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, Brédikytė, 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
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 picked 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

| Turn | Character | Action/Dialogue |
|------|-----------|-----------------|
| 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 noises) |
| 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; 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

|   | EDITH: |   |
|---|--------|---|
| 1. | Who lived at home with mum and dad |
| 2. | But one day the mum and dad said, you’ll have to leave home, you’ll have to build your own house! |
| 3. | 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. | (comes and sits down) |
| 5. | 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 similiarly 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 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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