gaskins (1998) argue that there are three important differences between the *as-if* engagement and understanding of children and adults. The first difference they propose is that “we feel that the motives of children’s *as-if* activities are not consciously connected to the actual activities themselves” (p. 201), for instance if a child plays police she is not aware of why she plays this play. The second difference proposed “reside in where the references of these activities come from” (p. 202), with children’s activities said to “derive from events actually experienced […] as well as from fairy tales and folk tales (e.g., Cinderella and Pocahontas), exposure to other people’s experience (e.g., stories of peers), and fictional characters of the screen (e.g., Superheroes)”, while such activities in adults “are deeply embedded in the personal experience of participating individuals” (ibid.). The third difference proposed “resides in the

planning or progression of these activities" (ibid.); with children pretending, the activity is "planned flexibly and often without an apparent logical sequence of events", in contrast to adults whose activity is "planned with an articulate sequence of events" (ibid.). Arguably, all three claims can be questioned. Regarding the first claim: To what extent children (and adults for that matter) are aware of why they engage in a particular imaginary (*as if*) activity is not easy to determine (note also the vague terms used by the researchers to state this proposition: "we feel"). Regarding the second claim: children may or may not build their *as-if* activities on a wider repertoire of experience than adults who engage in such activity; but is this necessarily so? Adults have more experience to draw from. Another reason why it may appear that adults 'only' draw on what the authors refer to as 'deeply embedded personal experience' perhaps has more to do with the nature of the kind of activities studied in Josephs' (1998) study, on the one hand, and that it may be 'controversial' for adults to admit that they engage in fantasizing with reference to fiction (e.g., imagine themselves being a character in a movie they have seen), on the other hand. Regarding the third difference pointed out, such generalized claims are difficult to make on the basis of the discussed study (cf. our objection to the second point). However, in what way and to what extent imaginary (*as if*) activities of children and adults differ are not the topics of our investigation and we will not further pursue this discussion. Suffice to conclude in the context of our present study is that engaging in imaginary activities (*as if it were*) is a feature of how human beings at large relate to the world of reality (*as it is*). The ability to do so is nurtured and potentially developed already in early childhood, particularly in play activities. Hence, developing the ability to engage in imaginary play worlds has implications way beyond childhood (for collectives, e.g., science; Vygotsky, 1930/2004; and individuals; Fleer, 2011; Josephs, 1998).

Summary

To summarize, the theoretical ideas here presented and discussed emphasize that conceptual learning is founded on engaging in imagination (*as if*), and moving between *as if* and *as is*; that more experienced participants have critical roles in the child's development in promoting rich experience from and with which to play, and introduce cultural resources for developing existing, and orchestrating new, plays. What critically remains to find out is how engaging with children in play activities can provide the means and support of developing their knowledge in the context of preschool. And how can the inherent tension between these processes – teaching as always directed while one of the characteristics of play is its open-endedness – be understood through looking empirically at how this plays out and is managed in actual everyday activities in ECEC.

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Part II
Empirical Studies

In this second part of the book, we present our analyses of original empirical data. This part is structured in the following way. In Chaps. 5, 6, 7 and 8, we focus on the playing skills of preschool teachers: how they become part of children's play, how they co-constitute frames for playing, and how they plant contents in play. In Chaps. 9, 10 and 11, we analyze how teachers when participating in play with children co-constitute teaching. In these latter chapters, we analyze longer (entire) activities where teachers have become part of play, how they participate in these activities, how contents are constituted and elaborated, and how children's conceptions are challenged. We give examples of plays established by children, where the preschool teacher enters, and where the preschool teacher initiates and engages children in play.

Chapter 5
The Lava-Shark: Teachers Attempting to Enter Children's Play

Child	*Now my cakes are ready, tatam*!
Teacher	*Oh, how good! Is it okay to taste them now?* I think Alfon's dad is really lucky being allowed to taste!
Child	This cake is a child cake!

This short dialogue illustrates the complexity of entering and becoming a participant in children's ongoing play. The teacher's initiative to take a part in the ongoing play by asking (in a playful voice) if it is okay to taste the cakes is rejected by a child, who clarifies that the cake is a "child cake", thus not a cake for adults. There is a tension visible in the dialogue, a tension between what the play is about (baking and eating cakes) and perhaps about who may participate (only children or also teachers). This tension can be seen as an example of what Wertsch (1998, 2000) refers to as the ongoing dialectic between *intersubjectivity* and *alterity*. In this chapter, this dialectic will be used as an analytical tool to illustrate and understand the premises for teachers' attempts to enter and participate in children's ongoing play. Another important analytical distinction is between *as if* and *as is* (Vaihinger 1924/2001). *As if*, as we clarified in Chap. 4, denotes utterances and other actions of a make-believe/imaginary kind appearing within or constituting a narrative play-frame. *As is*, in contrast, denotes utterances and other actions building on or constituting established knowledge as well as meta-communication about the play in order to coordinate what is going to be played and how.

In this chapter, we present examples of different strategies used by teachers trying to enter children's ongoing play. In the following chapter (Chap. 6) we conduct thematic discussions focused on *how* and *why* teachers seem to succeed (or not) in their attempts to enter ongoing play. The variety of play activities is substantial; for example, there are play focused on construction as well as play based on narratives and role-play. What is common to the examples analyzed is that they are all cases of play that is ongoing when teachers attempt to enter.

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How Teachers Attempt to Enter Children's Ongoing Play

The teachers use a *variety of strategies* in their attempts to enter and thereby getting access to children's ongoing play. We have found four different ways used by the teachers when trying to enter children's ongoing play: (1) *Asking for permission to join the play,* (2) *Asking questions about the play,* (3) *Taking a role in the play* and (4) *Responding to a suggestion to join children's play.* Below, each of these strategies are illustrated with excerpts followed by analysis.

1. *Asking for permission to join the play*

We present two examples of how teachers try to enter children's ongoing play by asking permission. In the first example, the teacher mainly acts *as if* when she asks for permission and then talks about the animal house and the animals living in it according to the narrative play-frame. In the second example, the same teacher mainly acts *as is* by asking if she can join in and meta-communicating about what the hut looks like.

In the beginning of the first example, two children are sitting on the floor together with a teacher. Beside them is a hut with a roof. The two children are one boy (Sam, 3 years old) and one girl (Siri, 5 years old).

Excerpt 5.1

1	GUNN:	Shall we play something?
2	Siri:	We're already playing
3	GUNN:	What are you playing?
4	Siri:	We pl… we play animal house
5	GUNN:	Ahh yes animal house. Can I join for a while?
6	Siri:	Sure!
7	GUNN:	Animal house… who lives in the animal house?
8	Siri:	It's… elephant, dog, they they… the elephant is in the house
9	GUNN:	The house… is this the big house? (pointing at a hut)
10	Sam:	(makes barking noises and creeps on all four towards GUNN)
11	Siri:	We added an extra room
12	GUNN:	And you have so many animals in the house?
13	Siri:	Mm
14	GUNN:	What is the dog doing? (points at Sam)
15	Siri:	It's just a child of the giraffe and the elephant
16	GUNN:	I thought he was a little guard dog 'cause he barked at me when I came in here
17	Siri:	He's not. He just… he gets a little excited, always when he gets excited he barks
18	GUNN:	Okay, but what did you say now, Siri, was it in the tale that… or in this play, that the house was too small so you had to make it larger? You were too many animals in the house?
19	Siri:	Yes
20	GUNN:	Yes…
21	Siri:	We've got lots of animals

In this example, the teacher first invites the children to play (turn 1) but immediately changes her plans when Siri says that they are already playing (turn 2). Instead, the teacher asks what they are playing and if she can join them, asking permission to enter the children's ongoing play (turns 3 and 5). When the teacher gets permission to enter the play, a negotiation starts about how to understand what they are doing and what they are going to do. The teacher continues by asking *as-if* questions about the play, for example "who lives in the animal house" (turn 7). Turns 7–10 can be understood as meta-communication that coordinates *as is* (the physical hut) and *as if* (the hut as the house in the play). The teacher introducing a new idea (the dog being a guard dog, turn 16) can be seen as an example of alterity, which opens up for rethinking the premises of the play. However, the child has another idea regarding why the dog is barking (turn 17). Hence, even if rejected, suggestions may be generative for the development of play. Even if rejecting what theoretically could be referred to as alterity, the teacher's suggestion still triggers the child to develop the narrative (the character description of one agent in the play; turn 17). When the teacher asks about the house being too small (turn 18) this reconnects to Siri's previous explanation: "we added an extra room" (turn 11). We can see the teacher asking *as-if* questions about the play and trying to introduce *as-if* ideas into the play. This can be understood as an example of the continuous tension between temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity and alterity. In this episode, the teacher is sensitive to the children's agency (Clarke, Howley, Resnick, & Rosé, 2016) and does not obtrude her ideas into the play. The teacher becomes a participant in the play and after her entrance the play is not *free from* (van Oers, 2014) the teacher. She participates as a play partner and both the teacher and the children are *free to* make suggestions on how to take the play in unforeseeable directions, even though all suggestions may not be realized. In their continuing play, the teacher suggests that even more animals be present, and the play continues for 15 minutes within the same narrative frame.

In the beginning of the second example, the same teacher tries to enter one child's ongoing play by asking permission, but in a different way to in the previous example. The child (Siri, 5 years old) is playing in a hut when the teacher sits down next to her.

Excerpt 5.2

1	GUNN:	Can I play with you?
2	Siri:	Yees
3	GUNN:	Nice. What are you playing?
4	Siri:	Everyone who wants to can join
5	GUNN:	Everyone who wants to can join. Can I join for a while then? What are you doing?
6	Siri:	I'm only playing in the hut
7	GUNN:	You're playing in the hut. May I pop in?
8	Siri:	Yes
9	GUNN:	I take a look here. Oh! what a NIIICE hut you've made
10	Siri:	And I have lots of pets. Here!
11	GUNN:	Do you have so many pets?

12	Siri:	Yes, a whole box full!
13	GUNN:	A box full of animals. Oh! Okay. But Siri, I thought that now when I come to pay you a visit here in the hut I feel like playing with these for a while. Come and take a look. I thought we would take these (gets up and gets a can). Oh, it's such a BEAUTIFUL hut. THESE, what do you think of THESE. What do you say we play with these for a while?
14	Siri:	YES!
15	GUNN:	We can play that I come and pay you a visit and then I'm… the Triangle-Lady maybe?
16	Siri:	YES
17	GUNN:	Shall we do that? Is that okay? Can't you sit here next to me instead? Nice. The Triangle-Lady comes and pays a visit (holds a triangle in her hand and shows it to Siri). Do you know why they're called triangle?
18	Siri:	'Cause… they are a bit like that… (makes a drawing in the air with her finger), they're almost like this!
19	GUNN:	YES I agree

The child is playing inside and outside the hut when the teacher, in an *as-is* way, asks if she may join the play (turns 1 and 5). Siri says yes (turn 2) and then explains that everyone who wants to can join the play (turn 4). This is a common social norm in Swedish preschools that everyone shall be allowed to participate in play. It can be seen as an example of double dialogicality (Kullenberg, 2014), that is, the child orienting towards the teacher in the here-and-now and, at the same time, towards the institutional framework of preschool. Phrased differently, she contextualizes her response to the question from the teacher in institutionally-sanctioned terms. When the teacher asks what the child is playing (turn 5) Siri answers that she is "only playing in the hut" (turn 6). The dialogue continues with the teacher asking an *as-is* question: if she can look into the hut (turn 7). She is allowed to do so and says that the hut is very nice (turn9). Then Siri explains that she has got many pets (turn 10). The teacher confirms the narrative play-frame by talking *as if* and using the word *pets* (turn 11). She also confirms that there is a box full of pets but then she, in the same utterance (turn 13), states that she feels like playing with something else. Thus, she switches between admiring the look of the hut and her own suggestion of what to play within the same utterance and she asks Siri if they shall play with "these" (the geometrical shapes in the can) for a while. Siri accepts the invitation (turn 14). From being allowed to become a participant in the child's ongoing play, the teacher now directs the play into a new direction, suggesting how to reframe the premises of the play. She meta-communicates about what to play and what play-role (Triangle-lady) she will have (turns 15 and 17). Siri does not get a named role in the play; instead, she is asked questions by the Triangle-lady, about a geometric shape, a triangle. The teacher's focus is no longer on becoming a participant in Siri's ongoing play, but on introducing the geometrical shapes she has in her can. She tries to do this within the frame of play, being a Triangle-lady in the hut. In this episode, there is not much room for the child's agency; however, the child is enthusiastic about the geometrical shapes and we do not know what would have happened if the child had said no to the suggestion from the teacher. The teacher directing the play

in a new direction rather constitutes a new kind of play than taking ongoing play in a novel direction (alterity). It can thus here be questioned if the child is *free to* (van Oers, 2014) play in a way of her choosing. As the activity evolves, she aligns with the play initiated by the teacher in place of her own play.

2. *Asking questions about the play*

The second strategy teachers use is illustrated with an example where four and sometimes five children (2–3 years old) are playing in a room. Since this strategy – asking questions about the play – is more or less continuous throughout the play, we will illustrate how the questioning continues by showing several examples from the same play.

Excerpt 5.3

1	Liv:	*Go to the playground!*
2	Sara:	*Now we're at the playground*
3	EVA:	(is filming and is therefore herself not in the picture) What… what are you playing?
4	Lisen:	Playground
5	Child:	Mum dad child
6.	EVA:	Ahh
7	Liv:	We we play… (inaudible)
8		(they all go to another room)

The teacher starts filming and asks the children what they are playing (turn 3). One child answers that they are playing "playground" (turn 4) and another that they play "mother, father, child" (turn 5). Hence, it appears that the children are not in agreement about what they are playing; apparently, this has not been necessary for them in in their play before the teacher enters (or they have been playing mother, father, child at the playground), which indicates that intersubjectivity is partial, sufficient for going on with a (more or less) mutual activity (play) without sharing concepts in a more strict sense. The example shows that their intersubjectivity is temporarily sufficient for going on without necessarily sharing conceptual understanding – to a certain point; when a new play partner tries to enter the play (or develop it), some coordination (meta-communication) work becomes critical. Then the children all start to walk away and the teacher follows them into another room. The teacher positions the video camera in the room, why we can follow the children's play also when she is not there.

Another narrative play-frame emerges when one child asks her friends in turn 18 (below) if they shall "look at the *padda*?" (Swedish vernacular for a computer tablet). The other children are doing different things while Liv starts to give out imaginary tablets to some of them, including the teacher who has now rejoined them (turn 21):

Excerpt 5.4

18.	Liv	*Look at the padda?* [the Swedish word *padda* literally means toad; however, it is used here as a common contemporary colloquial term for a computer tablet]

19.	Lisen	Yes!
20.	Sara	(has her hands before her, appear to be driving something, makes noises)
	Svea	(singing and dancing)
21.	Liv	There (hands Lisen an imaginary computer tablet, and continues to give also to other children)
22.	Lisen	I'm a baby
23.	Sara	I too wanna look at the *paddan*
24.	EVA	(sits down next to the children)
25.	Lisen	(makes noises)
26.	Liv	Here you have a *padda* (hands EVA an imaginary tablet)
27.	EVA	Is it a *padda*, an ipad? Oh (takes the imaginary tablet)
28.	Liv	Mmm (nods and sits down)
29.	Sara	I too want an ipad
30.	EVA	Let's see

This teacher's attempt to enter the play is verbal at first, as she asks the children what they are playing (turn 3). Her attempt then gets physical when she returns and sits down beside them (turn 24). When she is offered a pretend tablet from Liv (turn 26) and asks, "Is this a *padda*, an Ipad?" (turn 27), she gets a humming and nodding answer from Liv (turn 28). Through this clarifying talk on how to understand what she is given, and the response she receives, she has become a member of the play. The local and *as-is* language ("Is this…") is coordinated with a more expansive and also *as-if* language of the play ("*padda*, an Ipad").

The teacher uses the same voice as usual (i.e., without taking on the voice of a character or speaking in a manner that signals play) and asks many *as-is* questions; the children answer and continue the play. After this question-answer dialogue there is a cut in the film (we do not know for how long) but when it continues, they still sit together talking about their imaginary tablets and that one of the tablets is broken:

Excerpt 5.5

61.	EVA	*But what are we gonna do when it's broken?*
62.	Sara	(points towards the tablet) *it's not working*
63.	EVA	No but can you fix an ipad?
64.	Sara	Noo
65.	EVA	You don't think you can fix an ipad?
66.	Sara	Noo (shakes her head)
67.	Sven	*Yes, I get a syringe*
68.	EVA	You get a syringe
69.	Sven	(nods, reaches out and grabs a pretend syringe)
70.	EVA	Okay! and…?
71.	Sven	*To fix it*
72.	EVA	To fix the ipad?

73.	Sven	*Here's where you put it in* (does something with the imaginary ipad)
74.	EVA	You mean you insert the syringe… in the ipad, in the ipad?
75.	Sven	Yes
76.	EVA	Yes, okay. What happens to the ipad when you put a syringe into it?
77.	Sven	Then, then then it's fixed
78.	EVA	You mean it's fixed then?
79.	Sven	Yes

The teacher's concern for the broken tablet has an *as if* approach when she in turn 61 asks "what are we gonna do when it's broken?" but shifts to an *as-is* approach when asking, "can you fix an ipad?" (turn 63). Sara confirms that the tablet does not work (turn 62) and answers "no" (turn 65). The teacher asks, "you don't think you can fix an ipad?" and gets another "no" from Sara (turns 65–66). Sven takes a different approach, replying, "yes I get a syringe". Sven puts his hand forward with a pretend syringe (turn 69). Here the teacher looks surprised and says "okay! And…?" Sven responds to this prompt by explaining, "to fix it", and gets a confirmatory question "to fix the ipad?" (turn 72). Turns 61–72 can be understood as a negotiation where the tension between the teacher's *as is* and the children's *as if* turns out to be a possible way to establish temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity and to keep the play going. This negotiation continues throughout the play and seems to work as fuel for the continuation of the play. Sven shows how to put in the imaginary syringe in the imaginary computer tablet (turn 73). Again, the teacher looks surprised and says, "you mean you insert the syringe…in the ipad, in the ipad?" (turn 74). After Sven answers "yes" (turn 75), she acknowledges his suggestion and asks what will happen then (turn 76). Sven sticks to his former suggestion, that it will get fixed, and the teacher turns his statement into another confirmatory question "you mean that it's fixed then?", which he once again confirms.

Despite different standpoints, concerning *as if* and *as is*, the child is *free to* take the play into a new, unforeseeable direction. The teacher communicates in an almost over-participating way, asking many questions in an evaluative-instructive style (Walsh, McGuinnes, & Sproule, 2017). However, she does this with an interest in how to solve the problem actualized in the play, and by her questions, she becomes a participant in the play. Noteworthy is that through her *as-is* question (i.e., whether a broken computer tablet can be fixed, turn 63), she triggers the children to engage in a sustained, collaborative *as-if* exploration (from turn 67 onwards). Hence, there is no simple linearity between a question and how it in a wider sense is responded to and given consequence by participants in play. An actual problem (*as is*) is contextualized by participants in play *as if* (a problem in the imaginary realm).

3. *Taking a role in the play*

Below follow three examples where different teachers try to take a role in children's ongoing play without asking or saying anything before their entrance. In the

first example, two girls (Ruth and Klara) and two boys are in a room that is decorated as belonging to a hairdresser. The two boys are lying on a sofa and do not pay any attention to the two girls. The two girls are standing beside a chair where the customers sit when they get their haircut. One girl praises the other girl's braids by saying "you actually became really nice". Then the teacher enters the room and sits down on the sofa:

Excerpt 5.6

1.	ANNA:	*I can take a book while I wait* (whistling)
2.	Ruth:	Oh!
3.	Klara:	*Next can come!*
4.	ANNA:	*Is it my turn?*
5.	Klara:	*Yees* (ANNA sits down on the chair and Klara starts fixing her hair). *I take down the pony tail* (and does so)
6.	Ruth:	Now I get a chair
7.	ANNA:	*I'd really like some colour*
8.	Klara:	*Okay, what colour?*
9.	ANNA:	*Eeeh, some red in*
10.	Klara:	I get a comb
11.	ANNA:	Mmm (some children move about the room and one of the children tries to sit in ANNA's lap) But I'm at the hairdresser's
12.	ANNA:	*Eh then I think I want to cut my hair a bit* (Klara silently combs ANNA's hair) *Have you had many costumers today at the saloon, Klara?*

The teacher has been observing the children before she enters the room and based on her observation she does not need to ask the girls what they are playing; she already knows that they are playing hairdresser. Instead, on her own initiative, she takes the role of a customer, without meta-communicating this action. She does not tell the girls that she joins the play or that she is a customer, she just says that she will "take a book while I wait" and sits down on the sofa (turn 1). When she does this, it becomes obvious to the girls that she is a customer and the play continues without interruption and without any need for the participants to negotiate the mutual play project (turn 3). This action triggers the development of the play where the teacher is a participant.

The play continues with the two girls and the teacher acting as hairdressers and customer (turns 4–12), respectively. The teacher clearly shows that she is playing when she says "but I'm at the hairdressers" when another child tries to sit in her lap (turn 11). It is evident that the girls have some experience of what happens at the hairdresser's and the teacher asks them *as-if* questions about what to do with her hair (turns 7 and 12) and if there have been many customers this day (turn 12). Thus, there is temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity for engaging in mutual play in which the teacher is a play partner. However, ANNA is not consistently in the frame of *as if*; notice how she addresses her *as-if* question to the child, using her actual (in the transcript by the researchers replaced by a pseudonym) name, Klara (in turn 12).

Also in the next example, the teacher first observes the children through a windowed door and then knocks before entering the room. A boy (Sigge) and a girl (Lilly) are in the room. There are many different toys in the room, including two baby dolls. The teacher brings a similar doll in a carrycot when she makes her entrance into the ongoing play.

Excerpt 5.7

1.	GUNN	*Hi hi, may I come in, may I come in?*
2.	Sigge	*Mm*
3.	GUNN	*Hi, I thought I'd pay you a visit today. Here I am with my little baby* (carries a baby doll)
4.	Sigge	*Aaa*
5.	GUNN	Can I sit down?
6.	Sigge	Yes, you can sit here
7.	GUNN	Can I sit here?
8.	Sigge & Lilly	Yees

Based on her observation of the children's play, the teacher enters the play by taking a role within their ongoing play (i.e., acting *as if*). This means that she does not have to interrupt the play by asking what the children are playing and/or if she may join. She simply asks if it is okay to come in with her "baby" and is swiftly accepted (turns 1–4). Her entrance potentially expands the play, by adding a new role character; a role that aligns with the play-frame. Coming prepared, through having observed the children's play, the teacher manages to make this addition seamless. As the role taken aligns with the narrative play-frame, intersubjectivity is temporarily established, allowing participants to continue with a mutual play.

Observations like these indicate that teachers need to be sensitive to possible roles within the play they try to take a role in. If not, the role taken may not be a possible role according to the children and then the play may collapse. Below is an example where the children are playing a, for them, well-known story, Billy Goats Gruff. There has been some negotiation before the play start, regarding the roles of the story. There are six children involved in the play and a decision is made that three of them will act as the goats and three of them as trolls. The teacher participates during this negotiation but she does not make any attempt to be given a role in the play. The three children acting as trolls are lying under a bench serving as the bridge. The teacher initiates the play by, with a dark voice, saying "once upon a time there were three goats" (i.e., framing the activity *as if*). Then the children take over and start to act in line with their roles. Soon there is a discussion about what the goats are to do before they walk over the bridge:

Excerpt 5.8

53	Peter	They do not graze before the tale begins
54	CIA	How do you know?

55	Peter	'Cause you don't see that they have done that
56	CIA	Aha. Wonder what the goats do? Perhaps they… what do the goats do before they cross the bridge?
57	Lisa	Eat, I have the book

Excerpt 5.8 indicates that the children have a view of how the story goes (turns 53 and 57) and that their intention is to play in line with the original storyline (*as* it *is*). This can be seen as an example of alterity (expanding the play in a new direction) being rejected. Then, after a little while, when the second goat is to walk over the bridge, the teacher tries to enter the play:

Excerpt 5.9

77	CIA	*Wrao … Here's another troll, a troll who eats trolls* (walks with her hands reached out towards the troll)
78	Child under the bench	No, you were our mother troll
79	CIA	Okay. *But my children, you have to take the goat*

When the teacher tries to enter the play as a troll who eats other trolls (turn 77) she does no longer follow the original storyline and the children interrupt the play by meta-communicating about the narrative, telling her that she is not a troll who eats other trolls but a mother-troll (turn 78). Even though the teacher has been observing the play and even though she acts *as if,* temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity is not established. The children clearly want to keep the play as close as possible to what they perceive to be the original storyline, why the addition from the teacher is not accepted. However, CIA is offered another role. The teacher is responsive and immediately adapts and acts as the mother-troll (turn 79) instead. However, her role as a mother-troll is reduced to her being the storyteller, helping the children to continue the play in line with the original storyline. Thus, the narrative frame of the story becomes an *as-is* frame of the play (i.e., how the play *really is*) where participants, in this case the teacher, are not *free to* take the play in an unforeseeable direction (what we theoretically refer to as alterity). This finding implies the need to question the common-sense idea of imaginative children and a-creative, governing teachers (we will return to this issue in Chap. 12).

4. *Responding to a suggestion to join children's play*

The fourth strategy that teachers use to gain access to children's play we have found is when the *teacher accepts an invitation* to participate in children's ongoing play. Thus, the initiative is not the teachers' but still they have to make an appropriate entrance into ongoing play. Excerpt 5.10 contains an example with two girls (Ivy and Kim) in a room with a small slide. The girls have started a chase-and-catch play called "The Lava-Shark". Before the teacher is invited to participate in the play, the girls have been negotiating (arguing) about how to play but now they have agreed

on the rules and have played for about half a minute. Thus, temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity seems to be established, first they "agreed on not agreeing" (cf. Matusov, 1996) on the rules and then they reach an agreement. Now they are playing by the jointly agreed upon rules. Suddenly, one child turns to the teacher and says, "you're the Lava-Shark". Thus, it is one of the children who invites the teacher into the play, and she does this by assigning the teacher a role. Based on the previous negotiation between the two girls (about how to play and the rules) the role assigned to the teacher is a role that none of the children seems to want to have.

Excerpt 5.10

7.	Ivy:	You're the Lava-Shark!
8.	SARAH:	I can be the Lava-Shark (goes to the slide and sits down on her knees. The two girls are at the top of the slide)
9.	Ivy:	This is for free
10.	Kim:	And here is free, you cannot take us here
11.	SARAH:	Can I take you here (puts her hand on the slide)?
12.	Ivy:	You must, when you are there then you can take someone
13.	SARAH:	There (points at the floor)?
14.	Kim:	Mm
15.	SARAH:	Perfect (the girls start laughing and one of them slides down the slide)
16.	SARAH:	*Taken!* (touches Kim with her hand)
17.	Kim:	Then I'll have to sit here (sits down on a small chair by the slide)
18.	SARAH:	Okay

The teacher accepts the role she is given (turn 8) and a dialogue focused on the rules of the play follows (turns 9–15). These rules are the ones negotiated by the two children before they invited the teacher to become a participant in the play. Telling the teacher the rules of the play is a dialogue carried out in terms of *as is* – on the rules previous decided on how the play *is* (to be) played – is important to establishing temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity between the children and the teacher. The children have agency to determine how the play is to be framed (played), as the teacher without objection agrees on the rules of the play and immediately starts acting as the ascribed character (the Lava-Shark).

Discussion

In this chapter, we have presented four examples of different strategies used by teachers when trying to enter children's ongoing play. The teachers' actions differ between, but also within, these four strategies. One difference is whether the teacher tries to enter the ongoing play *as if* or *as is*. In the strategy we have referred to as *asking for permission to join play*, the teachers sometimes act *as if* and sometimes *as is* when they make attempts to enter children's ongoing play. In the strategies we

call *accepting a suggestion to join the play* and *taking a role in the play*, respectively, the teachers act *as if* while they in the strategy we call *asking questions about the play* in our analyzed data act *as is*. As previously mentioned, the conceptual pair of *as if* and *as is* is not to be considered poles in a conceptual dichotomy, and none is considered to be superior the other, but as seen above, different strategies seem to be possible to connect with *as is* and/or *as if*. In the next chapter, we will deepen our understanding of these strategies by conducting a thematic discussion intersecting the strategies, focusing on when and why teachers seem to succeed (or not) in their attempts to enter children's ongoing play.

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Chapter 6
The Lion and the Mouse: How and Why Teachers Succeed in Becoming Participants in Children's Ongoing Play

This chapter deals with preschool teachers' attempts to participate when children are already engaged in playing, alone or with playmates, and we will focus on when and why teachers seem to succeed (or not) in their attempts to enter ongoing play. In order for a teacher to succeed in becoming a participant in children's ongoing play, the moment of entrance is critical. Communication and play live in the dynamic tension between intersubjectivity and alterity with participants explicitly or implicitly negotiating how to understand what they are doing, or are going to do – for example, what and how to play. How teachers do to enter children's play and how they, if becoming a play partner, participate throughout the activity are critical to whether the play will (or will not) continue.

Hence, critical to teachers' participation in play is not only how they attempt to enter but also how they participate once becoming a participant in the activity. Below we will discuss two tensions found regarding why teachers succeed or fail with becoming and maintaining the role of a participant in children's ongoing play. These two are:

- Responding to alterity
- Coordinating *as if* and *as is*

Responding to Alterity

A first matter found regarding why teachers succeed or fail in their attempts to enter and participate in children's ongoing play is how they (and the children) deal with the potential tension between allowing the participants to go on with the negotiated play and the acceptance of expanding the play in a new direction (in theoretical terms, alterity). This tension can regard different parts of the play, for example

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negotiation about possible roles and the direction of the play. This tension is a natural part of expanding and developing ongoing play. However, to expand and maintain play, this tension needs to be managed and below we give examples of such negotiations with different outcomes.

Negotiating Possible Roles

Below are two examples of the same teacher trying to enter ongoing narrative play at two different times. The focus of these examples is the tension regarding possible roles within play. In the first example, the children have decided to play "The Lion and the Mouse", a for them well-known story. Before the play starts, they negotiate if they are to 'play or talk' (turn 9) and then about the roles of this play (turns 13–22). The teacher takes an active part in these negotiations.

Excerpt 6.1

9	CIA:	Mm, but how are we, what shall we do? How will we do it? Shall we see if we can play or should we talk about it, or should we tell, just tell?
10	Sara	Play, play
11	CIA:	Shall we just tell the story?
12	Ted	No, play!
13	Max	I think they should be hunters
14	Kalle	No you get to decide by yourself what to be
15	Max	I wanna be… the mouse
16	CIA:	Okay
17	Child	I wanna be the lion
18	CIA:	Aha
19	Child	I too wanna be the mouse
20	CIA:	There can be two mice, right?
21	Child	I too wanna be the mouse
22	Max	No, not three

Although Max says that there cannot be three mice (turn 22), the teacher decides that it can be so, and the division of roles in the play thus changes on her decision. The teacher is then given the role of the lion. When her role is to enter the narrative, she cannot (*as is*) enter the house of the mice (she is too big), prompting her to try to change the original storyline by changing the character of her role in the play:

Excerpt 6.2

80	CIA	Aha, so I cannot enter the mouse house, *oh no!*
81	Kalle	It's really small

82	Max	*But we were out… of the nest*
83	CIA:	But I'm one of those lions who love to write. So maybe I do like this, I write a note to the mice to *COME*. Look here, I play that I write *COME TO THE PINE A SURPRISE AWAITS* (Kalle several times tries to interrupt her without succeeding) and I put this note here so perhaps the mice see it (the mice creep away and beep). Has the mice seen the note?
84	Max	Yes
85	CIA:	Look here, here, here, here is the pine (the mice creep to the pine) *Raow. I got two mice at least. Now I'm gonna eat the mice* (the mice creep away)

The actual (*as is*) obstacle faced by the teacher in the play (turn 80) is first confirmed and explicated by a child (turn 81), before another child, through shifting tempi (turn 82; see Björk-Willén, 2012, for an analysis of temporal shifts when going in and out of play) indicates a recontextualization in terms of *as if* that in effect solves the problem. In turn 83, the teacher suggests that she is "one of those lions who love to write". She says "Look here, I play that I write" (turn 80), which indicates that she tries to implement this changed role-character into the original storyline within the actions of the play. This is an example of a tension between temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity (mutually playing out a storyline) and dealing with alterity (changing the role character in relation to the storyline). Writing/text is thus introduced into and contextualized in the play in a way that develops the narrative of the play. The children accept the changed role-character and the play continues with this addition to the storyline. Thus, the teacher is *free to* take the play in an unforeseeable direction. The play develops in a new direction, in what can be understood as a potentially tense 'space' between temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity (i.e., what is temporarily, implicitly or explicitly, sufficiently shared to go on with a joint activity) and alterity (i.e., suggestions on how to reframe the premises of the activity, or expand it in other ways than previously, implicitly or explicitly, agreed upon). The teacher meta-communicates her reframing, including explicating that she plays (turn 83).

Excerpt 6.3 contains another example from when the same teacher tries to introduce a character from another for the children well-known story into the current one.

Excerpt 6.3

107	CIA:	But think… do you know the troll Ludenben [Eng., Hairy-Legs]? What if the troll Ludenben were to jump into the Billy Goats Gruff story. Do you know who Ludenben is?
108	Lisa	Me! (raises his hand)
109	CIA:	But do you remember… what story is Lundenben in?
110	Kalle	Gruff, Gruff [Swedish, *Brusarna, brusarna*]
111	CIA:	Petter and his Four Goats, right? In his hood, no in his stone lived the troll Ludenben. He was always ANGRY and hungry like a…
112	Child	You can be, you can be Ludenben (to CIA)
113	Child	Well, we can play <u>that</u> play
114	Lisa	But then I wanna be the cat

The children have been playing Bill Goats Gruff for a while when the teacher suggests that maybe Ludenben could jump into the play (turn 107). After talking about who this troll is (turns 109–111) one child says, "well, we can play that play then" (turn 113). If they are going to do so, another child wants to be the cat (turn 114), which is a role within the story of the troll Ludenben. The emphasis on "that" (turn 113) and the discussion of new roles connected to the narrative of Ludenben indicate that mixing characters from the two stories does not seem to be a possibility, according to the children; rather, you play *either* Billy Goats Gruff *or* the troll Ludenben.

Through the processes of dealing with alterity, there is the possibility that also an original storyline 'within' which the play is played will come up for re-negotiation and transformation. How come that the teacher succeeds with adding a changed character into the Lion and the Mouse play but not into the Billy Goats Gruff? It is the same teacher and several of the children are also the same, and both excerpts are examples of a teacher *taking a role in the play – acting as if.* One explanation could be that the children know the second story better, and for this reason, they are less willing to break the original storyline. Another explanation could be that a previous negotiation in Billy Goats Gruff has made clear that the play is to be played in line with the original storyline. In the negotiation before the Lion and the Mouse play, in contrast, the teacher decides that there can be three mice. Thus, the original storyline was changed (reframed) even before the play started. The teacher deciding about the three mice also showed that she – maybe based on her being the teacher – is *free to*, without negotiation take the play in a new direction; in her role as teacher, one task she has is to make sure all children who want to are included, and this may necessitate expanding roles that can be played.

The negotiation regards the tension between continuing the joint play project (the Lion and the Mouse) or accepting the suggestion from the teacher on how to somewhat reframe the premises of the play (alterity). That the character of the lion likes to write is perhaps sufficiently harmonious with the original storyline for the children to be able to continue the play with this addition.

Negotiating Possible Directions

Dealing with alterity is also visible when possible directions are negotiated within ongoing play. Below are two examples of such tensions and how they are dealt with, through further re-negotiation. In the first example, the teacher has been invited by the children to participate in a role-play. The teacher has been assigned the role of the grandmother, and two girls are acting as older sisters. Almost as soon as the play starts, one of the children introduces the activity of reading a book:

Excerpt 6.4

1.	Vera:	Read this! (hands a book to the child who is inside the hut)
2.	Sofia:	You mean the songs?
3.	Vera:	(turns around and puts the book on the floor)
4.	CIA:	But how are you gonna read… how… *can you read big sisters?* (on all four creeping to the hut)
5.	Vera:	*Yes*
6.	CIA:	Let's see… come, let's read (picks up the book from the floor)
7.	Vera:	We play (inaudible)

The two children talk about which book to read for the babies (turns 1–2). Then the teacher questions their ability to read the book (turn 4). It is not clear if she initially does this as a teacher (outside the play) or as a grandmother (inside the play); thus, her question can be understood as both *as if* and *as is.* However, she quickly adds "older sisters" as in her role as grandmother (making the question one raised within the play form, *as if*). Then the teacher invites the two girls to read together with her (turn 6). By responding, "we play" (turn 7), the child signals that reading is to be understood *as if* (pretend-playing to read) and not *as is* (actually being able to read); alternatively (we do not hear the end of her utterance) suggesting that they play something else (than reading).

Excerpt 6.5

8.	CIA:	*Can't you read for me big sisters?* (starts browsing the book)
9.	Vera:	Nooo
10.	CIA:	I'm grandma who loves to hear a story (continues browsing the book)
11.	Sofia:	*Oh that's right, that's right, we were going to a party today and we're already late*
12.	CIA:	Oh… but…
13.	Sofia:	At school we were going to a party, *oh we're late, we have to go!* (the girls put blankets over their shoulders as if they were capes, and exit the room)

Once again, the teacher tries to invite the "older sisters" to read while she turns the pages of the book (turn 8). She combines *as if* with *as is* by calling the girls "older sisters" at the same time as she invites them to read. In responding "No", the child explicitly expresses a different opinion, which can be understood as her having agency and being *free to resist taking the play in a particular direction*. The teacher continues by saying that she is a grandmother who loves to listen to a story (turn

10), again implying that she wants the girls to read. The children deal with this suggestion by taking the play into another direction: leaving for a party (turn 11). This turn is made *as if* imagining going to a party. The teacher is not invited to join the girls to the party; instead, the two girls, in tacit agreement, leave the room (turn 13). Using her play skills, the girl combines experience of going to a party and the importance of being on time, and amends the narrative without losing the thread through employing narrative chains and time markers. The suggestion made by the teacher that the girls read does not manage to expand or maintain the play. Instead, the two children agree to take the play in a new direction, where the teacher is not included. Teacher and children do not at this point establish temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity to go on with a joint play. Instead, the children take the play in a direction that excludes the teacher.

A second example of dealing with alterity in ongoing play is a continuation of the hairdresser's play, previous presented as an example of a teacher entering children's ongoing play by taking a role in the play (see Excerpt 5.6). When this episode continues, as seen in Excerpt 6.6, the teacher is still acting as the customer and the children (Ruth and Klara) are acting as the hairdressers.

Excerpt 6.6

12.	ANNA:	*And then I think I wanna cut my hair a bit* (Klara silently combs ANNA's hair) *Have you had many costumers today, Klara?*
13.	Klara:	*Aaaa* (continues silently combing ANNA's hair)
14.	ANNA:	So what do you do now? (Klara takes a book and puts it under ANNA's long hair)
15.	Klara:	I take, I take up the hair and then I take it down
16.	ANNA:	Ahaa
17.	Klara:	Oh, that's right! (stops combing, gets up from the couch, puts the book and comb away and goes to get a yellow blanket)
18.	ANNA:	*Do you get a hair wash and so here also before?*
19.	Klara:	Mmm
20.	ANNA:	*Aaaa perfect* (Klara puts the yellow blanket around ANNA's shoulders, it falls off)
21.	Klara:	Shucks! (tries again, ANNA helps her)
22.	ANNA:	*Ah, I'm gonna be so nice in my hair now* (Klara attaches the blanket, lifts ANNA's hair and starts combing it again. Stops after a while, gets up, takes a plastic plate and brush and stands in front of ANNA)
23.	Klara:	*Do you wanna have a makeup?*
24.	ANNA:	*Oh, can you have a makeup here too?*
25.	Klara:	*Yes, you can be a witch and such*
26.	ANNA:	*Ahhhhh*
27.	Klara:	*Do you want a makeup like a princess or a witch* (inaudible)
28.	ANNA:	*Eeeh, I wanna be… a witch*
29.	Klara:	*Mmm* (Klara stirs the brush on the plate as if there was paint, then does something with some other plates)
30.	ANNA:	What a place, you can cut your hair and get a makeup here!
31.	Klara:	*So* (Klara returns to ANNA and starts pretending to put makeup on her face with the brush)

Both the teacher and the children act *as if* (see turns 12–13), and, for example, by putting the blanket on the teacher's shoulders (turns 20–21) the girls show that they have experience of being at the hairdresser's. The teacher acts *as if* by asking questions about possible treatments (turn 18). Thus, within the frame of the play, *as is* (what actually happens to a costumer at the hairdresser's) is interweaved with *as if*. There is no obvious goal or narrative in the play. Rather, it is open ended and continuously negotiated through the actions of the teacher and the children; actions that are in line with being hairdresser and customer. However, in turn 23, one of the girls introduces a different perspective (alterity) into the play by asking if the customer wants some make up. The teacher answers with some surprise in her voice, but still in her role as customer (turn 24). Her answer shows that it is not obvious that you can get a make-up at the hairdresser's, but she aligns and hands over to the girl to decide if this can be incorporated and, thus, the direction of the play. Through this response, the child is *free to* take the play in new directions and she continues the extension by introducing the opportunity to get a make-up as a princess or a witch (turns 25 and 27). The teacher confirms the new direction, partly by saying that she wants to be a witch and partly by emphasising the quality of the place where you can get both a haircut and a make-up (turns 28 and 30). Thus, negotiating the new frame of the play is made within the frame of the play *as if*, rather than through stepping outside it. By dealing with alterity in this way, the teacher helps the children to combine two different previous experience (being at the hairdresser's and getting a make-up as a witch or princess) into something new within the frame of the play. Combining previous experience into a new form is an important feature of creativity, as conceptualised from a Vygotskian point of view (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). In response to this expansion of the play, the teacher a little while later leaves the hairdresser's as a flying witch.

Coordinating *as If* and *as Is*

A second reason why teachers seem to succeed or fail in their attempts to enter and participate in children's ongoing play is how they and the children coordinate *as if* and *as is*. As seen in previous excerpts in this chapter, the participants consistently shift between these modes of talking; the line between these being highly permeable. However, this permeability sometimes makes it unclear for the participants if an utterance is to be understood *as if* or *as is*, that is whether or not it is to be taken as an action in the play. Uncertainty regarding *as is* and *as if* becomes particularly visible in narrative play. Playing as such implies *as if,* but when playing a canonical story in line with the original storyline, the storyline gains standing *as is*. The previously presented example of Billy Goats Gruff (Excerpt 6.3) is an example of how adhering to a well-known narrative frame hinders the children from being *free to* take the play in unforeseeable directions.

In the following, the delicate issue of coordinating *as if* and *as is* is illustrated with excerpts from two other play activities. In the first example, a teacher is trying to initiate a play with trains with a boy (approximately 2 years old). She does this by asking meta-questions to the child:

Excerpt 6.7

1.	KAREN:	Then who wants to drive that ambulance?
2.	Martin:	My dad/*my dad*
3.	KAREN:	Who's driving grandma and grandpa's car? Shall I drive it?
4.	Martin:	*Grandma and grandpa are gonna drive it*

When the teacher asks, "then who wants to drive that ambulance" (turn 1), the child answers "my dad" (turn 2). In real life, the father of this child is an ambulance driver, why both the question from the teacher and the answer from the child can be understood *as is.* Then the teacher asks who is driving the grandparents' car (turn 3). Again, this question is about who of them that should move the car physically in the play. The teacher offers to do this (she has no role in the play, thus the "I" [turn 3] in the utterance refers to her as teacher, *as is*). However, the child's answer indicates that he is talking *as if.* If connecting this second answer to the answer to the first question, both answers could be *as if* within the play (hence, the two different writings in the excerpt, one in plain writing and one in italics). Thus, it is possible that the teacher talks *as is* while the child answers *as if.* At this point, there is no indicator that the two participants have established some intersubjectivity, allowing them to go on with a shared activity; they may, in effect, be engaged in parallel ones, talking past each other.

Sometimes this doubtfulness regarding whether actions are to be taken as *as if* or *as is* becomes a matter for meta-communication. In Excerpt 6.8, three children (Linn, My and Sam) sit under a table. There is a blanket over the table giving the impression of a hut.

Excerpt 6.8

1	Linn	I found that one before (looks at CIA and points at the imaginary phone My holds to her ear), the one that My has
2	CIA:	*What are they saying, what are they saying, My?* (looking at My who is "on the phone")
3	My	*The thieves are gone but they cannot lock. So they have to come here while the builders rebuild it. It takes thirty-seven months*
4	CIA:	Oh, so the neighbors say that in thirty-seven months they cannot live in their house?
5	My	Yes, as they must, so we need to share our house
6	CIA:	Aha
7	My	We have to be nice
8	CIA:	Shall I sit here? Can I do that? (creeps in under the table)

9	My	*We have to be nice to the neighbours so they… we need to be nice to the neighbours so they, so they can be, be in our house.*
10	Sam	Even the castle fell on their house
11	CIA:	Aha, noo
12	My	Yes, like this pfff (shows with her hands how the castle fell)
13	Linn	But…
14	My	And it was on their cabin. Not good, right?
15	Linn	Wait… it came on our house but it, it's extra stone
16	CIA:	In the play or for real?
17	Linn	In the play
18	CIA:	Okay

When the recording starts, one child is trying to get the teacher's attention by saying that she had it first, referring to a pretend telephone (turn 1). However, the teacher neglects this *as is* talk and instead starts to communicate *as if* with another child (turn 2). Thus, she clearly shows that she is now taking part in the children's play, *as if*. However, later, in turn 16, the teacher is no longer sure if one of the children is talking within the play or not. Something in what the child says makes the teacher unsure about whether the child is talking *as if* or *as is*. To re-establish mutual ground (temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity), the teacher asks, "In the play or for real" (turn 16), which the child answers, "in the play". Through this meta-communication, mutual ground is re-established.

Discussion

In this chapter we have focused on when and why teachers seem to succeed (or not) in their attempts to enter ongoing play. In this analysis, the theoretical notions of *intersubjectivity* and *alterity* have been important. To become a participant in children's ongoing play means to balance the tension between intersubjectivity and alterity, that is, sufficient mutual ground for engaging in a shared activity and being open to unforeseeable development, respectively, as well as coordinating *as if* and *as is*. This is of substantial importance in the moment of entering in order for the teacher to get access to a play, but as mentioned, our analysis shows that it is not only the teacher's first attempt to enter ongoing play that is critical. When the teacher has become a participant in ongoing play, the balancing and coordinating continues and then the ability to latch on to what the children enact and say becomes critical to the development of the play. To become and remain a participant in children's ongoing play the teacher needs to be sensitive to children's initiatives and be able to balance between these and their own contributions within the activity. This is a matter of contributing to and maintaining play, and thus an important play skill required by teachers.

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Chapter 7
Goldilocks and Her Motorcycle: Establishing Narrative Frames

In this chapter, we give empirical examples of how teachers establish narrative frames for children to play in and from, and what this means to how activities continue. The position of the teacher is highlighted and we analyze the consequences for children's actions, and the development of the actual play, of different positions taken.

Narratives in Children's Play

There is a growing body of research on children's narratives in play, which from a theoretical point of view argue for the importance of adults positioning themselves inside of play. According to Fleer (2015), the seminal work in this regard is the work of Lindqvist (1995) in Sweden, who introduced the concept of 'playworlds' into the literature (see also Chap. 3 of this volume): "The focus of playworlds is the teacher and the children collectively role-playing together complex themes with problem situations from stories, fairy tales, and other narratives", Fleer (2015, p. 1802) explains. The specific pedagogical characteristics of playworlds for developing children's play have been studied by Hakkarainen (2010), who illustrates how playworlds work and the active role this requires of the adult in children's play. The reason for emphasising the importance of adults contributing to children's plays, Hakkarainen, Brėdikytė, Jakkula, and Munter (2013) argue, is that imaginative play is "disappearing from the lives of children throughout the world" (p. 214), allegedly often replaced by media use. Consequently, according to this reasoning, preschool teachers are critical to supporting children in finding out how imaginary plays are played out. Adjacent to this reasoning is a more overarching concern about teachers' play willingness and skills, and to what extent such skills are adequate parts of preschool teacher education. The pedagogy of playworlds is primarily communicatively framed through the telling or reading of a story, after which the children and

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the teacher collaborate on creating the play by joint imagination, agreeing on a basic plot and enacting specific roles. Hakkarainen et al. in their study of adult participation in children's play development, understood in terms of Vygotsky's concept of play, argue that narrative mode is an essential prerequisite for gaining access to children's playworlds. They claim that adults have to become sincere partners in children's play and they have to use appropriate narrative strategy for joint interaction to, in play, create a zone of proximal development (ZPD) for children. Hakkarainen et al. use six criteria to define developed narrative role play, that it: (1) has a social/collective character; (2) is imaginative; (3) is creative; (4) is developed over time; (5) is challenging; and (6) has a narrative structure.

The central play interventions used in Hakkarainen et al.'s (2013) study was story presentation, carried out in different forms, such as dramatization or puppet show:

> It is important to understand play as a child's narrative about the world and how they use their narrative and imagination to join the play. Dramatising stories and taking roles motivates adults to step in a joint playworld and take a role, which in turn wakes up the adult's own imagination, helps emotional involvement, and perezhivanie. It changes the adult–child relationship and 'switches' adult thinking from rational to narrative. (Hakkarainen et al., 2013, p. 223)

The study shows how teachers in playworlds collectively create imaginary situations with children.

Another intervention project in a preschool setting is reported by Lindqvist (2001). She documents a pedagogical process in staging a story among toddlers in a preschool in Sweden. The study focuses on the cultural aspects of play and its aim is to investigate how young children create meaning in their play in dialogue with adults. The result shows that the children's imagination is captured by the story, which gives the object and the actions meaning. She further argues that: "When adults play roles and dramatize a chain of events, they open a door to a playworld which the children can enter" (p. 7).

A more recent study on what role teachers take to imaginary play situations in play-based settings is reported in Fleer (2015). She presents findings of a study were play pedagogy in early childhood has been analysed. The concept of subject position has been used in analysing the teachers' response to children's play activities, and it was found that most teachers position themselves outside of children's play, but Fleer also identifies a typology of how teachers relate to children's play: (1) teacher proximity to children's play; (2) teacher intent is in parallel with children's intent; (3) teacher is following the children's play; (4) teacher is engaged in sustained collective play; and (5) teacher is inside the children's imaginary play. Against the background of these empirical studies, as well as our theoretical premises (as clarified in Chaps. 1, 2, and 3) in the present study, it is of analytical interest to investigate what roles teachers take and how they approach children when they introduce and establish narrative frames for play. Importantly, we will also analyse how the children are responding to the teachers' actions.

Empirical Examples of Narrative Folktale Frames

There is a wide variation in how these play activities, filmed at different preschools, evolve; with different teachers and the ages of the children also differing. In this chapter, we focus on what teachers' establishing of narrative frames mean for the continuation of play-responsive activities in preschool. We use examples from eight different films with a specific focus on playing/dramatizing a folktale that is well known to the children. From the analysis, we have identified a pattern made up by four different ways that teachers involve themselves in children's narrative play. These identified patterns are here referred to as: The teacher directing; The teacher taking a role; The teacher triggering play through engaging children in a playful dialogue; and The teacher engaging in play as a guiding participant. We will illustrate the teachers' different approaches, and how activities in which these are taken continue.

The Teacher Directing

One of the most popular folktales the teachers use in the filmed play activities is Goldilocks and the Three Bears (for another study of the use of this story in preschool, analysed in terms of teachers' positions to children's play, see Fleer, 2015). At some preschools, this folktale sets the frame for longer thematic work. At one of the preschools, the teacher had worked with Goldilocks and the Three Bears for a long time in a group of children around 5 years old within thematic work on bears. The teacher has documented the process, describing how after role-playing the story many times, the children negotiated a new plot. Together with the children, the teachers wrote a continuation of the folktale, with the children one at a time giving suggestions. The film analysed in the next section is of the participants playing, that is enacting, the new story in front of a videorecorder. One teacher (SIV) is filming and the other one (SARA) takes the part of Mummy-Bear, but is mostly engaged as the storyteller or director of the play. The three participating children take the characters of Goldilocks (Polly), Baby-Bear (Per) and Daddy-Bear (Ola), respectively; Daddy-Bear is on the scene but has no lines in the presented excerpts.

Excerpt 7.1: Setting the Scene

1.	SIV:	Now the film is rolling
2.	SARA:	Now it was Little-Bear who was gonna come to me, as I'm Mummy Bear (sits on a chair, points at herself)
3.	Per:	(approaches SARA) *Where is Goldilocks?*
4.	SARA:	(turns towards Per)
5.	SARA:	*Yes, Goldilocks, she has gone out in the forest and picked blackberries* [in Swedish: *björnbär* – literally bear-berries]

6.	Per:	(Per turns around)
7.	SARA:	*Shall we go and look?*
8.	Per:	(turns around jumping, sits down on the chair next to SARA)
9.	SARA:	(reaches for the boy and takes his hand) *Yes, let's go and see if we find Goldilocks*
10.	Per:	*Mm*
11.	SARA & Per:	(they get up and walk hand in hand)
12.	SARA:	*Yes, let's do so. Shall we look here* (they see Goldilocks (Polly) putting something in a basket)
13.	SARA:	*And she has picket blackberries, yes!*
14.	SARA:	So you sit here and watch

In the introduction of the play activity, the teacher SARA meta-communicates that she has taken the role of Mummy-Bear (turn 2). Per acts in line with the new script when asking SARA where to find Goldilocks (turn 3) and SARA responds in the role of Mummy-Bear, telling Baby-Bear that Goldilocks is out in the forest picking blackberries. She then asks him if they should go and look for her together (turn 9). However, in turn 13, SARA changes her participation from being one of the characters to becoming the director of the play. She meta-communicates about how the activity should evolve in line with the manuscript previous developed by the participants.

SARA continues telling the written story as a kind of director, while still alternating with being in the role of Mummy-Bear: She tells Per to sit and wait while she looks up what Goldilocks is up to. SARA meta-communicates about Polly's actions as she, in the role of Goldilocks, goes to the house and tries to open the door, but finds that the bears have locked it. SARA then asks Polly what will happen next:

Excerpt 7.2: The Unexpected Turn

23.	SARA:	And then, what was Goldilocks to do then?
24.	Polly:	Ride a motorcycle
25.	SARA:	Ride a motorcycle, that's right
26.	GL/Polly:	(Goldilocks walks across the room)
27.	SARA:	Shall we see if there is any motorcycle here then?
28.	Per:	Yes
29.	SARA:	There is
30.	GL/Polly:	Over there (puts on a cap)
31.	SARA:	Yes, how nice
32.	GL/Polly:	(GL sits down backwards on a chair and holds the basket)
33.	SARA:	And now you sit down on the motorcycle and then you ride home
34.	GL/Polly:	I ride to mum and dad (pretends to ride a motorcycle)
35.	SARA:	Mm now you ride there
36.	SARA:	And then what happens, she's at home maybe

In turn 23, the teacher asks what Goldilocks/Polly is about to do “and then what was Goldilocks to do?” Polly replies that she is going to ride a motorcycle. The teacher then confirms that Polly remembers the story they wrote together (turn 25). It becomes clear that the story has taken a new direction and is not following the traditional narrative; it is not part of the traditional Goldilocks story for her to drive a motorcycle. This development, and its contrast to the traditional story also potentially challenges stereotypical gender norms. According to the teacher’s documentation, when the new story was made, the teacher was responsive to the children’s ideas and she supported new ideas in line with experience from the children’s everyday lives.

The excerpt shows that the teacher leads the action on, that is, makes sure the story evolves. In turn 27, the teacher asks if there is any motorcycle, which triggers – triggers in the meaning of challenging – Polly to find a prop that might be an imagined motorbike and as she takes on a hat, as if it were a helmet, shows the make-believe aspects of the play, encouraged by the teacher (turn 31). The children have few lines since the teacher is telling the participants how to act. Even if she has taken on the role of Mummy-Bear (turn 2) there are few play actions made in this role during the play; rather, she focuses on directing the play. The activity evolves more in terms of meta-communicating about what is happening (going to happen) in the play than actually enacting the play. In a sense, the play evolves as a more traditional instructive question-answer activity, where the children are supposed to provide answers to queries with set answers (a prewritten script).

This pedagogical positioning is described by Fleer (2015) as the teacher *being parallel* with the child as a narrator or promotor. Even if the teacher is supporting the play she is “generally not engaged in sustained collective play inside of the imaginary situation” (p. 1811). There are few opportunities for the children to explore and to make new suggestions about how to develop the play in new directions. The play is not *open-ended* and the participants have *no freedom to* pursue the activity in an unforeseeable direction (cf. van Oers, 2014); they already know where the activity will lead them according to the manuscript.

The activity of enacting the play might be described as a theater play rather than as an imaginary play, even if the participants take roles and pretend to, for example, ride on a motorcycle (turns 32 and 34). That the teacher comments that she finds the child’s initiative to use a chair (as a motorcycle) and a hat (as a helmet) as props amusing (turn 31) could be interpreted as indicating a playful atmosphere. However, the activity is to a large amount planned and organized forehand by the participants, leaving little space for novel development (alterity) while playing. However, it should be remembered that writing the script together was an open-ended activity and the resulting story constitutes an altered story, not evaluated against the traditional, well-known one. Hence, features of play such as open-endedness may come and go during related – and within particular – activities.

The Teacher Taking a Role

In another example of dramatizing Goldilocks and the Three Bears, the teacher has taken a leading role as the character of Goldilocks. In the activity, we can see how the teacher dramatizes through different actions, using gestures and her voice. The play plays out in a playroom at the preschool and the props used are pillows in different sizes, colours and shapes and also plastic toys, serving as the bears' dishes. In the sequences, the teacher (ALICE) enters the imaginary house of the three little bears, through trying the chairs (pillows) and tasting the porridge from the dishes. When she has eaten the little bears' porridge, she acts tired and finds the beds. After a while, the three bears, Daddy-Bear (Anton), Mummy-Bear (Ahmed) and Baby-Bear (Aisa) enter the scene.

Excerpt 7.3: Children Become Co-constructors

17.	ALICE:	*No, I'll try this little bed, it looks comfortable* (creeps to a smaller mattress, lies down and pretends to fall asleep)
18.	ALICE:	*Oh, it was really comfortable. Here I lie* (pretends to sleep, makes snoring noices)
19.		(three children enters, playing Big-Bear, Middle-Bear and Little-Bear)
20.	Anton:	*Someone has sat my chair* (sits, jumps a bit on his chair)
21.	Ahmed:	*Someone has sat in my chair too*
22.	Aisa:	(inaudible) *my chair broken* (creeps) (beeps; inaudible)
23.	Anton:	(leans down and says something inaudible to Little-Bear, puffs her a little)
24.	Anton:	(gets up and goes to the table)
25.	Ahmed & Aisa	(follow Anton)
26.	Ahmed:	*Someone has tasted my porridge!*
27.	Anton:	(with a rough voice) Someone has tasted my porridge also
28.	Aisa:	(with a squeaky voice) *eaten my porridge* (throws herself over the plate)
29.	Aisa:	(pretends to eat, licking the plate)
30.	Anton:	*my porridge*
31.	Ahmed:	(turns the plates around)
32.	Anton:	(looks around) What should we do now?
33.	Ahmed:	(points at the large bed) *Someone has tried my bed!*
34.	Anton:	No, this is your bed (said to Ahmed)
35.	Ahmed:	(moves to the middle bed) *Someone has tried my bed!*
36.	Anton:	*Someone has tried my bed also* (said with a squeaky voice)
37.	Aisa:	*Someone lies in my bed* (pretends to cry) *Ohhhh*
38.	Anton:	It's just ALICE

In turns 17–18, ALICE acts out her role as Goldilocks. She pretends to sleep by making snoring sounds. When the three children enter the stage (turn 19), it is evident how familiar they are with the story and what roles they enact as the three

bears. They use playing voices and they know what their lines are. As the teacher has proved to be a role model in her acting, she opens up for the children to also act out the story. As she continues to lie down, in character pretending to sleep, she seems confident in the children being competent in playing out the story. This can be seen in contrast to the example of the teacher acting as a director. Here, Anton choreographs the other participants in how to act (turns 23, 32 and 34) and it is evident that all the participants are engaged in the play and are co-constructors of how it develops. Similarly to the examples in Excerpts 7.1 and 7.2, this play can be characterized as a theatre play rather than an open-ended make-believe play. But in contrast to the teacher's role in Excerpt 7.2, the teacher in this activity lets the children play out their roles without directing them, allowing them space to participate as more involved agents in the activity (i.e., with increased agency). This could be seen as an example of how the participants are sharing a playworld (cf. Lindqvist, 1995) and how the teacher is inside the framework of the children's imaginary play (cf. Fleer, 2015). The way the teacher acts in a dramatized way also proves to be modelling (she being a role model) for how the children verbally can shape their roles in play. Anton's response (in turn 38) to the evolving play (*as if*), suggesting that "it's just" the teacher (*as is*) who has laid in the bed is a potential play-breaker (Huizinga, 1938/1955; cf. Excerpt 35, where we discuss this matter).

The Teacher Triggering Play through Engaging Children in a Playful Dialogue

In the data, there are also examples of more spontaneous activities when teachers contribute to establishing narrative frames for play activities. The next example plays out in an outdoor activity in a sandbox on the preschool's playground. Two children, 2–3 years old (Sam and Siri), sit in front of a teacher (EDITH) and after a little while, one more child (Sofie) joins them. Another child (Saga) takes part but is not visible on the film, as it is recorded (by a computer tablet placed on the edge of the sandbox). The teacher tells the folktale of Three Little Pigs as a puppet show, using as props things she finds in the sandbox. She uses expansive language (Pramling, Doverborg, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2017) and is dramatizing by using a play-voice:

Excerpt 7.4: The Frame Triggers the Play

1.	EDITH:	Who lived at home with mum and dad
2.	EDITH:	But one day the mum and dad said, you'll have to leave home, you'll have to build your own house!
3.	EDITH:	And the first pig, it built its house of straw (makes a room out of straw for the pig). This is grass but we pretend it's straw (puts the pig in the house), moved in
4.	Sofie:	(comes and sits down)
5.	EDITH:	And the second pig built its house out of sticks (makes a room/house of sticks)

6.	EDITH:	And the third pit built its house out of (inaudible)
7.	Sofie:	Then the wolf comes.
8.	EDITH:	Does the wolf come then (appears to be looking for something)?
9.	Sofie:	(takes a stone and and hands it to EDITH) Here!
10.	EDITH:	(gets closer) Here, here was a stone (takes it) Thank you (returns to her place)
11.	EDITH:	And this is the house of stones
12.	EDITH:	But then the wolf comes, oh to the first pig's house
13.	EDITH:	And then these two pigs went to the third pig
14.	Child:	(inaudible)
15.	EDITH:	Yes what will the wolf say now?
16.	Child:	Now I was gonna tell, the wolf
17.	EDITH:	Do you want to tell what happens now?
18.	Child:	Yes, eh, blow and fart [in Swedish: *prutta* (fart), which has some sound similary to *pusta* (blow)]
19.	EDITH:	Blow and fart?

This excerpt illustrates how the teacher initiates a play by telling the story of the Three Little Pigs. The activity starts as a ‘puppet show’ with the teacher as narrator, illustrating the story with props and by using expansive (i.e., non-deictic or beyond-the-present-situation form of) language; the children participating as audience. The teacher meta-communicates (in turn 3) when she clarifies that she uses grass as straw. She thus verbalizes the activity with the grass *as is* into *as if* it was straw. That another child approaches the sandbox at this point may indicate that it is a situation that engages the children and makes them curious about what is going on. In turn 7, Sofie suggests the wolf is coming, which indicates that this is a story well-known to the child. The activity develops to become a joint play, where the teacher is responsive for including the other participants' initiatives. In turn 15, she invites the children to participate, through asking them about what the wolf says, and a child takes on the role of the wolf. The play continues and gradually the children take more and more initiatives. The play then unfolds in a new direction, and new props, such as a dinosaur, are introduced. The children also build a large sand house where they all (the characters of the play) can live, which indicates that the ordinary narrative of the three pigs has been left or fundamentally developed.

Excerpt 7.5: The Play Opens Up for New Initiatives from the Children

103.	EDITH:	Then you have to try to agree, if you are building a house, what to do with the house
104.	Sam:	(kneels by the house) *Can I come in?*
105.	EDITH:	Mm, the pig wants to go in
106.	Sofie:	*I want to open the door*
107.	EDITH:	Yes, okay
108.	Sofie:	*It open*

In this example, the teacher thus enters into a dialogue with the children and acts as a co-creator of the play. The children develop the play and the teacher scaffolds this development through contributing material that can be used as props. In turn 103, when the teacher says that you have to come to an agreement, "If you are building a house, what to do with the house", she scaffolds the children in how to approach the construction of the house. Sam replies to her suggestion by taking the role of a pig, who asks: "*Can I come in*?" (turn 104). The teacher then makes clear to the other participants, through a meta-comment, that it is the pig who wants to enter the house they have built together (turn 105). Sofie takes on the role of a pig inside the house (turn 106); an initiative the teacher encourages. Even if the children are in the midst of developing their language, they are acting as engaged participants, taking roles on their own terms, such as when Siri verbalizes, in the role of the pig, "*It('s) open*" (turn 108). By framing the activity as a folktale (a familiar story), the teacher scaffolds the children in their make-believe play and makes them engaged in a joint activity, instead of arguing about how the activity should be performed (to fit the original story). In this way the teacher guides the children to enter into a shared playworld where they have agency to develop the evolving story/play.

The Teacher Engaging as a Guiding Participant

Another narrative frame for many of the play activities filmed in the project is the folktale of The Three Billy Goats Gruff. There is a tradition in Swedish preschools to dramatize this story, especially with the youngest children. The story is about the three goats named "Gruff", who are to go up to the hillside to make themselves fat. On the way up the hill, they have to cross a bridge over a cascading stream; and under the bridge lives a great ugly troll.

In the next example, a teacher working with the youngest children (1 to 3 years old) has organised a mutual play activity by placing a shelf on the floor in a playroom at the preschool to serve as a make-believe bridge. They have also produced props, such as toilet rolls in different sizes placed on their foreheads symbolising Billy Goat's horns. Two girls (Fia and Lea) have taken the roles of trolls, the teacher (KAREN) the role of little goat and two boys the roles of middle goat (Dan) and biggest goat (Kaj). The teacher crawls over the bridge and tells the trolls to not eat her but instead to wait for her brother, the middle goat:

Excerpt 7.6: Guiding the Narrative Action

8.	Dan:	*Come I* [Swedish: *Tommer jaa!* (*Kommer jag*)]
9.	Lea:	(pretends to eat on KAREN's leg)
10.	KAREN:	Do you come now?
11.	Lea:	(creeps up on the bridge and continues to pretend eating on KAREN's leg)
12.	KAREN:	Oh oh oh, now comes the next one… (takes Lea's arm and points to Dan, whispering): Look, look, now comes the next goat. COME! (to Dan)
13.	Dan:	(creeps over the bridge)

The example illustrates how the teacher supports the children through responsive listening (turn 10) to Dan's announcement that he is about to crawl over the bridge. She guides the narrative action (turn 12) when making the two trolls aware that another bigger goat is coming on their bridge, and she supports Dan to walk along. Since these are young children, they are in the midst of developing their speech, but they still participate actively in the activity. When Dan has succeeded to crawl over the bridge without being eaten by the trolls, it is the more silent boy, Kaj's turn. He has not spoken at all so far in the activity:

Excerpt 7.7: The Teacher Giving Voice as a Coordinator

24.	KAREN:	NOW COMES, now you'll have to be prepared troll
25.	Kaj:	(drags himself on his stomach across the bridge)
26.	KAREN:	(knocks hard): bom bom bom
27.	Fia:	Bom bom bom (mimics KAREN)
28.	Lea:	*Who tramps on my bridge now?*
29.	KAREN:	(sits down next to Kaj): *It's the BIG goat Gruff*

The teacher positions herself close to Kaj, looks at him and guides him as she knocks on the bridge (turn 26). Lea clearly knows the story, as indicated by her asking in a troll-sounding voice who is tapping on the bridge this time (turn 28). When Kaj does not answer, the teacher scaffolds the continuation of the play through giving voice to the lines of the child's character (turn 29) When doing this, the teacher leans towards Kaj, looks at him and, as she speaks the biggest goat's response, she metaphorically speaking becomes an extended arm to the child.

Even if it is a folktale that is dramatized, and thus builds on a well-established set of events, it allows the children to contribute to developing the play in unforeseen directions. In turn 11, Lea as a troll gets up on the bridge and takes a bite out of little goat's leg, which is not a part of the traditional story. The fact that there are two trolls is also a new contribution to the original narrative. The participants know the story well; they are engaged in the same playworld even if there are improvisational initiatives made by the children, that is, the activity is opened up for alterity (there being two trolls is accepted rather than corrected against a set formula).

The teacher acts as a guiding participant when she coordinates the children's perspectives and she helps the narrative to continue, in a playful manner, verbalizing the children's intentions for each other. For example, in turn 12, she point towards Dan to make Lea aware that the middle goat is coming over the bridge. She metacommunicates about what is happening and she uses an *as-if* clarification (turn 12) about the role that Dan takes in the play. She also acts as the director when she encourages Dan to crawl over the bridge.

Discussion

In this chapter, we have given empirical examples of how teachers use different folktales for establishing narrative frames for children to play within and/or to develop the play from. We have analysed different positions the teachers have taken as participants in the play activities and what their approaches have meant for how the activities continue. The examples are in line with those described by Hakkarainen et al. (2013), in the sense that they are framed by a story where the teachers and children have jointly agreed to the imagined plot and then enact their specific roles. In other words, the participants (teacher and children) establish a mutual playworld (cf. Lindqvist, 1995). Most of the examples given have also characteristics of role-play, as described by Hakkarainen et al.: they have a social and collective character; they are imaginative and have a narrative structure.

As the stories seem to be well known to the children, one can assume these plays have been developed over time, especially the examples illustrated in Excerpts 7.1 and 7.2, where the children have been engaged in developed the plot more in line with their everyday experiences than the traditional story departed from; for example, allowing Goldilocks to ride a motorcycle. The narrative framework could hence be understood as a creative sense-making process rather than simply a reproductive one. To some extent, the dramatized plays have been challenging for the children; at least the example illustrated in Excerpts 7.4 and 7.5, where the children participate in contributing to how the play should evolve. This is also the only example, of the ones we have here presented and analysed, where the play can be described as open-ended with all of the other examples being more in the nature of what we have referred to as theatre performance, with a set manuscript to follow (play out).

Even if folktales set the frames in all examples we have here given, our analysis also makes visible consequences of different *didaktikal* approaches for what abilities come into play and in the end the development of the play. The analysis shows that the children involved in the different examples get different possibilities for their play actions. The frames set for the plays can be described as a way to scaffold children into narrative engagement, and, as Hakkarainen et al. (2013) argue, “[t]he main feature of mature narrative play is the ability of the players to develop shared ideas and to construct a plot (storyline) together” (p. 215). According to the findings of the present study, it can be noted that the playworlds that the respective teachers establishes create conditions for children’s development of play abilities – although most of the situations here studied can be characterized as playful rather than as open-ended play.

When reading field notes from the video session (see Chap. 4), when the play of The Three Billy Goats Gruff (Excerpts 7.6 and 7.7) was analysed, the teacher told us that she had in mind to teach the children about the concepts ‘over’ and ‘under’. The teacher reflected that when she entered the playworld with the children, she was so focused on scaffolding the children in how to play she forgot to introduce these concepts. The activity developed in another direction. In other examples we have presented here, it is not clear whether the teacher intended to support the learning of

any particular or general ‘content’ in these play activities. From the excerpts it has been visible that different abilities are in play, for example, being imaginative in taking a role or using some props or being creative in acting and participating in story development. These are all abilities that have bearing outside (particular) play activities.

Arguably, the analysis here conducted on teachers’ involvement in narrative play also shows how the concept ‘subject position’ in relation to adult-child interaction can be related to a *didaktikal* approach to supporting play in preschool (cf. Fleer, 2015). By shifting their role from acting from a position outside the play – for example as a storyteller – and acting out a role (a character in the play), the teacher can support in children not only the development of a specific play but also the development of children’s play ability. Learning how to play includes developing the ability of taking a role but it is also about the ability to establish plays with others through various means including meta-communication; to both be inside a framed playworld and, when necessary, to step outside it for engaging in discussions about the development of the playworld. In the excerpts here analyzed (especially in Excerpt 7.3), it has been visible that the teachers act as role models by shifting positions over time and in response to the continuation of evolving or played-out narrative. When adults are co-constructing early narratives with children, Bruner (2003) argues, children get familiarised with temporal sequences and with a basic structure of the beginning, the conflict (what is happening in the story) and the resolution of the event, constituting the end of the story. By taking account of the children’s initiative, but also through challenging the children to take initiative, as in the example in Excerpt 7.4, turn 15, when the teacher asks, “What will the wolf say now?”, the teacher engages the children in the play at the same time as the development of the story (the storyline) becomes visible to them. What the participants orient toward is the plot and how they collectively can role-play the themes of the folktale.

In the present chapter, we have shown how different forms of teachers’ role taking in playful activities together with children set the frame for children’s actions and for their possibilities to contribute to the development of the play. Accordingly, children’s different abilities are in focus for development. On the one hand, abilities about keeping in mind and to do/say/remember the expected line (in line with the folktale), and on the other hand, abilities that relate to imagination and creativity. There are examples of how the teacher exposes the children to expansive language by naming props with their conventional names as opposed to merely using a local, deictic language (Pramling et al., 2017). In their discussion of teachers’ roles in play, Hakkarainen et al. (2013) suggest that teachers have to keep three different zones of development simultaneously in mind: proximal, distant and self-development:

> Individual development is accomplished in the space between distant and potential development. Child development in joint play proceeds from co-development to self-development. (Hakkarainen et al., 2013, p. 216)

Hakkarainen et al. (2013) report that the teacher students participating in their project found the play interventions to be a difficult task. They needed some time to

practice before they became accepted play partners, but in the end the students reached "a better understanding of the children's position and point of view" (p. 224). They also learned "to use play as the source, context and medium for a child's learning and development" (p. 224). In the examples in this chapter, it is evident that the teachers combine elements of *as if* (i.e., imagination) and *as is* (in taking a meta-perspective on the play and how to play), and elements of storytelling as well as considering children's perspectives.

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Chapter 8
The Triangle-Lady and Billy Goats Gruff: Constituting Contents for Learning in Play

In this chapter, we study how contents for learning emerge in play. From a *didaktik* perspective, it is of interest not only to highlight what contents are constituted and how but also how these contents may be appropriated by children in play. Building on the premise that communication is the mechanism of learning, how participants communicate in and about play become critical to our analysis.

Our analysis aims at clarifying how content for learning is constituted in play and particularly in communication in and about the play, regardless of whether the contents are introduced into the activity through the child's or the teacher's initiative. There are many studies reporting, for example, what features of mathematics *can be made* into contents for learning in different activities (e.g., Bäckman, 2015; Björklund, 2007; Lundström, 2015). However, in the analysis of the present chapter, we highlight contents that actually *become* the nexus of shared attention and exploration in different ways. Of particular interest to our analysis is what are necessary knowledge or skills for participants to develop in order to be able to continue their interaction and play (see also Chap. 10 about conceptual resources necessary for play).

As already mentioned, we are here interested in what contents are constituted in the analyzed activities and how the children indicate that they start appropriating these (i.e., actualized cultural tools and practices). We present the analysis in two sections, corresponding to different ways contents are constituted in play: (1) *External content for learning introduced into play*, including (a) *Isolated content for learning*, and (b) *Learning content necessary for play*. These contents are characterized by being introduced by the teacher, with different aims. However, we also see content emerging in the interaction between teacher and children *in* play: (2) *Learning contents emerging in play*. This second category is qualitatively differentiated into: (a) *Learning the framework of the play*, (b) *Learning how to play*, and (c) *Developing concepts as part of the play.*

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External Content for Learning Introduced into Play

In our observations of teachers participating in children's play, teachers implement content for learning that are of both academic character and concerns social skills. What stands out is that the teacher takes on the role of introducing the content to the children, but as it turns out, this content can remain isolated from the children's play, or the content is considered necessary for the children to embrace in order to play (on).

Isolated Content of Learning

An isolated content for learning can be found when the teacher asks a specific question or gives the child a task to solve, where it is apparent that a particular answer is expected. The function of asking this kind of question thus is to make sure children have sufficient knowledge of some predefined content.

When it comes to language learning (i.e., writing and reading) and mathematics learning, teachers readily see opportunities to count or spell. However, the content for learning, which is quite distinct to both an observer and participating children, may remain isolated and does not refer to, or is not integrated with, the play. Phrased differently, the content is not sufficiently recontextualized to the play.

Excerpt 8.1a: Billy Goats Gruff

1	CIA:	Once upon a time there were three goats and they all were named (inaudible) (with a dramatic voice)
2	Lisa:	Gruff
3	Two children:	*I'm the middlest. I'm the bigglest* [in Swedish: *Jag är den mellande* (mellan). *Jag är den storande* (stora)]
4	Kalle:	I'm the smallest
5	Lisa:	No, I'm the smallest
6	Child:	Here, beneath, here beneath is the troll
7	CIA:	Yes, but are there three trolls also (with a dramatic voice)?
8	Child:	I'm troll

In this initial sequence, the teacher and the children negotiate about which roles to play in a well-known story. There are opportunities opened up for topicalizing mathematical concepts for size and order, which are central parts of the story and notions the children are familiar with, albeit here not using the conventional words (turn 3). The teacher does not respond to this *didaktikal* opportunity; instead, she directs the children's attention to an occurrence outside the story they are initiating:

Excerpt 8.1b: K for K-N-I-F-E

9	Child:	But look, look here (creeps in under the bench)
10	CIA:	Oh, where shall it be? But what is it?
11	Peter:	It's for the letter wall (has something in his hand)
12	CIA:	What is it? A…?
13	Child:	Knife
14	CIA:	Which letter does it being with?
15	Child:	T
16	CIA:	You think so? T K K K
17	Child:	Knife
18	CIA:	K K K
19	Child:	K
20	CIA:	Yes
21	Nils:	Three can be, three can be, and three can also be trolls.

The sequence represented in this excerpt shows how an occurrence that leads the participants' attention outside their ongoing play becomes content for learning. The sounding of "K" has no relevance to their play, but the children follow the teacher in this excursion. However, one child (Nils) makes an effort to bring back the focus to the play they had initiated in the first place (turn 21). He does so, through, in a sense, recontextualizing "three" (letters) to three trolls, relevant to the story.

Mostly, in this kind of occurrences, where the teacher introduces a learning content while participating in a play situation, the children have already developed the skills necessary for solving the task and it can be questioned whether any opportunity to learn anything qualitatively new is offered the children. Furthermore, this approach is in a sense counter to, rather than responsive to, children's play.

Learning Content Necessary for Play

To participate in play, one needs some knowledge of the framework, roles and actions that are relevant. Usually, this is negotiated between the play participants. Sometimes the teacher adds a new item, feature or notion into the activity, which may alter the play-frame and either disrupts the play (similarly to in the previously presented category) or is incorporated into evolving play. These then have the potentials of working as contents for learning (since they may not be known before by all the participants) that are necessary for the development of mutual play.

The following excerpt seems at first glance to be the teacher attempting to introduce an isolated mathematical content into a child's play; quite typical for how mathematical contents are presented and dealt with as contents of learning in preschool (see e.g., Björklund, Magnusson, & Palmér, 2018). The teacher asks for permission to join the child's play, she takes on a role that makes her a participant

in the play and she introduces the content, in this case mathematical shapes, but the shapes do not at first appear to have any connection to what the child is playing (a part of this activity was analyzed with a different focus in Excerpt 5.7):

Excerpt 8.2a: The Triangle-Lady is Visiting

7.	GUNN:	You're playing in the hut. May I pop in?
8.	Siri:	Yes
9.	GUNN:	I take a look here. Oh! What a NIIICE hut you've made
10.	Siri:	And I have lots of pets. Here!
11.	GUNN:	Do you have so many pets?
12.	Siri:	Yes, a whole box full!
13.	GUNN:	A box full of animals. Oh! Okay. But Siri, I thought that now when I come and pay you a visit here in the hut I feel like playing with these for a while. Come and take a look
14.	GUNN:	I thought we would take these (gets up and gets a can) Oh it's such a BEAUTIFUL hut. THESE, what do you think of THESE? What do you say we play with these for a while?
16.	GUNN:	We can play that I come and visit you and then I'm the Triangle-Lady perhaps?
17.	Siri:	YES!
18.	GUNN:	Should we do that? Is that okay? Can't you sit here next to me instead? Nice. The Triangle-Lady comes and pays a visit (showing the triangle she holds in her hand) Do you know why they're called triangle?
19.	Siri:	'Cause… they are a bit like that… (makes a drawing in the air with her finger) They're almost like this!
20.	GUNN:	Yes, I agree
21.	Siri:	I actuallly have a book with shapes
22.	GUNN:	Shapes?
23.	Siri:	Yes, it's about Barbapapa
24.	GUNN:	Barbapapa. Can he make himself into shapes?
25.	Siri:	Yes
26.	GUNN:	Can he make himself into a shape like this?
27.	Siri:	Yes
28.	GUNN:	Aha. How many corners does it have?
29.	Siri:	…three!
30.	GUNN:	Three, yes. It can be called three-angle also [in Swedish, *trekant* (literally three-angle) is a less formal word for triangle (Swedish: *triangel*)]
31.	Siri:	Yes, and a nicer word for four-angle [in Swedish, *fyrkant* (literally four-angle) is a less formal word for square] is square!

In this exchange, the teacher introduces a character that changes the direction of the activity. The participants (i.e., teacher and child) to some extent coordinate, what from a Vygotskian perspective could be referred to scientific concepts with everyday concepts (turns 18–19 and 28–31). It is the child who here (in turn 31) introduces a new mathematical/scientific term; and the teacher follows this up,

which is not the most frequent unfolding of communicative events we see in the play activities we have analyzed.

Excerpt 8.2b: What is a Better Name for…?

32.	GUNN:	Oh, what you know. Do you find a… what was it called again, four-angle, here in the tub. THERE. What was a nicer word?
33.	Siri:	Square
34.	GUNN:	Square was the nicer one. It was a difficult word, S Q U A R E [in Swedish: K V A D R A T] and is there a nicer word for this (holds a triangle)
35.	Siri:	Rectangle?
36.	GUNN:	Mmmm… almost right. TRIANGLE, THREE-ANGLE [cf. turn 30] (points out the three corners)
37.	Siri:	YES
38.	GUNN:	Three corners. One, two, three. Three-angle and triangle. How well you know. What shall we build then when we build?
39.	Siri:	Shall we build a castle?
40.	GUNN:	Yees. Who should live in the castle?
41.	Siri:	Ehhh Muss… we would need hundreds of pieces if we were to build a house for Musse.
42.	GUNN:	Why?
43.	Siri:	’Cause he’s so big
44.	GUNN:	Yes, okay

The sequence represented in this excerpt is interesting for *didaktikal* development in three ways. *First*, the content is handled in a way that directs the child’s attention to the attributes of the mathematical shapes, helping her to differentiate not only that there are different shapes with different names; they are different due to their specific features (number of sides and vertex). In this activity, it is not only the teacher who initiates new terms; in turn 31 and again in turn 33, we can see that the child provides a mathematical term for a shape: “square”, to which the teacher responds by asking the child to find such a shape among the different ones in the bowl. *Second*, an aspect with an interest in *didaktik* is that this example of mathematics teaching is isolated from the child’s self-initiated play, to which the teacher asked permission to participate. The geometrical objects are handled by the teacher as content for learning and in the communication between teacher and child, specific features of the shapes that distinguish a square from a triangle are made into a figure. However, the features of geometrical shapes do not contribute to the child’s original construction play. That is, the content introduced is not coordinated with the play into which it is introduced, and in effect transforms the play into non-play. Nevertheless, the dialogue about shapes and their features and names returns in the continuing interaction and is eventually included in the play. This constitutes a *third* and not to be neglected aspect of *didaktik*: to introduce new content and visualize aspects of the world that the child might not have been able to recognize on her own, and that subsequently will contribute also to the development of the child’s play:

Excerpt 8.3a: Musse's House

64.	GUNN:	Yes, of course, of course. But how do we do with Musse's house here now?
65.	Siri:	That's fine
66.	GUNN:	Do you think he fits into this?
67.	Siri:	(with a tricky look, smiles) Nooo
68.	GUNN:	Noo (smiles) We'll have to make it a bit larger. Here's more squares
69.	Siri:	He needs a bit thicker house also
70.	GUNN:	Do you know any more nice words?
71.	Siri:	Oval
72.	GUNN:	OVAL!? What does an oval look like?
73.	Siri:	It's like a plateau, like this (draws with her finger in the air)
74.	GUNN:	Hm how? I'll have to try (draws with her finger in the air) How did you do?
75.	Siri:	They are… eeh… you should see, if only I brought my book
76.	GUNN:	Is there any that looks… aha, the shapes book. Can't you bring it tomorrow? It's really fun with shapes.
77.	Siri:	Of course I can! I can put it in my jacket pocket
78.	GUNN:	Yes, so you'll remember it
79.	Siri:	Yees.
80.	GUNN:	But can you tell me what is oval in shape, so that I understand what is oval?
81.	Siri:	Eeeh… it's like soap that lies down, which is slimy, a little bit like… a jellyfish (makes a gesture) but… slimier
82.	GUNN:	Yees… so the soap is like an oval?
83.	Siri:	Yes, the soap itself
84.	GUNN:	Okay, then I think I understand what the shape oval is. I wonder why there are shapes. Linn, do you know?

This section of the activity illustrates how the child is able to show some of her knowing; as is known from other studies (e.g., Magnusson & Pramling, 2017; Pramling & Wallerstedt, 2009), children often say that 'it's like this' (cf. turn 73) and then they show through gesturing or bodily enactment. However, in the nature of educational institutions such as preschool (and school), teachers often challenge children to try to go beyond *showing* to also *telling* (or explaining) (ibid.). To go from, and to coordinate, what one *shows* with what one *says*, constitutes an important general ability, critical to schooling. Challenged by the teacher to explain what an oval is, the child uses a number of similes (turn 81). From the child's reasoning it is not entirely clear what features of, in this case, a soap and a jellyfish she understands are shared with the geometrical shape of oval. At first, it appears that she intends the shape to be shared between a soap and an oval, but when suggesting that it is like a jellyfish, only a little more slimy (turn 81), she attends to another feature, and one not shared by an oval as such. Still, her explanation is ambiguous, as evident in her reasoning in this way at the same time as using meta-markers such as "a little bit like" (turn 81). It is possible that she here plays rather than provides a straightforward explanation of how she understands what an oval is. The content is introduced by the teacher and some of the concepts are challenging for the child to

comprehend and express her understanding of. The child needs both to differentiate between what aspects are relevant to the concept and what are incidental to it (the shape 'oval' versus the texture 'slimy') and how to express this meaning (in words and gestures).

The question of why there are shapes (turn 84) seems to puzzle the child, since she does not respond to it. This kind of question is what Piaget (1926/1951) in the beginning of his research asked children, for trying to see if they could reason in terms of more formal logic. The inherent ambiguity of such questions are analyzed in Pramling and Säljö (2015). They argue that there can be many answers to a question such as what different forms can be used for, but why they exist is far more complex to answer. It is not entirely clear what an adequate answer would be. In the excerpt, the child responds to the situation by returning her attention to her book and her construction play:

Excerpt: 8.3b: Shapes

85.	Siri:	Nooo, that's not what the book is about. It was the shapes. Eeh… how it BECOMES
86.	GUNN:	You should learn how shapes become?
87.	Siri:	Yes, for example… (stands up and shows on the hut) this becomes… eh… one like these (picks up a square). This hut is shaped like one of these!
88.	GUNN:	Like a square. Yes
89.	Siri:	YES, look! (stands up and points around the edges of the hut)
90.	GUNN:	Yes, exactly. I think I understand. You have a square hut
91.	Siri:	YES
92.	GUNN:	Do you know what I'm doing now Linn?
93.	Siri:	No
94.	GUNN:	Now I make a new shape, and this shape you said before (has shaped a rectangular shape from the squares)
95.	Siri:	RECTANGLE
96.	GUNN:	So much you know! Now let's see if you know this tricky one: What is the difference between a square (Swedish: *fyrkant* [four-angle]) and a rectangle?
97.	Siri:	A square has EQUALLY long sides, but this one… eh… one side is a bit longer than the other. So this is a bit thinner (shows on the short side of the shape) than this (shows the long side)
98.	GUNN:	Okay, so two sides are a little shorter and two sides are a little… yes, EXACTLY! RECTANGLE (nods). Excellent! Can Musse fit into this now (points at the constructed rectangle)?
99.	Siri:	Yees

The teacher reformulates what the child *shows* into a conventional term, "a square" (turn 88). In this way, she coordinates the child's perspective and an institutional category (scientific concept). The child then refers to the book she mentioned earlier, and what information about the topic shapes that the book provides, namely, how shapes are made. She gives the example of the playhouse she has built (turns 87 and 89). The teacher then picks up on the idea of how to make shapes and con-

struct a rectangle (turn 94) out of two squares, which is eventually reconnected with the original play theme about Musse (turn 98). The teacher and child are going in and out of the play (*as if* and *as is*), sometimes discussing specific content to develop their common understanding of (turn 97), which is then used within their mutual play frame (turn 98). This example shows how new content that is elaborated in conceptually developing ways later becomes a part in the child's subsequent play. That is, what is introduced by the teacher in a rather a-contextual way (vis-à-vis the child's ongoing play) is later recontextualized in terms of the play.

Another content for learning in play emerges when there are some necessary skills or knowledge that the child needs to acquire in order to participate and act in accordance with the play rules. This is shown in Excerpt 8.4, where a group of children and a teacher plan how to play Ninjas and Ninjagos (popular hero figures at the time of the observation):

Excerpt 8.4: How to Play Ninja

14.	CIA:	But Amos and Nils, look here at Valter. What is it, what is it Valter, Valter tries to tell here?
15.	Valter:	Yes, look at Olle and me
16.	CIA:	Yes, look at Olle and Valter now!
17.	Valter:	You shouldn't have bandy-sticks
18.	Valter:	That you hold like this
19.	CIA:	Hold like this (shows how she holds her hands together)
20.	Olle:	And then… and then…
21.	Valter:	Yes, it's a bit difficult when you, I have my mittens on
22.	Olle:	Yees, and like, you do like this… (both boys show how they do sword-fighting movements in the air. They make a swooshing sound while swinging their imaginary swords)
23.	Olle:	And that's that… (returns to the group of children, several children start talking)
24.	Child:	Ninjas, ninjas, they do like this… they sit like this (makes himself small) but they sit like this… then they do like this and then they fight (show fighting with his hands)
25.	CIA:	Okay! But Valter, is is, is it an imaginary sword you mean? A bit like this, you pretend to have a sword in fantasy?
26.	Valter:	Aah
27.	CIA:	Do you remember that we made a fantasy journey before, we saw a waterfall and so (makes movements with her hand)
28.	Children:	Aaa
29.	CIA:	Just like that I think Valter is trying to tell with, with, kind of, fantasy sword. For example like this now (gets up to a kneeling position and start fighting in the air). Now I pretend… (makes sounds while swinging her imaginary sword). Did you see how many I ninjad [Swedish: *ninjade*] down with my sword!? I'm a super-ninja. (One of the children gets up and runs with a bandy-stick, holding it as if it were a rifle. Makes shooting sounds.)
30.	CIA:	But ninjas without sword? Shall we see if we can do that?
31.	Child:	But ninjas don't have swords, they do like this (shows how he hits and kicks in the air, and then on a tree)
32.	Child:	But hello, ninjas are fencing at night and days all the time!

The imaginary fight seems to be troublesome to grasp for some of the children. The teacher picks up on this challenge, seeing it as a content for learning that is important in preparation for being able to participate in this kind of play. She refers to an activity they did earlier, where a waterfall was visualized with hand movements and sound (turn 27). In a similar manner, she addresses the suggested imaginary sword fight that some children tried to explain, by using her body movements and voice to illustrate her being a fighting ninja (turn 29). The content for learning here emerging is how to use one's body to *gestalt* (i.e., represent) imaginary actions. The skill of pretend fighting without a physical prop (a pivot; Vygotsky, 1978) is an important content that enables the children to participate in the play, *and* a content of importance to the teacher, who introduced the need of rules for the ninja play, in that no bandy sticks should be used as fighting tools towards another person (picked up by Valter in turn 17). That is, without being allowed to use some kind of physical props as swords, the children face the challenge of how to *gestalt* sword fighting only with their bodies (embodiment and sound-making). To be able to do so becomes a prerequisite for being able to participate in the play. Making the children pay attention to what a child does, in terms of verbalizing his embodied action in terms of "tell" (turn 14) and the rule that physical sticks cannot be used for fighting, the teacher triggers collaborative consideration of how to give *gestalt* to a critical part of the play with other means (*as if* having swords).

Another example of content for learning that turns out to be preparatory for play is shown in a catch-and-run play. There are no predefined general rules to the game and the teacher and the children have to make up the rules and roles. They do this within the frames of an imaginary sea world and the suggestions given make up the rules for the play. The content for learning is complex in this example, but concerns exploring "what sharks can do", something that is part of the framework of what kind of movements that are allowed in the play:

Excerpt 8.5: Sharks in the Sea

1	Tom:	Sharks cannot be on, walk on land
2	STINA:	Sharks cannot be on land? How lucky then that we have water here (turns towards the other children and points at the blue blanket)
3	Adam:	They can swim like this (shows with his body how sharks swim)
4	STINA:	And they can swim like that and they can swim like this and that (showing different ways to swim, while the children swim along on the blanket)
5	STINA:	What else can sharks do (she sits up, the children stop swimming)
6	Tom:	Sharks (stands and looks on)?
7	STINA:	Yes
8	Tom:	They can swallow a human whole
9	STINA:	Can they swallow a whole human being? You can come here and be shark (waves for Tom to come). Come here and be a shark! (waves. Tom comes and sits down on the blue blanket) What else can you be in water?
10	Ewa:	Mermaid
11	STINA:	And what do you say? (turns to one of the boys)

12	Adam:	Eat meat …
13	STINA:	What do we do now then?
14	Adam:	Let's do again! Then we can do again!

In this catch-and-run play, the teacher and children need to establish the rules for playing. They do this by showing and trying out different suggestions. Knowledge, such as introduced by Tom (turn 1), that sharks need water (*as is*), has decisive consequences for the emerging play rules: they have to move in a swimming mode and cannot enter and chase someone on land.

Common to the examples of contents of learning we here discuss is that they concern what is needed in order to participate in a particular kind of play. The teacher has a prominent role in offering different contents for the children to explore. The teacher works in all these examples in ways where she makes the framework explicit to the children and explains (with embodiment coordinated with words) what they mean and how to execute the necessary skills and knowledge. This means that the content for learning is extended in meaning to some children and works as confirmation to other children. In this way, both novice and expert players may be included in the same play.

Learning Contents Emerging in Play

In contrast to the play situations where the teacher initiates contents to be explored, we find another approach where the content for learning emerges *within* play. This category is further analytically differentiated into: *Learning the framework of the play, learning how to play,* and *developing concepts as part of the play.*

Learning the Framework of the Play

We can see that learning opportunities are plenty in play, but what, so to speak, is learning necessary for in these activities? What content is constituted and for what purpose? In some forms of play, such as "house" or "school", where the play participants take on certain roles (parent, sibling, teacher, postman) the content of learning is not only how to play that character but also in a sense the whole of the play (how to act and interact with the other characters of the play): how to play house or how to be at the doctor's to get a shot.

The younger children are more commonly invited by the teachers into structured play, such as rhymes or songs that traditionally follow a certain pattern of actions or movements. The following excerpt is of a play framed by a song about an egg, which is hidden under a cloth, and when the song comes to the end, a chicken comes out from under the cloth after a verbal cue: "come out" (Swedish: "*Kom fram*"). The child Karin in the excerpt is 2 years old.

Excerpt 8.6a: Hiding Chicken

26.	Karin:	Hide (puts the chicken under the cloth).
27.	SARAH:	Should it be there? (puts her hand on the cloth)
28.	Karin:	Yes (nods)
29.	SARAH:	(sings) the chicken in the egg, the chicken in the egg sleep…
30.	Karin:	What
31.	SARAH:	(continues singing) what are you doing, are you sleeping?

The teacher accidently starts saying the wrong word "sleeping" (turn 29) and the child is immediately correcting her by saying the right word "what" (turn 30). This indicates that the child knows the song very well even though she is not singing along in this episode.

Excerpt 8.6b: Counting for Closure

32.	Karin:	(takes out the chicken from under the cloth and shows it to the teacher)
33.	SARAH:	No but, it was, beep beep chicken! (accepts the chicken Karin gives her)
34.	Karin:	Beep beep. Hide egg, hide egg (puts an egg under the cloth)
35.	SARAH:	Hide egg?
36.	Karin:	Yes
37.	SARAH:	One, two, three (folds up her thumb, index finger and middle finger for respective word)
38.	Karin:	(makes pointing movements up and down with her index finger in time with the teacher's counting, says simultaneously with the teacher) three

The teacher here introduces a new aspect to the play frame in that she counts "one, two, three", showing one, two and three raised fingers for each counting word (turn 37). The child immediately follows up on the teacher's initiative (turn 38).

Excerpt 8.6c: Singing and Counting

39.	SARAH:	(sings) chicken in the egg, chicken in the egg… come out!
40.	Karin:	(quickly pulls the egg from under the cloth, says something inaudible)
41.	SARAH:	(shows the chicken she has in her hand) beep beep
42.	Karin:	(hides the chicken under the cloth)
43.	SARAH:	(counts and folds up one finger at a time) one, two, three
44.	Karin:	(in sync with the teacher, raises and lowers her index finger in time with the counting) two, three (starts singing) the chicken… (another child runs across the cloth, making the singing stop)
45.	SARAH:	(points and counts again) one, two, three, the chicken in the egg…
46.	Karin:	(adjusts the cloth and looks at the teacher who counts, points in sync with her counting, from two)

The content for learning emerging in this play is how to play the play in a specific manner. The teacher introduces the frame that constitutes the play. The child follows the initiated acts but then takes the initiative to repeat the play, following the same pattern (turns 42–46). She continues playing the same play on eight observed occasions, following the exact same framework and pattern of acts on her own.

Learning How to Play

In order to be able to play an occurrence of some kind (a contest or a visit to the doctor's) where several children participate, some *social skills* become necessary (and, thus, potentially contents for learning).

Excerpt 8.7: The Way to Play out the Story

35	CIA:	Once upon a time there were the three goats Gruff (with a dramatic voice, starts creeping). Where were they going now? (Lisa and Peter climb up on the bridge)
36	Peter:	You cannot go at the same time
37	Lisa:	But the little one goes first, then comes the middle goat and last comes the biggest
38	Child:	The little goat starts first
39	CIA:	Yes, if you're to play exactly as the tale is. But do you have to play exactly like the tale is?
40	Children:	Yees
41	CIA:	Yes, okay, okay
42	Lisa:	Let's first go round a bit and graze and then we go up on the bridge (shows with her arm how they can go)?
42	Peter:	Noo
44	Lisa:	Yees
45	Peter:	Noo
46	Lisa:	Yees
47	CIA:	Hold on, hold on
48	Peter:	Noo
49	CIA:	Stop, stop, stop. Do you know what, Lisa and Peter, if there is to be any play, what is most important for it to become a play?
50	Child:	Agreeing
51	CIA:	Agreeing. Does it feel like you're agreeing now?
52	Children:	No

Two learning contents emerge in the sequence represented by Excerpt 8.7: first, how a play based on a known story should be designed and performed (in terms of roles, order of occurrences, turns 35–38), and second, the skill to compromise and find a solution to how the story should precede that satisfies all the participants (turns 42–52). In the episode represented by this excerpt, there is not at this point

temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity in order for the participants to go on with a joint activity (mutual play). The teacher enters and tries to support the children in handling this problem, which can be seen as one of many ways that teachers are important to children's play. The episode also shows how learning to play in preschool is inherently part of socialization practices: learning how to be with others. Learning the kinds of skills necessary for the latter are not separate from learning to play or learning in play. This excerpt is also illustrative of a known story framing play in a unflexible way for children; – according to the participating children (turn 40, responding to the teacher's question in turn 39) – it has to be played "exactly like the tale is" (cf. Excerpt 6.3, turn 113).

Developing Concepts as Part of the Play

There is another category of contents that emerge when analyzing children's play. These contents of learning are phenomena that are explored as the goal of the play, commonly some novel concept. This seems to be most common among younger children, to whom many basic concepts relating to the surrounding world are novel, but this can also be observed among older preschool children, for example when playing with letters and words. Excerpt 8.8a is taken from a longer episode of kitchen play, where three toddlers and one teacher share imaginary milk and ice cream.

Excerpt 8.8a: More Milk from the Jug

59.	Said:	(picks mugs from a table and put them on another table, pretends to pour from a jug to a glass)
60.	Tim:	(takes out something from a box and gives it to MIA)
61.	MIA:	I can take it (takes what Tim gives her and puts it in her pocket) it's alright, I can take it
62.	Said:	(pretends to pour from jug to glass)
63.	Said:	Here's milk
64.	MIA:	What do you bring?
65.	Said:	Here's milk
66.	MIA:	Do you come with milk?
67.	Said:	Yes
68.	MIA:	Ooh, thanks
69.	Tim:	(inaudible)
70.	Said:	(pretends to pour from jug to glass)
71.	Tim:	(goes to pour from the same jug to his cup, but is hindered by Said)
72.	Said:	I can
73.	Tim:	(holds his cup to the teacher. Said follows with the jug)
74.	MIA:	Edvin wants more milk (to Said) okay?
75.	Said:	Okay (goes to Edvin and pretends to pour)

76.	Edvin:	(immediately pretends to drink)
77.	Edvin:	More (holds out his cup to Said)
78.	MIA:	(smiles and follows the actions with her gaze)
79.	Said:	(comes and pretends to pour)
80.	MIA:	Ain't it good with milk?
81.	Edvin:	More… more more more more (Said comes and pretends to pour)
82.	Tim:	(holds out his cup towards the others)
83.	Edvin:	I got all
84.	MIA:	Now's the milk soon finished, I think
85.	Said:	(pretends to pour in Tim's cup)
86.	Tim:	More (holds out his cup to Said)
87.	MIA:	There's room for a lot of milk in that jug, in that big jug

In turn 87, something happens that disrupts the play, which up until then has followed the same pattern. The children and the teacher have drunk milk from their cups, over and over again, with more milk added by Said from the jug. The teacher then states that the jug seems to contain quite a lot of milk. She thereby directs attention towards the amount of (imaginary) milk that has been poured from the jug to the cups. This seemingly ordinary statement does however point out something specific about the relationship between the jug and the cups and triggers a change in the child's way of handling the containers:

Excerpt 8.8b: From Container to Jug to Cup

88.	Said:	No, here (goes to the other table where there's some other things, pretends to pour more milk from a carton)
89.	MIA:	(inaudible) look you can fill up over there!… wow
90.	Said:	(pretends to pour in Tim's cup)
91.	Tim:	(shows his cup)
92.	MIA:	It's like a milk machine, it looks like
93.	Said:	(puts the jug upside down over a glass) look (points)!
94.	Tim:	Looks (points)!
95.	MIA & Edvin:	(inaudible)
96.	Tim:	(tries to help Said)
97.	Said:	No, you don't know how (pretends to pour)
98.	Edvin:	The ice cream is in there (to MIA)
99.	MIA:	Is it in there?
100.	Tim:	(goes to Said and holds out his cup. Said pretends to pour)
101.	MIA:	(inaudible to Edvin. Tim walks between the tables with his cup)
102.	MIA:	You haven't put it in yet?
103.	Tim:	More milk! (shows MIA his cup)
104.	MIA:	You got more milk
105.	Tim:	Yees
106.	MIA:	He had more there

107.	Said:	(pretends to pour from jug to glass)
108.	Tim:	More milk, I…
109.	Said:	Not that one, not that one (takes something from Tim and pretends to pour from a carton) that!
110.	Said:	(pretends to pour from jug to glass)
111.	MIA:	Now you've drunk lots of milk
112.	Tim:	(inaudible)
113.	Edvin:	Oh, the ice cream, it melts
114.	Tim:	More, more milk! (hands the carton to MIA) I get more milk (makes fetching movements with his hand, from the floor to the carton)
115.	MIA:	Oh, you can fill up like that
116.	Said:	No, it's in there (holds out the jug) there also, not…
117.	Said and Tim:	(hold the carton)
118.	MIA:	Watch it so it doesn't break, oh oh oh, carefully!
119.	Child:	(inaudible)
120.	MIA:	You cannot pull it, then it breaks (to Tim and Said)
121.	Tim:	I want it
122.	MIA:	Wait, let's see… can you fill milk in this? (to Said) can you do that? Can you fill milk in this?
123.	Said:	(goes with the carton to the other table)

Said immediately takes the new question about the amount of milk in the jug into account and explains that the milk in the jug comes from a larger container on the other table (turn 88). The play then continues in a more complex fashion, where the container also plays its role as providing milk to the jug and consequently to the cups. A seemingly simple play among toddlers is in this way extended by the teacher's comment on the amount of milk a jug may contain and the "milk-pouring" play continues. Tim (in turn 114) takes initiative to expand the play content. He was not allowed to use the box or the container that Said is in possession of, but Tim's act of filling up the larger container box gives him an important role and extends the concept they elaborate on in the play. The two last categories of content for learning in play have in common that the initiatives to expand or explore experiences are emerging mutually between teacher and children within play.

Discussion

We have here seen a number of contents of playing and learning being constituted in mutual activities. One thing that we can note is that there is much dialogue between the teacher and children in the play situations we have analysed, something earlier research on ECEC has pointed out as largely missing (e.g., Sylva, Roy, & Painter, 1980; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008). However, this is likely contingent

on the fact that in the project we ask teachers to try to participate in, and make contributions to, play.

Clearly, what teachers decide to respond to in, or introduce into, these activities has consequences for what becomes the content of the play (see also Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2010) and therefore also for what children can learn in interaction with the teacher and each other in these activities. Sometimes children are eager to be involved (see Excerpt 8.4) when the teacher takes the lead, and sometimes the very element of play is at risk of disappearing, that is, the *as-if* nature of such an activity, when teachers participate (see Excerpts 8.3a and 8.3b).

A premise for our reasoning is that there is always some kind of content constituted in communicative activities. What we have seen here is that it can vary between a single content for learning that is unrelated to what the play is about; in these cases, in our examples, always introduced by the teacher; towards learning the frame of a play; or contents for learning that emerge during play. Different contents are constituted in communication, for instance values, skills or knowledge that may be more or less specifically related to the goals of preschool curriculum. There are play activities in our data that do bring to the fore an academic content, some of which are discussed in this chapter (see Chaps. 9, 10, and 11, for examples analysed in depth), but content for learning in the observed play settings are often directed towards social skills.

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Chapter 9
When Kroko-the-Crocodile Got Sick

In this chapter, we illustrate what the tensions concerning what we refer to in terms of alterity and coordinating *as if* and *as is*, imply for playing and teaching. Below follows two examples of how the tension between dealing with *alterity* and *coordinating as if* and *as is* can be successfully handled in ways that integrate play and teaching.

Reading Icons and Graphical Symbols as a Prerequisite to Play

Four children (aged 4–5 years) are playing postal worker, and they have asked the teacher to write a letter. When we enter the play, she has left a note for the children in the letterbox. The note is about a toy crocodile by the name of Kroko, a very familiar toy to the children. Excerpt 9.1 starts as the teacher knocks on the door to the room where the children are playing.

Excerpt 9.1

1.	Maja:	Yes, there was a knock. There was a knock, yes. (takes the letter from the mailbox). It has knocked, *we've got a letter*! (shouts)
2.	Simon:	I knew it
3.	Disa:	What does it say? Band-Aid Emergency
4.	Maja:	Rrr… (holds the letter in her hand and starts to sound) A M L A T [(in English, (F) A L L E N]
5.	Disa:	Band-Aid! (shouting)

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6.	Maja:	M ….rmmldttt (while following with her finger over the word RAMLAT [Eng., FALLEN] sounding). Should I start up or down? (turns to the teacher, the other children are gathered around her)
7.	MIA:	Start there (MIA points at the first word, KROKO)
8.	Maja:	K... K... R... Å... K… A... HÄ... A... R... (tries to sound out KROKO HAR [Eng. KROKO HAS]) What happened to the word?
9.	MIA	Try again! (drawing her finger over the word KROKO twice) Try again!
10.	Maja:	Should I do up there or there? (points at the icon of the cross and then on the word KROKO)
11.	Disa:	Band-Aid Emergency!
12.	MIA	On the word
13.	Maja:	In that way or in that way (pointing from right to left and then from left to right)
14.	MIA	Start there, and then so… (points at the letter K and then draws her finger across the word in the reading direction)
15.	Maja:	K... R... Å... Ä… no K... R… Ä… K...
16.	MIA	K... (points at the first letter of the first word and sounds out the word) R... O... K... O…
17.	Disa:	Hospital!
18.	Maja:	*Kroko! Kroko is ill!*
19.	MIA	Kroko (reads the word again and then points at the next word)
20.	Disa	*Has bled!*
21.	MIA	H... A... R [Eng. HAS]
22.	Disa:	*Bled!*
23.	Maja:	R...
24.	MIA	A... M...
25.	Maja:	L.. .A...T *Kroko has fallen! Oh no! But we save it so we remember it* (puts the letter in the drawer)
26.	Disa:	*But Kroko!*

In this activity, the teacher takes the opportunity to implement a planned (curricular) activity in children's play. She does this in response to the children's expressed wish to get a letter in/for their play. The response from the children when they receive the note is immediate and excited (turns 1–3). They immediately hold their on-going play and direct their focus on the note. The note contains written text and two icons, one of a Band-Aid and one conventional symbol for hospital (Fig. 9.1). The discovery of the note (turns 1–2) evokes great engagement among the children and they laugh out loud (turn 2). There is a playful ambience in the moment when the children gather around the note and they want to know what it says (turn 3). Thus, the teacher is successful in implementing a real problem, how to decode (read) the note (its icons and text), and the children have agency in how to interpret the message of the note with the teacher initially staying in the background. Reading the note poses a challenge to the children, both individually and as a group (turns 3–25). To interpret the note becomes a shared focus, engaging and challenging the children

Fig. 9.1 The note left for the children. "*Kroko har ramlat*" [*Eng*. Kroko has fallen]

in how to grasp and interpret the message (*as is*). There is a transition from *as if* to *as is* when talking about the content of the note; what does the text (actually) say? The question posed (What does it say?, turn 3) shows an awareness of text as something particular (a message being sent and received), that the note has a function to it. Trying to read the note constitutes a challenge to understand text *as is*, while the activity is framed *as if,* since the note is implemented as part of their ongoing play. Also when trying to read the note, *as if* and *as is* are merged. In turn 3, a child says, "the Band-Aid emergency" which probably refers to the image on the note. However, when saying this she sounds *as if* she is reading.

In the activity, a variation of understanding of the concept of reading becomes visible through the different strategies used by the children. These different strategies are later seen to be significant for how the activity develops. One strategy is to read the icons on the note. Another strategy is to read the written text. One girl turns out to be knowledgeable in letters and she tries to sound out the first written word of the note. Even if she can match grapheme (letter) with its phoneme (speech sound), the challenge appears in the synthesis, to sound out the different letters into a unified word (turn 4). The teacher is invited to participate (turn 6), and becomes involved. Then the activity evolves as a reading activity, where this child overcomes the challenge to sound out and combine different sounds of letters with each other. The teacher supports the child through the reading process. The teacher is balancing between encouraging (turn 9) and giving adequate scaffolding in the process (e.g., turns 14 and 16). The questions from the child guides the teacher's actions (turns 6, 8 and 10). This balancing activity illustrates how the child and the teacher manage to coordinate their perspectives to do the reading according to an alphabetical principle. Important features of reading, such as where to start and reading direction (turns 7, 14 and 16) and meta-terms, such as "word" (turn 12), are pointed out by the teacher.

The two reading strategies (attending to icons and written text, respectively) could both have been accepted or rejected. As the design of the note opens up for

children to read in different ways, there is a choice for the teacher in what to emphasise. She has at least two options, either to engage with several children, who read the icons, or to engage in the reading process with *one* child who tries to sound out the first written word of the note. The teacher has to make a quick decision, in the spur of a moment, and the reading of the icons is implicitly put into the background as the teacher focuses on scaffolding the child who is continuing sounding the word. The child who involved the teacher into the common "reading project" is a child with knowledge of a key to reading, the connection between letters and sounds, which comes to have significance for the direction the activity takes.

After having read the note, some of the children run into another room where Kroko (the toy crocodile) lies on a couch:

Excerpt 9.2

27.	Disa:	Maja! *Kroko has fallen by the couch!*
28.	Maja:	*I'll be right there*
29.	Simon:	Noo, you've just put like that
30.	Disa:	*I have to get her* (runs off).
31.	Child:	*Kroko has fallen now… come quick!*
32.	Disa:	*He's bleeding, he's bleeding in different places. Look!*
33.	Child:	*Isn't he bleeding?*
34.	Maja:	*Bleeding, is he bleeding?*
35.	Disa:	*I think so*
36.	Simon:	No, you've send a letter just for us to… no, it's not the mailman who has
37.	Maja:	*Where does he bleed? Where does he bleed?*
38.	Simon:	No, it's just you who've put him like this
39.	Disa:	*Yes, he's wounded also*
40.	Alva:	*Here!*
41.	Disa:	*Aaaaaaa*
42.	Maja:	*What shall we do?*
43.	MIA:	*Has Kroko hurt himself?*
44.	Maja:	*Where does he bleed?*
45.	Disa:	*Kroko has hurt himself! Oh no, how sad!*
46.	Maja:	*Oh no!*
47.	Disa:	*Oh no!*
48	Simon:	No, we're gonna play doctor
49.	Per:	Aa doctor's bag
50.	Alva:	He's not bleeding

The content of the note (that Kroko has fallen) contributes to fantasizing about the crocodile and to further play. Disa evolves the narrative, by calling out to a friend that Kroko has fallen (turn 27). Another child, Simon, objects that it is merely

the teachers who have placed Kroko in such a manner (turn 29), by indicating that it is the teachers who have written the note (turn 36). Neither Maja nor any of the other children take any notice of this statement. Thus, there is initially some lack of intesubjectivity: while Disa (turn 27) aligns with the play frame, as constituted by (the reading of) the note, another child (Simon, in turn 29) objects to the evolving narrative. Hence, Disa aligns with the *as-if* nature of the initiated play while Simon takes the 'predicament' of the toy crocodile *as is* (he has not really fallen and hurt himself). The lack of coordination of perspectives continues, as we will see, throughout the episode represented in Excerpt 9.2.

Disa continues to advance the play and involves a peer (turn 30, who is urged to come quickly. There is no predetermined narrative but an open one, free for the participants to develop (cf. Huizinga, 1938/1955). The children fantasize that Kroko is bleeding, that he might be bleeding in several places and at the same time they are questioning whether he bleeds at all (turns 33–35). Kroko's possible injury seem to be open for negotiation, which implies different narratives (alterity). At the same time, the boy showing suspicion tries to convince the other children about it only being the doing of the teachers (turns 29 and 38), but still gets no response. The boy's comments show scepticism and could be regarded as a potential play-breaker. Huizinga (1938/1955) argues that every play has its own specific rules and no play endure doubt.

Simon's objections can be understood as him perceiving that this is not how it really is in the play, and that the teachers are not participants in the play, but stand outside it. What takes place in the activity could be seen as a field of tension between the boy's attempt to reveal the 'conspiracy' of the grown-ups and the agenda of the group to develop the common narrative in play. This field of tension also indicates the delicacy of play. One child, who sticks to the agreed-upon narrative, turns to the group, asking what to do with Kroko (turn 42). The teacher supports the evolving story, by asking if Kroko is hurt (turn 43), which is confirmed by one of the children (turn 45). The suggestion by the boy showing suspicion is thus put to the background. To support his suggestion could possibly have made the narrative of Kroko pointless, ending the play.

As illustrated in this example, the teacher is responsive and latches onto the invitation from the children to write a letter. The note provides a shared platform for the teacher and the children to act upon. By introducing the note, the teacher opens up for children to engage with a content (the connection between phoneme and grapheme). The teacher supports one of the girls to read (facilitating the development of reading skills) in response to the children's interest in finding out the meaning of the message. The reading contributes with a new possible direction for the play; not only reading but also what the message opens up for in terms of further play activity. Fantasy and reality are intermixed and opens up for new forms of play, such as playing doctor and nurses.

Teaching Everyday Routines in Play

According to the Swedish preschool curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018), the content to be taught concern matters of understanding the surrounding world and how to orient oneself in it. Excerpt 9.3 is from an extended play sequence lasting 24 minutes. Three children and one teacher is playing in the preschool's family corner. The narrative play-frame consists of everyday routines, common at home and in preschool and culturally prevalent (van Oers, 2013). They start the play by laying the table, eating lots of imaginary food and having an imaginary birthday party. The teacher is responsive to the children's initiative, but she also gives her own suggestions during the play. In Excerpt 9.3, the birthday party is over and one child starts pretending to brush his teeth:

Excerpt 9.3

119.	Tam:	(brushes his teeth)
120.	MIA:	*Where do you do that?* (till Edvin)
121.	Edvin:	*You do it outside* (inaudible)
122.	MIA:	*You brush your teeth after ice cream* (to Tam) *well done!*
123.	Edvin:	(says something inaudible to Tam)
124.	MIA:	*Maybe I too should brush my teeth... has eaten so much ice cream*
125.	Tam:	*Yes...* (laughing)
126.	Edvin:	(inaudible)... *here's even more ice cream, is here.* This is ice cream
127.	MIA:	(pretends to brush her teeth) now I've brushed my teeth
128.	Edvin:	*Ice cream* (offers MIA more)
129.	MIA:	*No, but I've just brushed my teeth*
130.	Tam:	Like that! Do like that! (makes a movement which cannot be discerned on the recording)
131.	MIA:	Can I eat ice cream when I've brushed my teeth? (to Edvin)
132.	Edvin:	Yes (nods)
133.	MIA:	Can I? Then I'll have to brush one more time later
134.	Tam & MIA:	(pretend to eat)
135.	Tam & MIA:	(pretend to brush)
136.	Edvin:	And put it in the mouth, both... and the tongue
137.	MIA:	Noo, I don't think I need to brush my tongue... but I can open up a bit (opens her mouth), like that!
138.	Edvin:	Now you're finished
139.	Tam & MIA	(stop brushing)

Tam shows and tells the teacher that he is brushing his teeth (*as if*) and she latches on to this, by asking Edvin where he does so (turns 119–120). Edvin says that you do it "outside (inaudible)" (turn 121). Here the teacher's question and Edvin's answers can be interpreted both *as if* and *as is*. Tam is praised for brushing his teeth after they have had imaginary ice cream. When the teacher says that she also might brush her teeth, Tam shows his approval by a smiling and saying "yes" (turns 124–125); this acknowledges her as a participant in the play. Edvin then tempts them with more ice cream, in an *as-if* way, saying "here is more", and he also meta-communicates (*as is*) about the (imaginary) ice cream: "this is ice cream" (turn 126). The teacher responds to his suggestion, saying that she too has brushed her teeth (turns 127 and 129). Tam tries to show something but the teacher asks Edvin two times if she is allowed to eat after brushing her teeth and, when Edvin answers that she is, she states that she then has to brush them once again (turn 133). Both Tam and the teacher eat more ice cream and then brush their teeth (*as if*) again (turns 134–135). Edvin suggests that also the tongue should be brushed (turn 136, theoretically speaking a case of alterity), but the teacher rejects this (turn 137). The teacher emphasizes that brushing should be done after one has eaten, connecting to culturally acceptable knowledge concerning how to care for one's teeth in a healthy way. Since the teaching latches on to the children's suggestions, she does not interrupt the play, but her contributions are relevant to the narrative play-frame and presumably also relates to the children's previous experience.

Discussion

In this chapter, we have given two examples of how the tension between dealing with alterity and coordinating *as if* and *as is* can be successfully handled in ways that integrate play and teaching. In the two examples (Excerpts 9.2 and 9.3), the teachers try to make it possible for children to discern two quite different phenomena (contents). In the first example, the phenomenon can be characterized as academic knowledge, while the phenomenon in the second example can be characterized as an everyday routine, a cultural practice. However, both examples concern making it possible for children to discern features of cultural life. Also shared by both examples is that the teachers deal with alterity and coordinating *as if* and *as is*. The examples illustrate that teaching is not restricted to the mode of *as is* but may also be carried out in the mode of *as if* (as also shown by Magnusson & Pramling, 2017; and Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2010).

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Chapter 10
The Magical Fruits: Establishing a Narrative Play Frame for Mutual Problem Solving

In this chapter, we will analyze an activity from initiation to conclusion. We will focus our analysis on (i) how the teacher establishes a narrative, imaginary, frame for the activity, (ii) how children participate and contribute to this activity, (iii) what *didaktikal* challenges are actualized and what support the children are faced with in the activity, including what contents are constituted, and (iv) what the implications of the activity are for children's development.

One preschool teacher and nine children, aged approximately 4–5 years, participate in the activity. The activity is carefully planned by the teacher and it starts with someone ringing the doorbell at the preschool. The children run to the door to open. When they open the door they find an envelope left on the doorstep. The children give the envelope to the teacher:

Excerpt 10.1: Introducing the Narrative Frame and the Challenge Posed

17	ANNA:	Should I read now? 'Cause there were these small messages Now, let's see. Can you hear? *Hi there, all you creepy children at the Galaxy. My name is mischievous Ralf. And I've left magical fruit for you. But!* (raises her index finger) *in order for you to get the magical fruit, you must first get past all creepy and dangerous obstacles that I have magically conjured on your preschool. Every obstacle. At every obstacle, I've left a letter with a mission. If you do not solve the mission* (raises her index finger) *you will not be able to pass the obstacle. If you manage to get to the magical fruit, you will, as soon as you take a bite, receive a magical power.* (The children start jumping with both feet) Wait, wait, wait. *What power you get when you take a bite from the fruit is up to you to decide*. And then the letter ends like this. *Good luck and watch out for all creepy and viscious monsters* (raises her index finger) *lurking around the corners. Mohahaha* (laughing with a rough voice) *Ralf.*
18	Gustav:	(finds a message on the floor and picks it up)
19	ANNA:	Now let's see. Wait, wait, back up a little. Then Gustav gets to… do you want to read Gustav? Shall I read the mission? *You all have to find ten round objects. Together*

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20	Minna:	What are objects?
21	ANNA:	Ten round things
22	Annika:	Kind of like this (takes a doll made from a paper roll from a shelf)
23	ANNA:	Yes, exactly
24	Nathan:	That one's mine (points at a doll on a shelf)
25	ANNA:	Listen. *If you find that, you'll receive a magical power that allows you to pass the red-hot stones* (points at four red paper sheets on the floor behind the children).
26	Children:	Oh!
27	ANNA:	Can you find ten round things together? And then we meet here, we can collect the things here

The teacher introduces the activity through reading the letter (turn 17). Reading the letter triggers the collective activity that follows, in which the children ponder over real problems (*as is*) in the context of *as if*. Establishing the narrative, imaginary, frame, she institutes some ground rules; in order to succeed every obstacle needs to be overcome, through succeeding with a task, a reward in the form of a magical skill is offered, which takes the children past the obstacle and towards the goal of a magic skill of their own choice. The activity is organized by rules, dictated in the letters. However, it also includes open-endedness in that children are to decide *what* magical power they will receive after finishing all the tasks and taking a bite of the fruit (and, thus, how the play can continue and evolve). Rules, as Vygotsky (1933/1966) has clarified (see also, van Oers, 2014) are constituents of every play; they co-constitute what is the nature of the play played. An imaginary realm is established; but the children are directly addressed ("Hi there, all you creepy children at the Galaxy"). Hence, the story initiated enrolls the children; they are constituted as recipients of the challenge, and thus the agents of the story. In this way, they are placed in a position where they have agency (Clarke et al., 2016) to 'tell'/develop the story, rather than merely listening to a story told. Phrased differently, the teacher through her introduction of the activity engages the children in a mutual play project (triggering collaborative play and problem solving). That the children are engaged in doing so is evident in their eagerness to start acting (they can hardly contain themselves, jumping up and down, turn 17).

Through planting a letter at every challenge the teacher makes reading necessary to the development of the play, as argued by Vygotsky (1997) to be critical to making it relevant to children already in the preschool age (see Chap. 9 of the present volume). The task is also constituted in a way that makes it necessary for the children to collaborate in solving it (turn 19). This is a more challenging task than for a child to solve it by him or herself (see Björklund, 2014, for an elaboration). Engaging children in mutual activities is key to preschool activities, since its group-based nature is one of the characteristics of how this institution organizes for children's experience and development (Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2013). The initial challenge posed is for the children to find "ten round objects. Together" (turn 19). In response, one of the children asks "what are objects (Swedish: "*föremål*", turn 20). Responding, the teacher reformulates the task in terms of "ten

round things" (turn 21). Another child shows a doll made from a paper roll, suggesting "kind of like this" (turn 22). The teacher confirms that this is an example of an object, as relevant in the activity: "yes, exactly" (turn 23). Hence, without experience of the actual term ("object"), the child can *show* her understanding, allowing her to participate in the evolving elaboration of the task (the activity).

In addition to showing how the mutual activity is established through introducing a narrative frame, Excerpt 10.1 shows how some conceptual knowledge is necessary for participating in it. In response to the child clarifying her being unfamiliar with the abstract category of "objects", the teacher unpacks it through reformulating it in more familiar terms ("things"). Another child finds and shows an example. The concept of "objects" is thus introduced and explained within the frame of the activity, as a part of setting the activity into motion.

There is some tension between the mutual task and individual engagement (turn 24: "that one's [pointing at an object] mine"). The teacher reiterates the reason for finding the objects (turn 25), that is, clarifies what role this plays in the play (the imaginary narrative): "If you find that you'll receive a magical power that allows you to pass the red-hot stones", and, through pointing at some props (four red sheets of paper on the floor, turn 25), coordinates *as if* (the challenge posed within the story) and *as is* (the actual paper on the floor). Finally, the teacher reminds the children of the collaborative nature of the challenge: "Can you find together ten round things?" (turn 27).

In this way, the activity, its rules, and challenges, are introduced. An imaginary realm is established for the children to explore. The children run around collecting objects, which they bring to the teacher. She again gathers the children to investigate what they have collected:

Excerpt 10.2: Counting Objects

33	ANNA:	Oh oh oh, now let's see. We should have ten. Come, let's count
34	Lotta:	One two three four five six seven eight nine (points down in the can)
35	Girl:	Ten. We have ten!
36	Gustav:	One two three four five six seven eight
37	ANNA and several children:	Nine (ANNA holds an object in her hand)
38	Child:	We need one more (two of the girls get up and run to the magnetic board to get more objects)
39	ANNA:	And ten (lifts and shakes the can with the things in it)

The task of finding ten round things actualizes two mathematical features. The first challenge is to discern the shape of objects and decide whether an object fits the criterion. The paper roll found by one child was considered a suitable example ("yes, exactly", Excerpt 10.1, turn 23) without further discussion. However, taking a mathematical perspective, the shape is rather a cylinder with a circular (round) basis. The children seem to know what shape to look for and have no trouble finding

round objects, neither are the shapes of their objects found challenged, even though the shape of the container may be included in the set of ten round objects.

The second mathematical challenge consists of the children being asked to count the objects they have gathered together. One of the children arrives at "nine" (turn 34), while another child suggests they have "ten" (turn 35). However, after some other suggestions (turns 36–38), the children decide they need one more, and two of the children set off to find the missing object. However, before they can do so, the teacher suggests they already have ten (turn 39). She says so while shaking the container in which they have placed the other objects. Hence, what is the reason for the discrepancy between the participants in counting is whether they count also the container as an object (the teacher does so while at least some of the children do not).

Excerpt 10.3: Negotiating How to Go On

40	ANNA:	Wait wait wait. We have ten. We succeeded with the mission. And you know what, the magical power is so that these stones are red-hot, so you cannot walk on them. But Gustav, who was first, got the magical power, so that when he takes a, when he stands on the stone (points at the first red paper sheet on the floor) it is no longer red-hot. (Gustav takes a careful step onto the first sheet, then jumps on to the other sheets. He is followed by other children, someone also walk on the floor) Stop, psst, no, there's a lot of sharks in the sea, stay on the stones (the girl stepping on the floor backs up on the sheet)
41	Esther:	(standing on the sheet behind Gustav): How are we gonna pass?
42	ANNA:	How are we gonna pass? How should we do?
43	Esther:	There, there (pointing at something on the other side of the room)
44	Nathan:	I know, we can go by boat!
45	Gustav:	But there is no boat
46	Annika:	I know what we should do!
47	ANNA:	What should we do then?
48	Esther:	We have to be limber
49	Gustav:	I have a plan!
50	ANNA:	Mm.
51	Gustav:	We can jump on the sharks all the way there (points across the room)
52	Eyla:	(takes a step to the first sheet)
53	ANNA:	Now you go. Good Eyla, you can go on (Eyla goes to the next sheet) so we can see how many children we can get there
54	Gustav:	I know, we can sneak (makes sneaking movements with his hands, reaches forward and then softly pulls his arms back to his body)
55		(The children stand two and two on each sheet and one child is on the carpet with ANNA)
56	ANNA:	Wait, let's see, what should we do now?
57	Eyla:	(sneaks across the floor)
58	ANNA:	No, you cannot go there, there are sharks! (waves her hand for Eyla to come back.
59	Eyla:	(turns around and sneaks back)

By lifting and shaking the container the teacher attempts to make the children aware of the missing object. She then concludes that they "have succeeded with the mission" (turn 40). Shifting back from *as is* (they now, in fact, have ten round objects), the teacher continues meta-communicating but now elaborates *as if*: explaining how with the magical power acquired through solving the problem, the stones cease to be red-hot, making it possible for the children to go on in their quest (turn 40).

When the children start walking, some stepping beside the red papers on the floor, the teacher introduces additional rules, or provides a clarification of the rules, for the children to relate to: "Stop, psst, no, there's a lot of sharks in the sea, stay on the stones" (turn 40). While they explore *as if*, there are things to adhere to, without which the play would soon lose all appeal (without any limitations/rules, there is no mutual story to play within). The teacher's comment is met by a child asking: "How are we gonna pass?" (turn 41). Another child suggests, "we can go by boat" (turn 42). However, this suggestion, which may be feasible within the frame of the story, is objected to by another child arguing that "but there is no boat" (turn 43). What is at stake here, play-wise, is whether to play with the props available or whether it is possible to introduce, through fantasy, new objects other than those represented by the props available. This question is thus briefly negotiated by the children. More suggestions are given by the children, that "we have to be limber" (in Swedish: "*smidiga*"), or that "I have a plan! We can jump on the sharks all the way there" (pointing towards the end of the room) (turns 49 and 51). At this point, the participants have not established temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity (Rommetveit, 1974) to go on with a joint activity (in this case, proceed past the solved problem). The children continue to try to find solutions to the problem they face. One of the children enacts (pretends) that she sneaks over the space before her (turn 57). However, this solution is not accepted by the teacher, who responds that "no, you cannot go there, there are sharks!" (turn 58). In response, the girl sneaks back to her previous position. Notably, the child does not leave the imaginary realm in response to the teacher's objection; even on her way back to her original position, she sneaks (i.e., acts within the play-world, *as if* to be careful not to wake or notify the sharks, turn 59). After some further consideration, they all pass on the stones (sheets). The teacher asking (in turn 42) – actually repeating a child's question (turn 41) – how they are to pass, triggers the children to contribute to the evolving narrative, trying out different solutions to the problem faced. They now face a new challenge:

Excerpt 10.4: Solving the Problem Individually or Collectively

68	ANNA:	What, have we got the new mission? (Annika gives her a folded paper). Now let's see. Ah. *Together you must find five* (lifts five fingers) *red things*. Wait, listen. *And five blue things. 'Cause then you can make all the monster-fish swimming there and are invisible*, we do not see them, *fall asleep in the brook! So that we can cross over*. Do we solve this mission?
69	Annika:	There's one (points at letters in different colors posted on the wall)
70	ANNA:	Yes, but we have to get five things. Blue. Things (the children start moving around) and five red. You can get things from in there also (points towards the room behind them. The children run and get red and blue things. One of the girls takes down a large box and gives it to ANNA)

71	Minna:	Two red and one blue (puts the things in the box. Other children also put their things in)
72	ANNA:	Oh oh oh, and that one was blue (sits down on the floor)… Good Nathan. Oh how many. Shall we see now, children?
73	Annika:	(stands on the table, turns to the teacher filming the activity) Hey, you're standing on the sharks
74	ANNA:	Annika and Minna and you, now we have to count so that we have five red and five blue
75	Eyla:	(drops a large cuddly animal among the things on the floor)
76	ANNA:	Oh, do you take that one? (hands back the animal to Eyla). Wait a bit (the children talk at the same time and some get more things)
77	Annika:	One two (moves the objects in turn)
78	ANNA:	Two
79	Annika:	Three
80	ANNA:	Three four (together with the children) five. Good.
81	Children:	Six seven eight (Anton brings three more red objects)
82	ANNA:	You'll have to return them, Anton, we already have five. Good. Five red and then we need…
83	Anton:	I had taken these three before they took those red
84	ANNA:	But it was swell. Now we've got lots of things
85	Eyla:	ANNA, you'll have to be a bit quiet, they're sleeping!
86	ANNA:	Now we need five blue things (turns to Nathan and then to Annika) Annika, Annika, put back the shoes and look here what Nathan has got
87	Nathan:	My cuddly animal! (holds a blue box with many things in. takes out a green-blue cuddly animal)
88	ANNA:	One. Blue (points at the cuddly animal). Two (points at Gustav, who holds a blue cup) and then we have (turns around a plastic letter) someone came with…
89	Esther:	I took it down!
90	ANNA:	An E. Three, four (holds and points at something small) and five. We found a lot
91	Annika:	And five (has climbed up on the table and points at something on the wall) and five
92	ANNA:	Listen, are you gonna sneak past now
93	Children:	(hurry to a door, someone says) I take it! I was gonna take it actually
94	ANNA:	We're lucky they're asleep, these fish
95	Anton:	Run!
96	ANNA:	Sch, sch, sch
97	Gustav:	I think it chewed a bit on my leg
98	ANNA:	Did it? No, they fell asleep, we solved the mission. Listen, sch, mission three. *A volcano has erupted so that the whole ground is full of red-hot lava* (someone is heard carrying their breath). Wait.
99	Lotta:	I cannot do this
100	ANNA:	*There's a boat on the other side that you can use. But then you first need to collect ten elongated things*
101	Annika:	(raises her ten fingers)

The new task given is to find "five red things" and "five blue things" (turn 68). These tasks are motivated by the evolving fantasy narrative: "'cause then you can make all the monster fish swimming there, and are invisible, fall asleep in the brook! So then we can cross over" (turn 68). The analogically recurring challenges weave the events together into a narrative of a prolonged journey (an intertextual link, cf. Mercer & Littleton, 2007). The teacher also implicitly reminds the children of another important feature of the activity: its group-based nature: "Do we solve this mission?" (turn 68), that is, the problem is to be solved mutually ("we"), not by any individual child.

The children search the room and the adjacent room for things that are blue or red. The teacher acknowledges their contributions and suggests they count how many they now have (turn 72). At this point, one of the children addresses the other preschool teacher, who, operating the video camera, has remained silent for the duration of the activity: "you're standing on the sharks" (turn 73). This may be seen as an attempt to enroll also this teacher in the activity. However, she remains silent and the activity proceeds. While the participating teacher (turns 72 and 74) orients to *as is*, the child here (turn 73) orients to *as if*.

Counting together with the children, the teacher concludes that they now have five objects (turn 80). However, one of the children arriving with three red objects continues counting: "six, seven, eight" (turn 81). In response, the teacher tells him that he needs to put them back, "we already have five […] and then we need" (turn 82). The boy is not immediately content with this suggestion, objecting "I had taken these three before they had taken those red" (turn 83). This illustrates an important feature of the task as group-based: it is more challenging than collecting a certain number of objects; one also needs to relate the objects one brings to the ones brought by the other children to make up the requested amount. Mitigating the potential disappointment in the boy, the teacher suggests that "But it was swell. Now we've got lots of things" (turn 84). We can in this example see the potential tension between including all children as important participants in the play tasks and to follow the designated rules of the play – here manifested as a task to collect only five red things.

As seen in Excerpts 10.2 and 10.4, the children are able to count and determine a set of ten objects by counting them one-to-one. However, a challenge is to adjust their own collecting to that of the other children. This requires paying attention to the collected number of objects, where the set of objects one child has collected is only one *part of the whole* (five in the activity shown in Excerpt 10.4, and ten in the activity shown in Excerpt 10.2). To solve the task, it is necessary for the children to establish temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity concerning *what* the task is about and *how* each participant's actions relate to this task. Otherwise, they will be engaged in parallel activities, trying to solve the task by themselves, individually, which will not work within the premises of the task given in the story they engage in. It is a treacherous task, since it seems easy enough for preschool children to solve, but actually requires conceptual knowledge of numbers as a collection of varying items and varying quantities that have to be seen as units constituting the whole set of five (a competence not shared by all Swedish 5-year olds, see Björklund, 2014).

One of the children addresses the teacher, exclaiming: “you’ll have to be a bit quiet, they’re sleeping!” (turn 85). Hence, remaining in the *as-if* mode of the narrative (cf. turn 68), she asks the teacher to remain in character and not break the narrative thread. This and the previous exchanges thus also illustrate how there is no problem in posing conceptual challenges to children within the frame of a fantasy story, but if stepping out of this frame, the nature of the activity may need to be re-negotiated (meta-communicated) (cf. Björklund et al., 2018, for an analysis of teachers’ conceptually challenging acts in the context of children’s play).

Having collected five red objects, the children now set out to collect five blue ones. They swiftly find these objects. The teacher, mirroring one of the children’s comments (in turn 85), now comments on the children’s exalted state: “Listen, are you gonna sneak past now” (turn 92), “we’re lucky they’re asleep, these fish” (turn 94), and “sch, sch, sch” (turn 96). Hence, like the children previously reminding the teacher of sticking to the play-frame, the teacher now reminds the children to do so. In order to remain engaged in a mutual activity (play project), these meta-communicative hints tend to recur in participants’ talk. Passing over the sleeping monster fish, one of the children suggests that “I think it chewed a bit on my leg” (turn 97). “Did it?”, asks the teacher, before objecting that “no, they fell asleep, we solved this mission” (turn 98). Restating the relation between the narrative and the conceptual problem (solving the task puts the monster fish to sleep allowing safe passage) here evidently takes precedence over incorporating the child’s suggestion into the narrative (e.g., suggesting that even while solving the problem, putting the fish to sleep, the loud sounds made by the children made them start to awake again, making it necessary to hurry silently).

The children now face the third challenge: “A volcano has erupted so that the whole ground is full of red-hot lava” (turn 98), but “there’s a boat on the other side that you can use. But then you first need to collect ten elongated things” (turn 100). That the challenges posed, at a collective level, could be in what Vygotsky (1998) refers to as the children’s zone of proximal development is indicated by the span of variation in responses, with one child stating that “I cannot do this” (turn 99), while another child shows ten with her fingers (turn 101).

Excerpt 10.5: Social Concerns

118	ANNA:	That was elongated, exactly (follows with her finger along the contours of a sandal) Nine and ten, good. Listen. Now we’re gonna open here (the children gather at the door) Wait wait, now we succeeded with this (reads from the letter) *If you succeed with this*, it says, *then one of you get a magical power so that one of you can walk on the magical and red-hot lava and get the boat*
119	Annika:	(raises her hand) I can!
120	Three other girls:	(raise their hands and say in unison) I can
121	ANNA:	One, one child (the children jump with both feet and raise their hands shouting” I can”)
122	ANNA:	Wait, can’t you try to decide together whom among you…
123	Lotta:	I know, Esther (points at Esther).

124	Several girls:	(point at Esther) Esther
125	ANNA:	Good that you agreed so quickly. And you know what, have to get the boat. You're the only one who can walk on the lava so you'll have to get the boat and take your friends across to the other side. Okay, let's see (opens the door). Then we have to stand here waiting. One at a time can go with Esther in the boat (Esther runs and gets a large box on wheels and rolls it back to the children) Who'll pass over first?
126	Children:	Me!
127	ANNA:	Annika, good, jump in (Annika sits down in the box) Esther takes her across to the other side (Esther rolls the box with Annika in it over to the other side of the room. The children laugh)
128	ANNA:	Oh oh, what red-hot lava. Next, next friend across (another child sits down in the box and is rolled across the room). How many friends have crossed? One, and then there's one more, how many is that? (someone says" two") Two friends
129	Minna:	I go last
130	ANNA:	Oh, how nice. How many friends are over there now?
131	Children:	Three
132	ANNA:	Three. Get one more
133	Boy:	Then Esther's gonna drive herself also
134	ANNA:	Esther has the magical powers, so she can walk on the lava
135	Eyla:	(dances across the floor)
136	ANNA:	No it's only Esther who has the magical power. Now let's get another friend. How many children is it over there now?
137	Children:	Four!
138	ANNA:	And with Gustav you have…?
139	Children:	Five!
140	Minna:	You can go before me
141	ANNA:	And then we get another friend
142	Esther:	Six
143	ANNA:	That's six friends over there now (turns to the next boy) Be careful so you don't fall in (turns to the children across the room) Six friends
144	Minna:	But you're standing on the lava!
145	ANNA:	No I'm not standing in it Nathan
146	Nathan:	(sits down in the box)

Having together collected ten elongated objects of various kinds (e.g., sandals and a pearl necklace), the teacher tells the next step of the adventure: "listen. Now we're gonna open here" – the children flocking at the door – "wait wait. Now we succeeded with this" (turn 118). She now reads from the new letter found at the door: "if you succeed with this, it says, then one of you get a magical power so that one of you can walk on the magical and red-hot lava and get the boat" (turn 118). Again, text and reading are introduced in the play activity as necessary (Vygotsky, 1997), containing information about the next challenge faced, making it possible to go on with the adventure. Several children announce their willingness to be the one to do

so (turns 119–120). The teacher is not content with this way of solving the issue of who is to be given the task of fetching the boat. To simply give the mission to the child first speaking or speaking the loudest is contrary to preschool tradition. Rather, the children are expected to arrive at a solution that is considered fair: "one, one child" and "wait, can't you try to decide together whom among you…" (turn 122). Several children now suggest "Esther". The teacher accepts this suggestion: "good that you agreed so quickly" (turn 125). It may be questioned whether the voices of all participating children were heard in this case or whether some children agreed on what may be a popular girl. The rationale of the task is explained to Esther: "you know what, have to get the boat, you're the only one who can walk on the lava, so you'll have to get the boat and take your friends across to the other side" (turn 125).

Esther starts to take her friends over the lava and the teacher makes the children attend to how many have crossed and how many remain: "get one more" (turn 132). In response to this suggestion, one of the children suggests that "then Esther's gonna drive herself also" (turn 133). Rather than simply accepting this logical conclusion, the teacher reframes/recontextualizes the problem within the rationale of the evolving narrative: "Esther has the magical powers, so she can walk on the lava" (turn 134). Hence, the teacher adheres to a rule of the play (following the texts stating the nature of the problems faced and the consequences of their solution). Another girl starts dancing over the floor (the lava). This breach of the narrative frame is objected to by the teacher: "No, it's only Esther who has the magical power" (turn 136). To what extent participants in a play are to follow a set of rules and to what extent also these can be renegotiated within the frame of the story (and outside it, if taking a meta-perspective) are always potentially at stake in play activities. Theoretically speaking, a tension recurs between temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity and alterity (i.e., between agreeing on the premises of the play activity in order to be able to create and maintain a mutual play project, on the one hand, and rethinking premises and taking action in unexpected and diverse directions during an activity, on the other).

Other examples of this tension between intersubjectivity and alterity was evident in Excerpt 10.3 (turns 57–58), when a child and the teacher negotiated whether it was possible to sneak past the sharks, and in Excerpt 10.4 (turns 97–98) where a child and the teacher negotiated whether the monster fish may have taken a piece of the child's leg as he crossed the brook. It is important to realize that the tension between intersubjectivity and alterity is always potentially at stake in human interaction (Wertsch, 1998), for instance in play projects, and not take a normative stance as one being better than the other. Mutual play projects can proceed whether being responsive to alterity or not; however, the play develops differently contingent on this response.

In her comments to the children, the teacher fluctuates between *as is* (e.g., how many children are in one place and how many in another and that there are different conditions/rules for different actors in the play), and *as if* (e.g., the children needing to be aware to not fall into the hot lava, turn 143).

Excerpt 10.6: Suggestions Not Taken Up

149	ANNA:	Across with the last friend
150	Child:	Nine
151	ANNA:	What about me?
152	Esther:	I can come and get you
153	ANNA:	Ah, nice. Take me across (sits down in the box and is rolled across the room. She suddenly points at the window) Look! Did you see the monster? (the children run to the window) I thought I saw a monster
154	Annika:	I've found a letter
155	ANNA:	There wasn't any monster, right?
156	Child:	Monsters are invisible
157	ANNA:	Oh, that's right. Good, thanks Esther
158	Annika:	I got the letter (hands it to ANNA)
159	ANNA:	What does it say? *Mission…*
160	Children:	*Four*
161	ANNA:	Which door did you find it on?
162	Children:	That (points at a closed door)
163	ANNA:	Then I think that that's maybe where we should go
164	Gustav:	Yes, maybe we get magical powers and kill the monsters
165	Eyla:	Sch, sch (covers her mouth with her index finger)
166	ANNA:	Sch, listen. Listen and I'll read the mission. *In the cave over there I have hidden the magical fruit. In order for you to get to it, you first have to*, listen, *get through the creepy tunnel*. Listen, THIS is important I heard or saw when I read this. *You have to be completely silent* (holds her index finger over her mouth) *so that you don't wake the invisible dragon who sleeps in there.*
167	Lotta:	We need to have magical powers and kill the monster
168	ANNA:	Listen. *If you succeed in getting the magical power, if you succeed in getting the magical fruit, you will as soon as you take a bite of it receive a magical power, that you decide by yourself*
169	Lotta:	And kill the monster
170	ANNA:	*And then you also get*, it says here, *a power that makes so that when you talk, the dragon cannot hear you*

Having taken all the children across the lava, the children count "nine" (turn 150). The teacher responds, "what about me?" (turn 151). In a sense, the children's omission of the teacher when making sure all participants have crossed the lava in the boat is analogous to them not paying attention to the container as an object in Excerpt 10.2. However, in this case they may not consider the teacher a participant in the play, but rather as a director or storyteller, and this may be why they do not count her as an additional agent they need to take across. Esther comes to get the teacher in the boat. On the way over, the teacher exclaims that she thinks she saw a monster in the window. The children investigate. While doing so one of the children finds a new letter. Following up on her playful suggestion (turn 155), a child responds that "monsters are invisible" (turn 156), implying that the teacher therefore cannot have seen one. This is again one small instance of participants negotiating

the premises of the play. Having agreed on the invisibility of monsters, the teacher asks what the letter says. The children point out on which door the letter was attached. The teacher then suggests that "then I think that that's maybe where we should go" (turn 163). In this way, the *as-if* world of the narrative (the letter with the challenges and the evolving story) and the world of *as is* (the actual milieu used as props in the play) are coordinated (cf. above).

One of the children is eager to go on with the adventure, suggesting that "yes, maybe we get magical powers and kill the monsters" (turn 164). This suggestion combines a constituent of the evolving narrative (i.e., that magical powers are acquired and that monsters are faced) with a novel feature (killing the monsters). This can be seen as an example of creativity (Vygotsky, 1930/2004) and the tension between intersubjectivity and alterity. The suggestion that they may acquire magical powers, making them capable of killing the monsters, is not responded to by the teacher. This non-response (which as such is a form of response) can be read as an indicator that this suggestion is not aligned with by the institution sanctioned forms of play. This kind of tensions places the activity in an institutional setting to which participants in different ways orient and are responsive. Differences in this regard can be seen as varying degrees of sensitivity to how to contextualize play actions in a preschool setting. Playing in preschool is also a way of being socialized into certain perspectives and values (including what is good and bad play, respectively). The teacher, so to speak, tries to curb the children's excitement ("sch, listen… […] listen THIS is important…") while explaining the rationale of the new task: "you have to be completely silent so that you don't wake the invisible dragon who sleeps in there" (turn 166). The children are eager to go on with the adventure; another child now also suggests that "we need to have magical powers and kill the monster" (turn 167, cf. turn 164). Again, this suggestion to kill the monster is met by a non-response by the teacher. Instead, she explains what the letter says: "Listen. If you succeed in getting the magical power, if you succeed in getting the magical fruit, you will as soon as you take a bite of it receive a magical power, that you decide by yourself" (turn 168). Adding to the teacher's elaboration, Lotta says "and kill the monster" (turn 169). In this way she weaves together her (and Gustav's) suggestion with the teacher's elaboration (the narrative as told in the letters). However, as on the two previous occasions, this suggestion to kill the monster is met by a non-response by the teacher, who instead continues her elaboration: "and then you also get, it says here, a power that makes so that when you talk, the dragon cannot hear you" (turn 170). She thus adheres to the rationale as stated in the letter, carrying the story forward.

Excerpt 10.7: Concluding the Play

186	ANNA:	Then you need to be quiet
187	Child:	Fruit, hello

188	ANNA:	Takes out a bowl of fruit from a small tent: Come, sit down (gets a note from Annika) what does it say? *Mission five. Congratulations, you succeeded with all your missions. Now you all get magical powers and when you take your first bite of this magical fruit you receive a magical power* (the children each take a section of an apple from a bowl and eat). And now you can talk, because it said that when we find this fruit, the dragon could no longer hear us. But Nathan, Gustav and all, I want to know what magical powers you have (several children raise their hands) Minna?
189	Child:	Fire
190	Minna:	Ice
191	Esther:	Fire also
192	ANNA:	How about you (points at Eyla)?
193	Eyla:	Ice
194	ANNA:	Do you know what my magical powers are? I'm invisible
195	Gustav:	I know, that I can do everything
196	ANNA:	You can do EVERYTHING? That was a good magical power
197	Lotta:	Hit the monster
198	ANNA:	How about you (turns to Nathan)?
199	Nathan:	The same as Gustav
200	ANNA:	Nathan, what's your magical power
201	Nathan:	Same as Gustav
202	ANNA:	What did Gustav have?
203	Gustav:	Everything

Sneaking through a foreboding tunnel, the children are presented with a bowl of fruit (magical fruit). Finding the final letter, the teacher reads and congratulates the children on succeeding with all tasks. As a reward of having arrived at and eaten the magical fruit they each acquire a magical power of their own choosing (turn 188). The teacher asks the children what powers they choose. The children give different suggestions, such as "fire" and "ice", "that I can do everything" (turns 189–195), and finally, "hit the monster" (turn 197). In contrast to the suggestion to be able to do everything, this last suggestion is not further commented on by the teacher, who instead goes on asking the remaining children (cf. above on what is and is not institutionally accepted and valued forms of play). The narrative framework established by the teacher constitutes several different magical powers that each child is about to earn through their play. This framework gives the children the opportunity to familiarize themselves with different ideas about what may constitute a magical ability (cooling down lava stones, making monsters sleep or talking without a dragon hearing), that is, with a variation allowing the children to appropriate a wider repertoire to choose from when they reach the final event of the activity (or when playing 'magic' on other occasions): the fruit that when bitten will give them the magical power of their individual choice.

Discussion

In this chapter, we have analyzed how a teacher initiates, and children participate in and contributes to developing a mutual imaginary narrative activity. We have shown how in this *as-if* activity, the children encounter and take on real conceptual problems (*as is*). In this continuous activity, spanning over 20 min, the teacher manages to engage the children in a mutual problem-solving play project mediated by a narrative frame communicated in sections through text (letters). During the activity, the children are faced with a number of conceptual and coordinating problems they need to take on as a group. In her participation in the activity, the teacher fluctuates between speaking and in other ways acting *as if* (make-believe) and *as is* (orienting towards established cultural knowledge). Contents such as shape (form), numbers (what constitutes a set of ten or five), terminology (what are "objects"), coordination of actions and contributions (collaboration, collaborative problem solving, reaching mutual agreement), and text (reading) are actualized and contextualized within the established play frame. The activity further indicates how play in preschool is *not free from institutional framing* (a feature of the 'freedom' of play not highlighted by van Oers', 2014, previous theoretical elaboration of this concept); rather, participating in play in preschool also means to take part in a socialization process, according to which forms of play differ to what extent they are acceptable and valued. The play develops in a potentially tense 'space' between temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity (allowing the participants to go on with a joint activity/play project) and alterity (i.e., diversity, suggestions on how to reframe the premises of the activity, or expand it in other ways than previously, implicitly or explicitly, agreed upon). The activity also illustrates what Vygotsky (1997) has emphasized as key to making the cultural tool of text (and the cultural practices of reading and writing) relevant to preschool-age children: they must be necessary for the development of play projects. Reading in the present example is made relevant to the evolving play children are engaged in, rather than something external to it and stand-alone.

As with all play, some premises or rules of the play are established, some initially, others as the play develops. In van Oers' (2014) terms, the play project is not *free from* the teacher – rather, she is instrumental to it, initiating and organizing it, as well as to some extent taking part in it as a play partner. Critically reflecting on the activity, which has many qualities of play-responsive teaching, it is debatable to what extents the children are *free to* (van Oers, 2014) take the play in unforeseeable directions (cf. particularly our discussion of alterity, above: we can thus theorize the 'free to' of play as a consequence of how participants, including the teacher, respond to alterity). However, it is clear that the narrative frame (the make-believe world of *as if*) works in engaging the children in a mutual activity where they actively and in collaboration with each other and the teacher take on conceptual challenges. These challenges are, metaphorically speaking, planted in the play, and important cultural resources are made necessary for the development of the play. This is one way in which teaching in preschool can be play-responsive.

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Chapter 11
The Letter Thief: From Playing to Teaching to Learning to Playing

In a key passage of his writing on the development of written language in the child – or what today could be referred to as a part of literacy development – Vygotsky (1997) emphasizes that "Reading and writing must be needed by the child" (p. 145). Elaborating on this idea, he argues that:

> [T]his means that the best method for teaching is one in which the children do not learn to read and write, but in which both habits are the subject of play. For this, it is necessary that the letter become the same kind of element in the life of the child as, for example, speech is. [—] The natural method of teaching reading and writing consists of appropriately affecting the situation in which the child finds himself. The child must need reading and writing in his play. (p. 146).

Rather than being taught through explicit instruction and drill, what Vygotsky here argues is that how we make children participants in important cultural practices, such as reading and writing, is through cultivating in play activities the skills necessary for these forms of participation. Conceptual knowing such as reading, according to this perspective, needs to be necessary for the child in the activities in which she engages. For example, in order to initiate, participate and particularly develop a play, such as playing shop, being able to make graphical symbols (e.g., to show prices) that are possible for others to interpret are functional. From this perspective, Vygotsky concludes that "it would be natural to teach writing at a preschool age" (p. 143). He thus locates the developmental space about which we intend to make contributions from empirical research: how to teach in play-based activities where conceptual knowing is contextualized (van Oers, 1998) in manners relevant to ongoing (and developing) play. Introducing cultural tools and practices that are necessary for play becomes critical to play-responsive teaching. In this chapter, an example of such tools introduced in play by the teacher will be given.

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The Letter Thief

The activity to be analysed in this chapter is an example of child-initiated play called *The Letter Thief*. ANNIKA, who is one of the participating teachers in the activity, has described the background of the activity to be analysed as follows:

> Some children [aged four to five] had played the board game The Letter Thief and in the game, there was a thief, a character, which steals letters. The children talked about the character but we [the teachers] had not had the opportunity to get involved in the activities/communication of this theme. One day, several children were gathered around a table where some children were drawing maps in order to find the Letter Thief. One of the children wrote down letters the thief had stolen.

The activity that evolves is interesting since it illustrates play and learning and their relation, and what we refer to as play-responsive teaching: a child-initiated activity in which teachers (in different ways) become involved and participate; an academic skill as a content (to become aware of phonetics in order to, more generally, learn to read) within a play frame (*as if*) which continues to develop during (and potentially in extension of) the activity – centred around the challenge of what happens to a person's name when the thief steals the initial letter.

The content of learning the teaching is oriented towards is to discern the initials of names (and names as made up by combinations of individual letters), both graphically and phonetically. This will prove to be challenging to the children.[1] The teachers scaffold the learning process and the development of play through meta-communicating *outside* the play frame, talking *as is*. In the activity, we can follow how one child, Maria, learns to separate the initial letter from a name as a whole. This also implies understanding something of the grapheme-phoneme relation; when a certain grapheme is changed (or "stolen" within the play frame), the phonetics of the name also changes. The learning process that analytically can be shown to take place can be theorized as a changed way of participation in a cultural practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Processes of Participants Orienting Toward Temporarily Sufficient Intersubjectivity

The video-recorded activity has been analytically differentiated into four sections. In the first one, we show how a shared play activity is established. In the second section, the content of learning is at the forefront of the participants' concern. The third section focuses the learning process of one of the participating children, Maria.

[1] The video camera, held by one of the teachers, focuses on the activity, that is, what the children are drawing and writing. Consequently, the child who speak is not always possible to identify and neither is the exact number of children who are present in the room. This is the reason why most of the children are referred to as "child" instead of by name in the transcripts.

In the last section, we follow how the content of learning and, at the same time, the play frame, are extended by participants.

Establishing a Shared Play Activity

Through three excerpts from the video recording, we will present how a collaborative play activity is established and how the teachers become involved. The starting point of the teacher's involvement is her showing an interest in the children's play (see turn 2 below).

Excerpt 11.1: Orienting Towards Temporarily Sufficient Intersubjectivity

2.	LINN:	What are you doing?
3.	Children:	We're doing the Letter Thief! (several children talk at the same time) And look, the thief has stolen our letters!
4.	LINN:	Okay!
5.	Child:	Look (shows the paper)
6.	LINN:	Where is the Letter Thief?
7.	Child:	That. That's when he sleeps and that's him (points at the drawing)

The children are engaged in an activity where one girl is drawing and the others around her are commenting on what she draws. The teacher (handling the video camera) initiates participation by posing a question (turn 2). The children respond to this initiative by answering: "We're doing the Letter Thief! and look, the thief has stolen our letters!" (turn 3). The teacher confirms the explanation: Okay! (turn 4), which is sufficient here in order to establish a shared activity. One of the children further uses the drawing (see Fig. 11.1), a central part of the activity, for explaining what is going on. The teacher elaborates the play by asking within an *as-if* mode: "Where is the Letter Thief?" (turn 6) – indicating that she is in on the activity – and the child that holds the pen develops the narrative of the play by explaining the drawing (turn 7). In other words, meta-communication (*as if)* is used for establishing some initial intersubjectivity.

Excerpt 11.2: *The Letter Thief* in Terms of *as If* or *as Is*

9.	Child:	He cannot be naked! (starts drawing on the paper, as if she put clothes on the Letter Thief, see Fig. 11.1). He's a guy (several children laugh, say something inaudible)
10.	Child:	He's already wearing… (turns the drawing so that the children around the table can see)
11.	Child:	A dress (laughs)
12.	LINN:	How do you know it's a guy?
13.	Child:	Eeh, 'cause he's got a mustache (laughs)
14.	LINN:	Have you seen him?

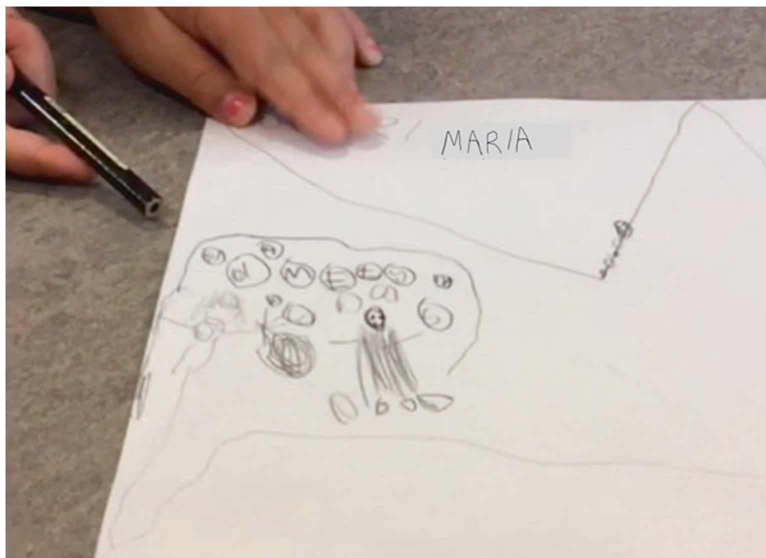

Fig. 11.1 The drawing the children are engaged in representing the Letter Thief (twice) and the letters he has taken. The drawing of the letter thief on the left side of the paper is made when talking about the character's looks and clothing (see turn 9). (The drawings have been edited so that the writings that identify the children's names are changed.)

15.	Child:	No, but I know so. 'Cause he's wearing a glued-on-mustache)
16.	LINN:	Okay. Have you seen him for real?
17.	Child:	No, but I know so. He, 'cause we have him in a game

In the negotiation about how the drawing should be understood within the play, the perspectives of *as if* and *as is* are alternated. The child who has drawn the picture of the Letter Thief says that: "He cannot be naked!" (turn 8). Two ways of understanding are opened up for, one about the visual representation of the Letter Thief on the paper (turns 10–11), and one of the model thief, that is, the character in the original board game (turns 15 and 17) the children have common experience of. The section represented by this excerpt illustrates how intersubjectivity is temporarily lost. The teacher scaffolds the interaction by posing a meta-question that helps the children to resolve the potential misunderstanding of what they each mean (turn 12): "How do you know it's a guy?" In response to this question (turns 13, 15 and 17) it is evident that the child who answers does not mention the drawn thief but the original character from the board game. When the teacher further asks whether the child has seen the thief "for real" (turn 16) she challenges the *as-if* dimension of the activity by implying that the character might be real. The excerpt shows how the teacher and some of the children have partly different ideas about the activity and more specifically about the central character, the thief, as to its look and clothing.

Excerpt 11.3: Re-establishing the Play Activity

22.	Maria:	Let's start over. Who wants to take part?
23.	Children:	Me!
24.	Maria:	(inaudible)… Olle, Liv and (makes a ring on her paper for every name she mentions)
25.	Child:	Maria
26	Maria:	And me. I'm the biggest (draws)

One of the children re-initiates the play by a comment and a question: "Let's start over. Who wants to take part?" (turn 22). This can be interpreted as a solution to a situation where the children have not established temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity; instead of further arguing, they start over. The other children respond by stating their participation (turn 23), which shows them accepting the suggestion to cease negotiating about the character. In this way, common agreement is established, momentarily regaining intersubjectivity to be able to go on with a (new) joint activity.

Establishing Intersubjectivity About a Content of Learning

In the following, we will show how the content of learning is initiated by a child and how she involves the teacher, LINN, to continue participating in the play activity. LINN takes on this opportunity to play the game and also to develop it further by challenging the children to note the difference a stolen initial makes to a name. By doing so a clear content of learning is 'planted' in the play (see turn 31 below).

Excerpt 11.4: A Content of Learning is Foregrounded

28.	Child:	LINN, the letter thief has stolen L. LINN, the letter thief has stolen L.
29.	LINN	The thief?
30.	Child:	Yes, it has stolen your letter!
31.	LINN:	Oh no! Then what is my name? …if I no longer have an L?
32.	Child:	(inaudible)
33.	LINN:	Then what is my name if I don't have any L?
34.	Child:	(says several words starting with 'lin')
35.	LINN:	INN
36.	Maria:	inn!
37.	Child:	Or *lilla* [Eng. little]

The child's action within the play frame, in addressing the teacher, is an additional example of how the children pursue the play. A child invites the teacher (turn 28). She proves to be knowledgeable within the field of letters, by expressing that L

is LINN's initial. Another child elaborates on this in terms of "letter" (turn 30). The teacher indicates that she is responsive to the play by crying out "Oh no!" (turn 31) when she is informed that the letter thief has taken 'her letter'. That is, she acts and participates *as if*, within the play frame. It is the teacher who introduces the challenge that is new in the play activity, to direct the attention to how a name sounds without the initial letter present, by asking what her name will be without the letter L (turns 31 and 33). This challenge is introduced within the play frame. This constitutes an important example of how a content of learning, in the form of an academic skill, can be introduced in a child-initiated play frame, without interrupting the play. That the content is new and challenging is shown by the children saying words that begin with the same letter(s) as Linn (L): "lin" (turn 34) and "lilla" (turn 37). Intersubjectivity is here lost due to the different 'levels' of understanding the initiated challenge. The teacher handles this by telling the 'right answer': "INN" (turn 35), which can be regarded as a way of guiding the children to a certain way of understand the rules of the play, and the concept of initial. One of the children, Maria, repeats what the teacher says: Inn! (turn 36), while another child does not indicate to have picked this up; instead suggesting a word starting with L (turn 37).

Maria's Changed Participation During the Activity

In the following five excerpts, we will show how one of the children, Maria, deals with the new challenge of handling symbols (letters) and their sounding representations.

Excerpt 11.5: Meta-communication Within the Play

38.	ANNIKA:	Then what is your name Maria if the letter thief has stolen your M? …if the M is gone from Maria (silently sounding the name), then what is it?
39.	Maria:	Maria (inaudible)
40.	Olle:	(inaudible) my O?
41.	ANNIKA:	What happens then?
42.	Maria:	I don't know
43.	ANNIKA:	If you take away O, the first O in Olle, what do you have?
44.	Olle:	If you take away…
45.	ANNIKA:	How can you find out?
46.	Olle:	That you spell

ANNIKA, one of the teachers, picks up what has just been initiated by LINN and taken up by Maria. She wonders, within the play frame, what Maria's name would be "if the Letter Thief has stolen your M?" (turn 38), followed by her sounding the name. The play is maintained and developed through making the Letter Thief the actor even when the attention is directed to the emergent reading skill. The activity is still challenging to Maria, as shown by her answers: repeating her name (turn 39)

and saying that she does not know (turn 42). Another child, Olle, also becomes involved in this challenge, by asking about his name (turn 40). This shows that the problem is shared, that is, children and teachers are engaged in the same activity, even if the children do not know the answer. To ask (relevant) questions in an activity is an important aspect of showing knowledgeable participation. The teacher introduces a strategy for solving the problem, by posing a question about the initial letter (turn 43). She highlights the initial, the letter that should be taken away. Then she directs the children's attention toward a way to take on the challenge, or solve the problem (*as is*), when asking "How can you find out?" (turn 45). Olle suggests that one could spell (turn 46). In the next excerpt, Maria becomes engaged in the strategy that Olle suggested, to spell the name:

Excerpt 11.6: Meta-communication Outside the Play Frame

48.	LINN:	Then what do you have? Try to find out. It seems tricky [the children have written their names on the drawing, see Fig.11.2] Maria? Cover the M there. Then what does it say?
[—]		(ANNIKA talks with another child unrelated to the current activity)
53.	Maria:	(has written 'aria' and now reads out what she has written) a-r-i-a, a-r-i-a, a-r-i-a, aria!
54.	LINN	(with a happy-sounding voice) Yes, that's right!

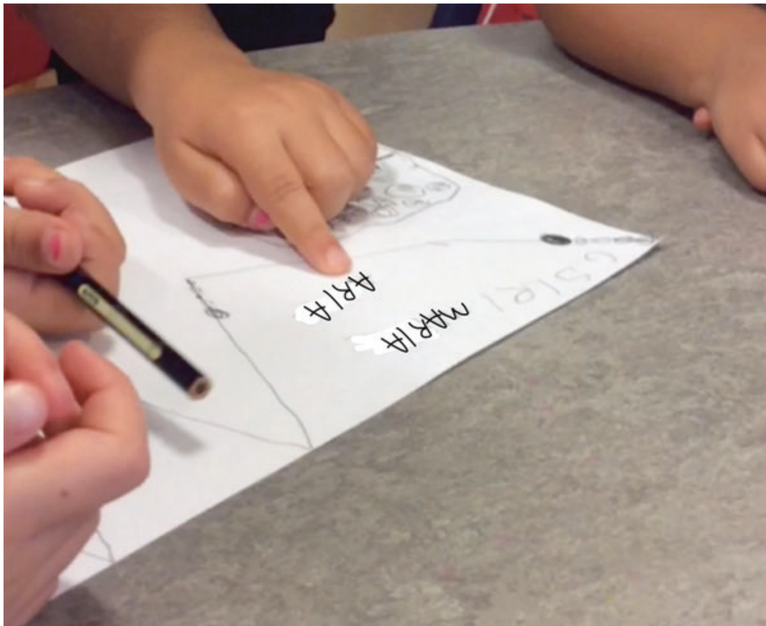

Fig. 11.2 Maria first writes her name and then only the letters that follow the letter M. Then she sounds what is written (the second word/name) accompanying her sounding with a finger

The teacher guides Maria by saying what she can do to handle the task: "Cover the M there". Here meta-communication, outside the play frame (*as is*), is used in order to help Maria pay attention to the critical aspect of the phonetics and graphics of the name without the initial letter. Maria has written her name without an M, and she sounds it three times, then saying: "aria!" (turn 54). Now she answers the question asked by the teacher in a different, developed, way compared to how she did earlier (in Excerpt 11.5) when she repeated her name (turn 39).

Excerpt 11.7: Maria is Appropriating the Strategy

58.	ANNIKA:	But if you get your name tags, perhaps you can find out if you use those
59.	Maria:	Look! (has written lle) l-l-e, lle
60.	ANNIKA:	Yes, exactly!

The play-frame of *the Letter Thief* is backgrounded and the teacher suggests another way of handling the challenge, to use the signs with the children's names on (these are prepared for being used in different activities in the preschool), in order to facilitate the reading activity that is going on (turn 58). Reading is now a part of the play and the signs become structuring resources for it. Maria has during this time continued with the writing activity (see Excerpt 11.6) but this time she has written Olle's name (without the initial letter), in response to his question (turn 40, Excerpt 11.5). Maria directs the other participants' attention to what she has written, by exclaiming "look!" and sounding the written text once, and after that saying, "lle" (turn 59). Maria has now independently solved the problem that LINN introduced: she uses another name, chooses a strategy to handle the challenge – writing the name down without the initial letter, sounds the written text and then puts it together (i.e., reads it). In this way, Maria shows that she has appropriated the strategy that the teacher exemplified and then scaffolded her in taking over, but she also shows her changed understanding of 'stolen initial letter'. In other words, she shows insight in the content the teacher initiated and shared with the children in the play-frame: what happens when you write and read a name without the initial letter (stolen by the Letter Thief).

Excerpt 11.8: Maria is Given the Role of a More Competent Peer

65.	ANNIKA:	(assists a child) Maria, can you help Niclas too?
66.	Maria:	(takes the name tag and sounds [she does not cover the N]
67.	Niclas:	If we take away N (puts his fingers over the N, see Fig. 11.3)
68.	Maria:	i-s-l-a-s, i-s-l-a-s, iklas
69.	ANNIKA:	C (points at the C, which in the name Niclas sounds like a K; at the same time as Maria sounds)

As the activity continues, Maria is given one more opportunity to deal with the content of learning highlighted by the challenge posed by the teacher; this time by

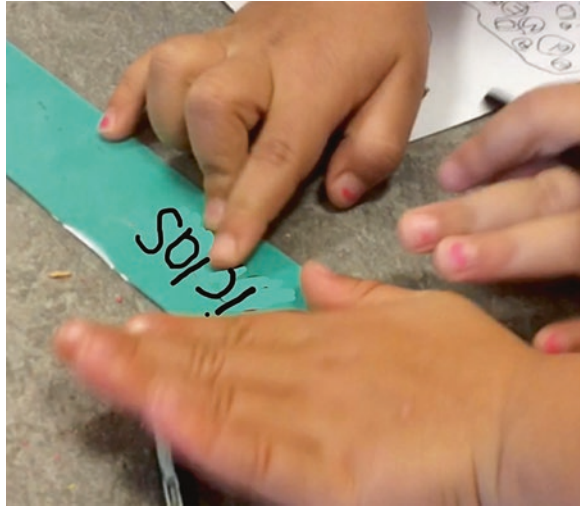

Fig. 11.3 Niclas puts his finger on the initial letter N and Maria sounds (reads) the text/word

being asked to help another child: "Maria, can you help Niclas too?" (turn 65). In this way, Maria is given the role of, in Vygotskian terms, a more experienced peer in the activity. She shows that she has an idea about what the teacher means by immediately picking up the next name-sign (see Fig.11.3). Niclas covers the initial letter with his hand, suggesting that they take away the N (turn 67). In this way, he also shows an emerging understanding of the challenge and how to handle it. Maria sounds the letters after N. The name includes an additional challenge due to the pronunciation of one of the letters, 'C'; in Swedish, this letter can be pronounced either as 'S' [as in *c*ereals] or (more infrequently) as 'k' [as in *C*atherine]. Maria uses the more common way; "c" as "s" (turn 68). While Maria is sounding, the teacher says "k" when pointing at the letter 'c' (turn 69). It seems to be taken for granted that this way of scaffolding without an explanation is enough, and understood by the children. In this way, the teacher meta-communicates about the reading activity (*as is*) and the activity then includes a classic element of teaching to read. This seems to be enough for Maria who changes her sounding of the character 'c' from 's' to 'k' and then reads the name "iklas" (turn 68).

Excerpt 11.9: Reestablishing the Play Frame

73.	ANNIKA:	What happens if the Letter Thief, hold it, takes my name, my first letter then?
74.	Child:	The you become… wait (says different words beginning with A)
75.	Maria:	We have to find Annika's name. Where's Annika's name? Where is Annika's name?
76.	LINN & Child:	There, you had it there
77.	ANNIKA:	Does it have my name?
78.	Child:	No… there! (hands the sign to Maria)

79.	ANNIKA:	There it was
80.	Maria:	n-n-i-k-a (points at the letters while reading) nnika

ANNIKA links the content back to the narrative of the original play, that is, she recontextualizes the problem. She poses a new question about how her name would change if the initial letter of her name would be taken by the Letter Thief (turn 73). This becomes a repetition for the children of how the problem could be solved, now in the case of the name Annika. A couple of children have not appropriated the strategy that has been used to meet the challenge (to write, leaving the initial letter out or using the name signs) and they answer by suggesting words with 'A' as initial letter (turn 74). In contrast, Maria takes the initiative to find Annika's sign: "We have to find Annika's name. Where's Annika's name?" (turn 75). Several children, also the teachers, search among the signs to find Annika's sign. When the sign is found, Maria starts to read. She begins with the first 'N' and this time she only sounds once before she tells the name: "nnika" (turn 80). This shows that Maria has become familiar with the strategy (reading from the sign) but moreover what it means to separate the first sound of a word from the word as a whole.

The Extended Content of Learning and Reestablishing Intersubjectivity

The last excerpt shows how the content of learning is extended by a teacher. It is presented within the play frame: the Letter Thief might steal not only the initial letter but *any* of the letters of a name. However, at this time the children continue the play without taking on this developed challenge:

Excerpt 11.10: A Potential Extension of the Challenge

87.	Child:	The letter thief has taken your letter! [to SANNA]
88.	SANNA:	Which of my letters has he taken?
89.	Child:	It!
90.	SANNA:	And then what happens to the name? Did you find out?
91.	Maria:	(covers the S) a-n-n-a, anna!

A child invites SANNA to participate in the play, again by saying that the Letter Thief has stolen "your letter" (turn 87). In response, SANNA suggests a development of the play: that any of the letters of a name can be stolen: "Which of my letters has he stolen?" (turn 88). She illustrates that she is aware of both the play frame and the academic skill focused. At the same time, she opens up for a new challenge. This is done implicitly, that is with no explanation given that points out the difference to the earlier challenge. The children go on in the same way as earlier, by

pointing out that the first letter is taken (turn 89). In other words, the teacher's proposal of developing the play is not at this point taken up by the children. Yet, there is temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity that allows the participants to continue the activity (the play) as earlier. The teacher follows the children's response, rather than explicitly meta-communicating the extended content, asking, "And what happens to the name? Did you find out?" (turn 90). Maria covers the initial letter, 'S' in Sanna, and sounds and reads the name (turn 91).

Discussion

In this chapter, we have analysed excerpts from a play activity, initiated by a group of children in which the teachers also become involved. The activity is analysed with respect to the concept of temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity (Rommetveit, 1974) and what this means to the continuation of activity (play). The analysis shows that the children and teachers share the problem (*as is*) and challenge (*as if*): discerning the initial letter and reading the name, beginning with the second letter, and they are engaged in the same activity; that is, some temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity is reestablished even if the children are unsure of how to handle the reading challenge.

The analysis also shows how the teachers introduce and establish a learning content that is a prototypical example of an academic skill (sounding and reading) within the play activity. This is done by explicitly communicating (meta-communicating) *what is meant* by the content that is challenging for the children. The explicit meta-communication of the teachers here appear to be needed for establishing intersubjectivity and opening up for learning opportunities regarding the proposed challenge. A way for the children themselves (without the teacher scaffolding) to regain intersubjectivity is to suggest starting the play over when they do not agree on something. This is a forceful strategy in order to be able to re-establish mutual play, since it is less demanding than through meta-communication clarifying what different participants mean and how these senses differ and can or cannot be reconvened within the scope of mutual activity.

In addition, to act and communicate *as if* appears as a way for the teachers to become participants in the play but also for scaffolding the children's participation in play and in other cultural practices (such as reading). In Excerpt 11.2, for example, the teacher asks about the thief *as if* he exists in reality, "have you seen him?", and in this way shows that she is part of the play world. When the situation requires clarification, for example in Excerpt 11.8 when they read the name "Niclas", the teacher switches to an *as-is* mode (saying how 'c' should be pronounced in the context of the name it is part of). This can be done without breaking the play-frame, even if temporarily leaving the *as-if* mode. Instead, it opens up for a possibility for the children to appear as more knowledgeable, according to Vygotskian reasoning (Vygotsky, 1998). The analysis implies that when introducing what for the children

is a new content, meta-communication was necessary in order to make this content and its features visible to the children.

The analysed activity is also a nice example of appropriation (Wertsch, 1998), that is, learning, within a play frame. Maria in her first attempts do not know what her name would sound like without its initial letter. Through a process of scaffolding she appropriates an understanding of what is asked and a strategy for taking it on. She repeatedly uses this strategy during the course of the activity, for example when scaffolding other children to take on the challenge.

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Part III
Conclusions and Theoretical Elaboration

In this third, and final, part of the book, we review the key findings of our empirical exploration, and we theoretically elaborate on what these findings tell us about teaching in early childhood education and what we refer to as play-responsive early childhood *didaktik*.

Chapter 12
A Play-responsive Early Childhood Education *didaktik*

In this volume, we have presented data on, and analyses of, play activities in preschool with an interest in developing teaching in a form responsive to the nature and tradition of preschool (early childhood education and care). In this concluding chapter, we will summarize some key findings and theorize these in terms of what we refer to as play-responsive *didaktik*. The chapter is structured in the following way: First, we review the previous chapters in terms of critical empirical observations and what they imply. Thereafter, we theoretically elaborate on how to understand teaching and *didaktik* as relevant to early childhood education. Some conclusions and further meta-comments finalize the chapter and the book.

However, to briefly reiterate what we emphasized in the introduction to this study, what we here have analyzed is how *one* important part of everyday preschool activities play out: how teaching takes shape in contemporary preschool against the premise that this process will need to be responsive to play in some way. It goes without saying, again, that children, also in preschool, need to be able to play on their own (individually and in group), that is, have a room of their own, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf. What we have investigated is *one* feature of preschool: teaching and its relationship to play. The ambition has therefore not been to give an encompassing picture of contemporary preschool. There are many other, equally important features of preschool that we do not study, nor make claims about. To focus on something (in our case the relationship between play and teaching) is a prerequisite for research; this does not imply that other features of, in this case, preschool, are not (equally) important. Given the often polemic and heated debate on preschool, not least when it comes to play and teaching, this realization is important to reiterate.

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Some Important Empirical Findings

Taking a meta-perspective on the empirical chapters of this book, there are some important observations that are worth recapitulating. We will now do so before making some more general comments in the form of theoretical elaboration – on what we have found with bearing on developing teaching and a *didakik* for early childhood education responsive to playing.

A basic premise of our study is that commonplace simplifications such as the dichotomy between traditional-schooled-instruction, on the one hand, and free play, on the other, are unfruitful for informing theory and early childhood education. Some inherent tensions of this kind were introduced and discussed in Chap. 1, providing a point of departure for our exploration.

In Chap. 11, we provided an important empirically grounded analysis of how learning content in the form of an academic skill, can be introduced in a child-initiated play frame, without interrupting the play (see also, Chaps. 9 and 10). The chapter therefore gives an example of play-responsive teaching, and how what is sometimes referred to as academic content can be promoted through such activity. The analysis clarifies how reading and graphical symbols become structuring resources in children's play. A real-world problem (also constituting a prototypical case of academic content learning) is introduced and managed within the fictional realm of play (*as if*). During the play-responsive teaching activity, participants continually *shift between* and *relate as is* and *as if*. This, we argue, is critical to play-responsive teaching. During the course of the analyzed activity, the child in focus appropriates a strategy for solving a challenge pressing to the development of the play. A meta-comment in this regard is that empirical examples like this testifies to the value and importance of in-detailed interaction analyses of early childhood education practices, something that is unfortunately often lacking in claims about play and teaching in this setting.

Making letters and written words parts of a play exemplifies an important contextualization (Pramling & Ødegaard, 2011; van Oers, 1998), where, rather than pondered in the abstract/formally (breaking down words into combinations of letters and recombining these according to conventions) as something in itself. Through this (re)contextualization, these analytical actions of differentiating and synthesizing a cultural tool (text) become part of playful sense-making activities. As seen throughout this episode, the children readily engage in this activity, and as exemplified by the child Maria, appropriating an important cultural practice (Chap. 11). Contextualized in the manner seen in this example, cultural tools and practices are made necessary for play (as highlighted by Vygotskian theorizing): engaging with these tools and practices is what allows the activity to progress.

This example also shows how children in these play-responsive teaching activities not only engage in *as-if* and *as-is* thinking, but also in *what-if* thinking (Vaihinger, 1924/2001). To engage in *what-if* thinking means to anticipate consequences or responses to actions, that is, the realization that if something is changed, this will have consequences that (at least to some extent) can be calculated. In

contrast to the importance of *reflective thinking*, that is, taking a meta-perspective on what happened and why, this is a case of *prospective thinking* (what will happen if…?). Through shifting in activities between *as is*, *as if*, and *what if*, children are socialized into different discourses and modes of thinking. This reasoning also reminds us, lest we forget, that teaching in early childhood education is an activity far more multifaceted and dynamic than to equate it with instruction (see also below). Giving an empirically grounded, theoretically informed nuanced understanding of teaching as an early childhood education activity constitutes an important contribution of the present study.

In Chap. 7, research by Hakkarainen et al. (2013) on going from a rational to a narrative mode of thinking is discussed (this distinction does not imply that narrative is irrational, rather that it constitutes a different form of rational rendering from what is traditionally referred in these terms, or alternatively, paradigmatic thinking; on the latter, see Bruner, 2006). This transition from a rational (paradigmatic) to a narrative rendering of reality, arguably constitutes a particularly challenging task (see Pramling & Säljö, 2014, for a discussion). Given the central standing of narrative as a mode of sense making and communicating in early childhood education, how also paradigmatic modes of thinking can be promoted within activities thus mediated constitute a pressing issue for research to clarify. Chap. 10 provides an empirically grounded analysis of precisely this matter. In the activity therein analyzed, a paradigmatic mode of thinking par excellence – mathematical problem solving – is promoted through engaging children in a narratively elaborated mutual play activity. The activity also makes evident how the entire group of children are a developmental asset in organizing for children's learning and development in preschool. Children are participants and agents in their own and each others' learning and development (cf. Oshiro, Pihl, Peterson, & Pramling, 2019). The latter claim is critical to our perspective on teaching, according to which teaching cannot be ascribed merely one participant (e.g., the preschool teacher), as we elaborate below. Returning to Chap. 7, it provides empirical examples of how participants, through meta-communicating, coordinate their perspectives on how the *as is* of reality relates to the *as if* of play. One example is: "This is grass but we pretend it's straw" (Excerpt 7.4, turn 3).

In Chaps. 5 and 6, how teachers do to attempt to gain access to and become participants in children's play are analyzed. These chapters show, among other things, how children may resist suggestions from the preschool teacher about how to develop play, or, if you will, play with a well-established play format. This gives a contrasting image to the popular dichotomous notion of creative and open children and restricted and closed teachers/adults. Clearly, reality is more complex, with teachers/adults and children being more or less creative on different occasions, for varying reasons. Challenging the common conception of creative children and a-creative teachers/adults is an important contribution of this study, as it yields a more nuanced conception of how participants relate to play (and creativity), opening up for informed, empirically-grounded discussions about how to provide more developmentally creative practices that children and teachers can share, mutually engage in.

These chapters also highlight that the issue of teachers' participation in children's play is not merely one of gaining access to and being accepted as participants (play partners), but something that can continue to be a somewhat negotiated issue throughout a play. Hence, teachers' participation in children's play is far more complex than merely one of whether they can gain access to these. As shown in our analyses, teachers' participation requires responsivity to children's perspectives, but in order to provide new developmental incentive, they also need to be able to plant the seeds of new directions and play possibilities in response to taken-for-granted or explicitly agreed-upon premises of play. As our analyses show, this is a very challenging task, but one, we argue, that is critical to teachers being able to support children's learning and development in play-responsive ways, that is, to engage children in teaching interactions within and/or in extension of play. Chap. 6 also gives a fascinating empirical example of children's creativity, through our analysis of what we theoretically conceptualize in terms of alterity (Wertsch, 1998), in showing how a teacher's suggestion to introduce a novel feature of a play can be resisted by the children in a way that allow them a way out of the mediation suggested by the teacher. The children, through their creative response to the teacher's suggestion, theoretically speaking, counter alterity with alterity. This example therefore also functions as another reminder, if one is needed, that children are not 'receivers' of developmental actions (e.g., instructions) but agents in their own and each other's learning and development. Phrased differently, children are participants in their own development. Facilitating such participation, for example through supporting their development of new forms of playing is critical to the ambition of early childhood education to promote children's agency.

These are all empirical observations that have important theoretical implications for how to theoretically understand and, in extension, develop early childhood education.

A Note on Agency

"The notion of agency is arguably at the very core of sociocultural perspectives on learning", Mäkitalo (2016, p. 64) writes in a commentary on the concept, clarifying how "[i]t alludes to the capacity of humans to distance themselves from their *immediate* surroundings and it implies recognition of the possibility to intervene in, and transform the meaning of, situated activities" (p. 64, italics in original; see also, Gillespie, 2012). This reasoning indicates that agency is contingent on mediation; that is, with mediation, a space of negotiation between action (perceiving, thinking, acting) and surrounding emerges. Hence, the concept of agency indicates how human action cannot be understood in terms of contingent stimulus-response patterns, to use the vocabulary of a bygone era of psychological theorizing. With the interest of the present study, we can say that play lives precisely in this dynamic space, allowing the world to be perceived, (re)thought and acted upon *as if it were* other than conventionally understood (what is conventionally perceived as a table

can be remediated (Nilsen, Lundin, Wallerstedt, & Pramling, 2018) as a pirate ship or tree hut, for example). With the appropriation of cultural tools and practices, these resources "begin to mediate an activity," and "new generative conditions unfold that invite further action and alternative forms of participation" (Mäkitalo, 2016, p. 64). Agency thus denotes the possibilities of the child to change the course of (her participation in) activity (see Clarke, Howley, Resnick, & Rosé, 2016, on what they refer to as "enacted agency", as distinct to "sense of agency"). In the context of our present concerns, being able and allowed to participate in activities not only in terms of *as is* but also in terms of *as if* are critical to the institution of preschool being responsive to children's play agency. How teaching plays out in such activities is contingent on how such shifts in discourse (alterity) are responded to.

The concept of agency reminds us that human interaction is inherently negotiated; participants do not merely react in predetermined slots or in predefined ways (in fact, resisting complying with a suggestion is an important part of agency, Rainio, 2008; cf. Excerpt 6.5 in Chap. 6 of the present volume). Actions and phenomena can always be taken in more than one way (cf. Bruner, 1990, on human sense making). Shifting from *as is* to *as if* or redirecting activities in novel directions (theoretically referred to as alterity) can be understood as clarifying the distribution and redistribution of agency. While we have not consistently highlighted agency per se in our analyses, we consider what we analyze as indicative of enacting, responding to, and the redistribution of agency (cf. van Oers, 2012, on education as the promoting of student agency). Teaching typically entails a redistribution of agency (Magnusson & Pramling, 2017), in that who does what in an activity changes with the increased familiarity/experience of the learner. This redistribution of division of labor has typically in psychological theorizing been conceptualized in terms of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976; van de Pol & Elbers, 2013). However, while recognizing the need for theoretical specification of the metaphor of scaffolding in studies fundamentally different to the one studied in Wood et al.'s founding study (see Oshiro et al., 2019, for an in-depth discussion and empirically-grounded specification), we suggest conceptualizing another metaphor for the evolvement of mutual teaching activities: triggering. In a following section, we therefore elaborate somewhat on the latter concept[1] and how we consider it different from common use of the concept of scaffolding.

[1] Developing the concept of triggering, we have become aware that the term is to some extent used in the related literature (e.g., de Koning, 2012; Janssen-Vos & Pompert, 2012; Magnusson & Pramling, 2017; van Oers, 2012), but without being developed as a concept. With our elaboration, we contribute with a conceptualization and differentiation of triggering as a concept for understanding a part of teaching activity in early childhood education. Etymologically, the word 'trigger' leads back to 'to pull' and later 'set off' (Barnhart, 2004). Hence, the metaphorics of the term indicates that – in the context of our present concern – triggering could be understood as pulling someone into, for example, a responsive activity, or as setting of (i.e., set in motion) a response. As here indicated, and we further discuss, triggering is a fundamentally responsive concept. Even if set in motion ('set off') by one participant, a trigger by necessity requires a response; the response is in effect what makes the action a case of triggering.

Teaching in a Play-responsive Way in the Dynamic Space Between Alterity and Intersubjectivity

As Wertsch (1998) has emphasizes, there is an inherent and dynamic tension in human communication between intersubjectivity and alterity. Intersubjectivity does not presume that all participants understand the content in the same way, only that there is partially and temporarily sufficient coordination (Rommetveit, 1974, 1992) for them to go on (Wittgenstein, 1953) with a joint activity. Participants will still exit an activity with (partly) different understanding, just like they entered the activity with (partly) different understanding. There is also alterity, that is, participants understand differently even when engaging in a shared activity (e.g., play). In fact, it is to large extent alterity – as a dynamic counter-force to intersubjectivity – that is critical to the (potential) development of activity. Some intersubjectivity must temporarily (and partially) be established in order for children (with our without a teacher) to engage in a shared play project. At the same time, in order for the play to not simply keep being repeated, responding to differences in understanding and intention is critical to developing play and what children can experience through participating in this activity. As seen in our empirical studies, participants may reject what is theoretically referred to as alterity, even creatively responding in ways that from a theoretical perspective is another example of alterity. What and how to play are potentially contested throughout play, from its initiation to conclusion. During the course of play, the relation between participants will fluctuate between intersubjectivity and alterity. In the context of our present concern, we argue that play-responsive teaching takes place in the negotiated and dynamic intersection between temporarily sufficient intersubjectivity and alteratity, rather than making the fallacy of seeing the relationship as dichotomous, with teaching as intersubjectivity and playing as alterity. *Play is not alterity*; it entails some alterity and some intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity and alterity are inherent features of teaching and playing and their interrelationship.

Granted, if conceptualized from an essentialist perspective, that is, as if it were something definite, unambiguously definable, play may be understood as alterity. However, as argued by Vygotsky (1933/1966) children's play is initially more recollection of experience than imagination. Hence, understanding play as evolving, we cannot make alterity inherent to play. Furthermore, as we show in our study, play may lose its alterity, so to speak, in that after increased imagination in play, imaginativeness may again come to be replaced by an approach to how it (the play) 'really is' (as we have seen in children resisting suggestions about how to develop play in a novel direction). Hence, understanding play as socio-historically evolving and contingent, play is not necessarily characterized by alterity. In contrast, an essentialist conception is a-historical and, allegedly, a-contextual. The latter kinds of conceptions are contrasted by empirically grounded conceptions. Researching play, we argue, highlights the importance of developing theoretical resources that allow us to conceptualize change, arguably decisive for the phenomena and processes we study in developmental research/educational psychology.

The Concepts of Triggering and Alterity

One conceptual resource that we introduce into our analyses in this project is 'triggering'. This concept denotes actions (which may be verbal or in other modalities, including simply starting playing) that allows scaffolding the investigation of some content or engaging in problem solving. Evidently, the concept of 'triggering' as here understood is somewhat adjacent to the concept of 'alterity' (see above). However, there is at least one critical difference between these concepts: 'alterity' denotes an action that suggests a novel direction of an already initiated activity in a way that questions what may or may not be within the scope of the present activity (framework) as it is understood by its participants. An example would be if in playing 'family', a child suggesting that also pets could speak with the children and parents of the family (and potentially also other characters of the play). If other play partners accept such a suggestion for how to play, this would potentially lead the play to develop in ways other than if they were to deny pets this role in the play. Hence, proposing a novel feature of a play that requires some renegotiation of the play frame, which may or may not be made explicit, is what we refer to as 'alterity' (see e.g., Chaps. 6 and 10, for empirical examples).

In contrast, the examples of triggering in our empirical chapters can be summarized as:

- The adult creates space for co-narration = > (triggers) the *as-if* dimension of the play
- The adult introduces the possibility to talk-in-character = > the *as-if* dimension of the play
- The adult directs the narrative as narrator = > the narrative of play
- The adult meta-comments on something going on in the play (*as if*, or within the narrative frame) = > *as is* a problem to solve
- The adult poses questions in relation to something going on in the play = > dialogue *as is*

Hence, alterity and triggering could be distinguished thus: alterity refers to actions that initiate taking and activity in a novel direction; triggering refers to initiating actions in play that potentially enriches activities cognitively and/or aesthetically. The processes referred to by these terms are important to how the educational potentials of play play out in early childhood education. In this book, we have given ample examples of what form these processes may take in such activities. It is further noteworthy that the examples of triggering we have listed here were all initiated by the adult (preschool teacher), while what we refer to as alterity (as seen in our chapters) were initiated by children as well as by preschool teachers. This difference indicates that triggering, as closely related to initiations to scaffold children's understanding or problem solving, implies other experience than being able to take ongoing play in a novel direction. However, this is not to say that the latter is something all children naturally know; rather, also redirecting play activity presumes

imagination, something contingent on experience, and thus something that can be learned (Vygotsky, 1930/2004).

A Note on Scaffolding and Triggering

The concept of scaffolding is prevalent in many analyses of and discussions about early childhood education and children's learning and development (e.g., Sun & Rao, 2012; van de Pol & Elbers, 2013). Conceptualizing interaction in terms of changing division of labor has proven illuminating of strategies employed in supporting new insights and abilities in children. However, for our present purposes it may be less functional. Critical to the process referred to by Wood et al. (1976) in terms of scaffolding is that typically the adult provides some structuring of activity allowing the learner to (learn to) solve a problem. Scaffolding is therefore directed towards a particular goal (e.g., laying a puzzle, building a structure). Many teaching activities are of this kind, even if in education many of the goals concern appropriating discursive tools (e.g., learning to reason in certain terms) rather than manipulating physical objects. But when it comes to play, one feature that is integral is open-endedness. When playing, participants do not necessarily know beforehand where they will end up (that we neither know where learners will end up in terms of understanding even in highly structured teaching is something we discussed in Chap. 3). This feature of play implies that scaffolding may not be as functional for conceptualizing these kinds of activities. Instead, we suggest that the actions of more experienced participants in play-responsive activities are conceptualized in terms of triggering. With this term, we denote actions that open up for fantasizing, engaging in exploring what is to a large extent unexpected, unpredictable, open. Arguably, there is always a direction in an activity, even an open-ended play activity, but this direction may change during the course of activity, and playing in a – metaphorically speaking – certain direction does not preclude that it is clear where play partners will end up.

Reconceptualizing Teaching and Early Childhood *didaktik*

On the basis of the criteria of teaching as discerned by Barnett (1973), and as rephrased in our terms: – an intention to make possible for someone else/others to see/realize what oneself has seen/realized; responding to the response of the learner(s), that is, adjusting one's way of showing/explaining etc. to the understanding indicated by the learner(s) – we can now draw these to their conclusion, furthering Barnett's reasoning, through arguing that this means that teaching conceptualized in this manner, cannot be ascribed one of the participants. That is, if taking this perspective to its conclusion, we cannot suggest that teachers teach (or should teach) in preschool. Rather, in the nature of our conceptualization – based on Barnett (1973) and others,

but here developed – teaching is a mutual activity in which teachers can engage children to participate. Since teaching in this conception is responsive to the responses of other participants, all participants (teacher and children) are equally important participants in the kind of activity we refer to as teaching. Hence, a criterion is that *teaching is a mutually co-constituted activity*. This, however, does not imply that what participants take with them from participating in this activity will be identical; learning will always partly differ between participants. Thus, participants enter teaching activities with partly different experience and they leave the activity with partly different (but different than before) experience. There is no causality (or as it is today sometimes referred to 'linearity') between teaching and learning. Neither is it necessary to partake in teaching in order to learn; people learn a great many things without participating in teaching activities. However, in the institutional setting of preschool, children are to be introduced to and supported in starting to appropriate culturally valued forms of knowing. Hence, how teaching plays out will be critical to how the institution responds to this task. Even if teaching, as we here conceptualize it, is a mutual activity, teachers do have a critical role to play; being more experienced participants, teachers challenge and support children taking on challenges through a multitude of practices; in the present study we have seen practices such as:

- asking questions (of many different kinds, within, outside and about play and other forms of activity),
- highlighting *as if* and *as is*, and the relationship between these forms of activity),
- meta-communicating,
- pointing out (through embodiment and through verbal means),
- introducing cultural tools (including, importantly, expansive language; cf. scientific concepts in the Vygotskian sense),
- instructing (i.e., informing children about, for example, what something is called, or what it is),
- recapping,
- reminding and
- recontextualizing phenomena.

Hence, teachers do critical work in teaching, but teaching is not solely of their doing, rather, as here conceptualized, it is a mutual activity where children are equally important participants. Still, as a more experienced participant and as the representative of the institution, the teacher has responsibility for teaching to take place. Hence, despite teachers and children being on equal footing as participants in co-constituting teaching activities, teachers differ from children in being accountable for such activity to take place in manners that are engaging and developmental. An additional clarification here is that to suggest that teaching is a mutual activity does *not* imply that participants will leave the activity with identical understanding. As we have repeatedly emphasized, there is no causality between teaching and learning, and children make sense of what they experience on the basis of previous experience and how they participate in activities. Hence, a conception of teaching as mutual activity does not imply a notion of homogenization where individual

differences are obliterated. Rather, as we have also emphasized, and investigated for a long time (see e.g., Pramling, 1996), differences in experience among children in a group is responded to as a *didaktikal* asset in making children aware of *different ways of understanding* and solving problems. That is, intentional outcome of teaching is to develop in children a greater repertoire of different ways of understanding, not to make every child understand in the same restricted way (the allegedly 'correct' way).

We understand teaching as an *activity*. As such, it is co-constituted by the coordinated (responsive) practices or actions of participants (and the tools they use), for instance pointing or asking. However, the word teaching is often used in a way that exemplifies what in linguistics is called nominalized (i.e., the process through which something, in this case an activity, is transformed into a noun); this transformation implies a reification (cf. Säljö, 2002). Conceiving of teaching as an *object* rather than an activity paves the way for fallacies such as claiming that the environment as such (if prior organized by the personnel) can teach children. Our perspective is *not* harmonious with the latter kind of perspective.

Teaching Is Not Instructing

Conceptualizing teaching in the manner we here do, clearly distinguishes the concept from the adjacent concept of instruction. If someone in the know tells someone what something is (conventionally understood as) or how something is done, he or she has instructed the other person, regardless of how – or even if – the latter responds to this instruction. In contrast, teaching presumes responsiveness to the response of the other participant(s); without this mutual responsiveness, there is no teaching. Hence, in contrast to what in everyday speech is referred to as 'teaching someone', we reserve teaching to such mutually responsive activities we have conceptualized above. Phrased in another way, *instruction is an action* while *teaching is an activity*. Hence, instruction can be done – and is typically done – by one person to one or several others, while teaching is a mutual activity where, for example, the children participating in the activity are as critical as the teacher is. The distinction we make between teaching and instruction further means that in early childhood education settings such as preschool there will likely be both teaching and instruction taking place. At times, direct instruction, arguably, has a role to play even in early childhood education, to clarify how things are conventionally referred to or done. However, instruction can never be the sole, or even the dominant, mode of action in early childhood education. The reason for this is that it is irresponsive to children's knowledge and participation in activities. Without grounding in children's experience, what children encounter will not make sense to them.

Teaching as Responsive and Directed Coordination

In Chap. 3 of this book, we referred to Hedges' (2014) work, and her argument that "playful and integrated pedagogical models depend on teachers' ability to recognize and act on possible links between play and content in a genuine way. This is in contrast to trying to slip content disingenuously into children's play, emphasizing content as if it were the only end-goal of play or teaching content didactically" (p. 200f.). Regarding the reference in her reasoning to 'didactics', we have already clarified that what is typically referred to by this term is markedly different from what we (grounded in the German/Continental tradition) refer to as *didaktik*, so we will not further comment on that. However, what Hedges writes about in terms of the importance of teachers recognizing and acting "on possible links between play and content", is something that we suggest we can contribute to illuminate theoretically on the basis of our empirical study.

What we argue is that some kind of content is always constituted in talk (conversation), but it is not necessarily a content shared by all interlocutors/participants. Teaching therefore critically consists of coordinating perspectives (not least *as if*/play and *as is*/established knowledge) in supporting children to discern or appropriate something new (or something familiar understood in a new way, from a new perspective). However, this coordinated activity is not premised to result in identical understanding among participants, since people make sense of what they encounter; and how they do so is contingent on their experience, interest and ways of participating in activities (intersubjectivity is at best temporary and partial; Linell, 2014; Rommetveit, 1974). Furthermore, teaching is directed coordinated activity; there is an intention in the teacher (i.e., the one taking this role, it needs not be an actual teacher/professional, also others, more experienced adults or other children can take this position in activity; for empirical illustrations of the latter, see Kullenberg & Pramling, 2016, 2017), but not necessarily or commonly shared by the learner, to make someone else see/realize something oneself has seen/realized. In Swedish, this distinction between seeing and realizing is closely intertwined: *se/inse* (cf. English: sight/insight). Teaching as directed coordination (cf. Kultti & Pramling, 2015) can further be differentiated in the following manner, as encompassing:

- different perspectives and experience
- *as if* it were (play/playfulness and creativity) and *as* it *is* (conventional, institutional understanding)
- local (deictic) language and expansive language
- showing and explaining
- different semiotic means/modalities
- children's experience and allowing them to make new experience (appropriate new perspectives, discern new phenomena), and thereby outline teaching simultaneously in continuity and discontinuity with children's experience

In terms of coordinating, or to use the metaphorics of contextualization we discussed in Chap. 2, teaching critically consists of interweaving differences in ways that result in a more multifaceted fabric (not a monochrome surface), that is, the intended outcomes of teaching in early childhood education is not for children to simply take over the understanding of the preschool teacher or develop identical sense. The latter is neither possible nor desirable. Rather, understanding is partly (and temporarily) shared and therefore also different among participants in an activity. It is, as we have argued elsewhere (Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2011), the fact that people have different experience and understanding that we have anything of interest to offer, and learn from, each other. Critical to teaching in early childhood education therefore is to make the variety of experience among the children (and teachers) of the group a *didaktikal* asset. This serves to make children aware that not everyone understands the same, which is, arguably, a premise for the development of democracy, and to increase the repertoire of children's ways of understanding (Pramling, 1996).

Continuity and Discontinuity with Children's Experience

An institution such as preschool can be conceptualized as a node where the interests of many stakeholders intersect: children, caregivers, preschool teachers and politicians. From a social point of view, this kind of institution serves as a means of caring for the wellbeing and development of the growing generation; it reproduces culturally valued forms of knowing that in complex societies cannot be left to the primary socialization of children in their immediate family relationships (cf. Elkonin, 2005, Chap. 3 of the present volume). Forms of knowing such as the symbolic cultural resources of literacy and numeracy are too complex to be appropriated by every child without some form of teaching. This means that what children experience in such settings cannot be entirely continuous with the experience they have made, and make, outside this institution. Through participating in teaching activities in preschool (and later, school), children are introduced to and supported in appropriating many culturally critical tools and practices. This is one of the points of institutions such as preschool and school (Luria, 1976). However, in the nature of learning, what children experience in these institutions cannot be entirely unrelated to what they have experienced, and experience, outside these. If the child cannot in some way relate what she encounters in these institutions with her life outside these, it will not make sense to her. As emphasized by Vygotsky (1934/1987), so called scientific concepts (institutional categories) are made sense of by the learner in a dynamic relationship to her everyday concepts (taken over through socialization in mundane activities). This means that an institution such as preschool by its very nature will be both continuous with and discontinuous to the child's experience; this is emphasized by key educational theoreticians such as Dewey (1916/2008), Vygotsky (1934/1987), and Säljö (2006; see also, Pramling, Doverborg, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2017).

Education as a Meta-narrative

In contemporary debates in Sweden about teaching in preschool, the notion of education has also emerged. This notion has not previously been used in discussions about early childhood education in Sweden. From our point of view, in part building on the work of Mercer (2008), an education refers to teaching activities being related in a – for the learner – meaningful way. Phrased in terms of what we have studied in the present project, weaving narrative threads between activities – metaphorically speaking, forward and backwards, that is, how what we do now relates to what we did yesterday or what we will do tomorrow –, a number of teaching activities (including play activities) becomes part of an overarching narrative that can be referred to as an education. Hence, an education from this point of view is constituted by a form of meta-narrative encompassing a number of what could otherwise by the child be perceived as disparate activities. Such a meta-narrative makes previous experience the foundation of new experience, facilitating cumulative learning.

Concluding Note

Discussions about *didaktik* revolve around questions concerning the professional knowledge base (professional language) of the teaching profession (Ingerman & Wickman, 2015). Hence, it concerns the development of conceptual resources for analyzing, speaking about (e.g., with caregivers, politicians and others concerned talk about educational principles and choices), and planning (the orchestration) of teaching activities/trajectories. *Didaktik* research therefore aims at contributing to collective knowledge building in science and in the teaching profession/teacher education. One of the outcomes of the research presented in the present book is that is clarifies – through detailed process studies – how teacher participation and responses are instrumental to the continuation and development of mutually engaging play-responsive teaching activities. Learning about the nature of these interactional processes is important to the professionals of early childhood education. Appropriating tools functional in analyzing mutual activities is key to being able to discern what difference makes a difference, and therefore how to provide more engaging and developmentally challenging and supportive participation in play-responsive activities with young children. In the present project, we have contributed to the development of such tools of the trade, through coordination and development of theoretical tools and empirical observation. Carrying out the study in close cooperation with the preschool teachers themselves (and the heads of preschools), and building the study on empirical data from everyday preschool activities, assure ecological validity, meaning that there is no 'translation problem' when, for example, through in-service education or preschool teacher education, disseminating this knowledge to the profession.

In this study, we have contributed to conceptualizing teaching and *didaktik* relevant to early childhood education and care (the Swedish case of preschool). Conceptualizing how children's learning and development can be supported through early childhood education without residing to either pole of the common dichotomy of traditional-schooled-instruction, on the one hand, and free play, on the other, is important if we want to savior the unique and favorable nature of early childhood education institutions such as preschool, without shying away from the task to also contribute to children's learning and development.[2] It is further critical that such conceptualizations are grounded in empirical research, rather than on ideological or philosophical basis, since it is only the former that is responsive to how participants themselves (children and preschool teachers) actually experience and participate in activities (Pramling Samuelsson, Kultti, & Pramling, 2018). The conceptualization we have provided with this study is at heart a mutually constituted activity where children are as important as the preschool teacher, and where responsivity is crucial; responsiveness to children's experience and to play. In being responsive, this does not imply simply following whatever wants are expressed by (some) children; rather, a key task for the preschool teacher is also to introduce children to new fields of knowing and new ways of playing. Thus, responsiveness in this conception denotes both being reactive (i.e., responsive to children's initiatives and interest) and being proactive (i.e., introducing and giving children ample opportunities to experience what they may not have been able to on their own). The reason we conceptualize teaching in terms of *play-responsive* rather than the more common term *play-based* (e.g., Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Walsh, McGuinnes, & Sproule, 2017) is – in addition to implying that responsive is a responsible stance (i.e., a way of working for establishing a socially just institution) – precisely to indicate that an activity does not necessarily start in play (i.e., be play-*based*, but that it has to be responsive to play if it comes in play), and thus, metaphorically speaking, the bi-directional nature of responding to as well as initiating play. In fact, providing an alternative to simplifications in the form of dichotomies constitutes a meta-point of the present study. Children's learning and development are far too complex and dynamic

[2] Our elaboration, amongst other things, highlights the importance of supporting children learning to play and through play learn about worlds: imagined and real, and their interrelatedness. There are challenges attached to what we call play-responsive teaching in early childhood education and care. These include empirical, methodological and theoretical (scientific ones) as well as practical (educational/*didaktikal* ones). Regarding the former: a challenge posed by letting preschool teachers themselves document activities when they spontaneously take place is that the initiation of activities may not at all times be captured, and these may be critical to how activities develop. This is an empirical and methodological challenge of how to capture the kinds of activities we are interested in analyzing. A theoretical challenge is how to conceptualize activities that encompass play without reducing these to predefined criteria: what play is (how we take on this theoretical challenge is clarified in Chap. 3). For early childhood education personnel (e.g., preschool teachers) co-constituting play-responsive teaching with children is challenging; critical is to find and make visible (i.e., noticeable and knowable) relationships between *as if* and *as is* – so that children can learn about real problems and issues through engaging in fantasy (*as if*), and conversely, how cultural tools and practices (*as is*) can be made into resources for developing imaginary scenarios *(as if)*.

phenomena to be understood in terms of either or. Abandoning such polarity thinking, generally conducted on ideological or philosophical basis, is crucial for the advancement of theory and, informed by such theory, the development of early childhood education and care practices developmentally fulfilling to all children participating. With this book, we have made an attempt to contribute to such developments.

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