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NARRATIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR PLAY AND LEARNING (NEPL) GUIDELINES

FOR KINDERGARTEN AND SCHOOL TEACHERS WORKING WITH 3-8 YEARS-OLD-CHILDREN



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INTRODUCTION

Dear friend,

We are happy that you decided to open these guidelines for the teachers, parents and any adults who are eager to have adventure of play and learning together with children.

In next seventy pages, we are going to tell you a story of narrative play and learning that is a practical method of narrative (developmental) play pedagogy implemented in several countries by creative pedagogues.

In the following short chapters, you will learn narrative play and learning history in a nutshell, theoretical and practical explanations of the approach, why it should be used, who can implement it, where and how. We will describe the concrete steps of realization with practical examples illustrating narrative play activities. Different forms of evaluation and planning are included in the appendixes.

Narrative play and learning (NEPL) project has been carried out in 2015-2017 in four different countries: Lithuania, Finland, Poland and UK. Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences coordinated the project.

The project aimed at professional development of the ECEC and elementary school teachers working with young children. A team of pedagogues and university researchers in each country were developing effective narrative play practices enhancing the creation of common playworlds of adults and children in early childhood education or elementary school classrooms. Common experiences and best practices were shared in each of the participating countries during joined training weeks. These best practices have been compiled into a NEPL guidelines.

The primary responsibility for writing the guidelines had Milda Bredikyte, Pentti Hakkarainen, Monika Skeryte-Kazlauskienė and Jarmo Lounassalo. However, the expertise and experiences of all the participants, their thoughts expressed during the discussions, practical suggestions and advices, concerns and comments became the basis of the guidelines. Therefore, all the participants of the project, including children and their families, are the authors of this publication.

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PREFACE BY PROFESSOR TINA BRUCE CBE

There is nothing more exciting, rewarding, fulfilling and USEFUL than international projects like this one - when colleagues from different countries come together to actively explore something as important as narrative play. In this project, colleagues from four countries (Finland, Lithuania, Poland and England) have shared thoughts, observations, tried out narrative play practices, and through this process found in what fascinating ways they agree, disagree, can find ways of reconciling their disagreements, or where they need to agree to disagree. Along the way there has been a huge amount of learning by each and every participant. There has also been deep respect for the professional work everyone is engaged in. There has been enjoyment and laughter together.

The gatherings in the four different countries of this community of learners has led to an important exercise in developing the guidelines written up in this book so that other colleagues will also be encouraged to promote, develop and support narrative play with children and families in their work. The guidelines are based on the group's intense exploration, discussion - and very important- observing each other working in the four countries to develop narrative play with the children both in the real settings and classrooms, but also through film and photography. In this book, the reader will find a journey into developing narrative play with children and colleagues which includes a realistic and practical approach. The book does not tell practitioners what they ought to think or do. It explains why narrative play is important. It gives

practical guidance, but in ways which require teachers/practitioners to feel comfortable about how they do this.

An area that gave cause for robust, exciting and inspiring discussion was whether some children might be frightened during narrative play. I have never (until this one) found a book which helped to ponder these kinds of issue in this kind of detail and which provides such positive and practical help. This is exactly the kind of support that teacher/practitioners need. It is well known that play is not just having fun. It is a far deeper aspect of learning than something so narrow in its contribution. Narrative play engages children in their emotions, and these include fun and enjoyment, but also engage children in the full human range. How adults who spend time with children support them in this is of fundamental importance, with implications for wellbeing, the development of self-regulation, sensitively towards and care of others, a moral framework and the possibilities of nuanced symbolic layerings. Narrative play has a major contribution to make in these respects.

Discovering likeminded colleagues in different countries is heartening. Coming into contact with different cultural approaches is fascinating. Realising that what seems to be a totally different way of working is not so different in what it tries to do, and that there is not one way to work. This is both challenging and stimulating. This international project ensures that teachers/practitioners avoid working narrowly in their

cultural context and instead encourages a broadening and deepening of the professional thinking that is undertaken in a learning community. So often this becomes a lasting network of professional exchange and discussions.

A huge reason for the success of this work on narrative play is Professor Milda Bredikyte. She speaks the languages of the four countries, and so could translate such that good discussion was possible. Using four languages during discussion involving deep thoughts is no mean feat, and participants in the project were sincerely grateful to her. She has subsequently brought together the feedback from the practical work and included the work from the researchers participating with the practitioners in the group. This has ensured that the practical work is illuminated, but also that the important theoretical and research on the subject of narrative play is included in accessible form to give support to the practice. Dissemination of the importance of narrative play which has come to fruition in the publication of this book. There is excellent guidance for those working directly with children and their families, who will be able to find their own way of working, supported but not put under pressure.

What an achievement this project has been so far. And this is only the beginning!

I. WHY WE SHOULD FOCUS ON PLAY?

PLAN:

- The importance of play
- Why do adults should play with children?
- Academic learning in early age – more damage than positive things (evidence, research)

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Often, those human experiences that are the hardest to depict and understand are the most important. What is the meaning of love? Why do we experience death? What is the role of children's play? (Bruce, 1993, p. 237)

PLAY is intrinsically motivated, freely chosen, pleasurable, non-literal, and actively engaged in by participants (Hughes, 1999, p. 25).

PLAY is a holistic way to experience and to explore the world.

Children's play is understood in industrialized world as the key to child development in early age before school start. Developmental neurosciences are starting to understand how young brains are different from old brain and how the transformation from early play-based learning to later, more focused goal directed planning takes place on neural level. Their conclusion that play activity is the most favourable to facilitate this transformation. Important to stress

that not early schooling but high-level play behind maturation of children's brain no matter what education administrators and bureaucrats think and believe. But even more important to understand that formal organizational changes cannot speed up these processes.

Scientific research points, that childhood is designed to be a period of variability and possibility, exploration and innovation, learning and imagination. It also suggests that social learning that is evolutionary deeper, developmentally earlier, and more pervasive than schooling is fundamental during this period of child's life. Young children learn by watching, listening and imitating people around them, and all this is tried out in their joint imaginary play.

PLAY IS MEANINGFUL ACTIVITY FOR THE CHILD.

If adults don't understand it's meaning they should at least try.

Children are living, valuable life, not just preparing. Play develops a way, how to live in society. Practicing life during play.

Central domains of development according to researchers are child's personality, imagination and self-regulation. Child's self-development seems to be at this stage more important than academic knowledge and skills. Narratives mediate cultural ideas and ideals from child's environment, they are compatible with emotionality of play and bring structure and sense to children's psychological experience. Adults are needed as models and mediators in preparatory and make-believe stage of play and simultaneously children's own play initiatives should be supported and increased. Digital media is not yet able to replace living emotional contacts and relations with close people. Alarming symptoms are growing with fast increase of children's screen time.

WHY DO ADULTS SHOULD PLAY WITH CHILDREN?

Current research into children's play (Postman, 1982; Elkind, 1982; 2007; Frost, 2010) reveals that developed forms of imaginative play are disappearing and many children become involved in all kinds of highly structured, mechanical computer games from a very early age.

Bruce (2005) writes that the adult role is crucial in helping children to develop their play activities. In her

opinion “helping children to play requires the most sophisticated teaching strategies of all” (p. 3). She proposes very concrete play support strategies, which teachers should use when: (1) observing children’s play, (2) supporting and extending play, and (3) engaging in the play.

Joint play is a perfect possibility for mutual understanding, strengthening of relation and fun together.

Singer (1995) proposes that “parents can enhance their child’s development of imaginative skills through storytelling, reading, and even through floor play with them and also through toleration, indeed enjoyment, of the child’s pretend games” (p. 18).

Bondioli & Savio (2009) in their review of the latest research into children’s imaginative play, report that *researches provide evidence to the firm belief that play is an ecologically determined activity whose quality is strongly affected by contextual elements [...] Never is evolution to be expected; it does not depend only on maturation and it is highly affected by the circumstances [...] there is no evidence of a clear and precise correlation between symbolic play abilities and age; the development of pretend play and of the abilities related to it depends both on maturation’s aspects and mostly on favourable conditions – i.e. inner conditions of emotional confidence and external conditions such as: playing opportunities, suitable space, suitable time and suitable materials, possibility of sharing play with more expert acquainted peers, adults’ appreciation* (p. 12).

Bondioli & Savio (2009) propose that children’s make-believe play should be observed and assessed using appropriate tools and that teachers should intervene and train children to enhance their play abilities. A similar opinion is held by Bodrova & Leong (2007) and their Tools of Mind project, Mihailenko & Korotkova (2001) and others.

ACADEMIC LEARNING IN EARLY AGE – MORE DAMAGE THAN POSITIVE ASPECTS

There is a constant argument about the importance of play activity for child’s learning and development. Very often play is a tool to support young child’s academic learning in different areas. Research into early learning and development shows that when children are properly supported in their play, play does not prevent realistic learning but contributes to it (Fromberg & Bergen, 2015).

There is no doubt that the acquisition of certain cultural tools such as reading, writing, etc. is possible at quite an early age. We know there is a tendency to start formal education earlier and earlier. This does not eliminate the period of play or change its character. Mastery of reading and writing itself doesn’t lead the child to the system of human relations. Only role-play highlights and focuses on human relations, as this is the specific object of role-play activity (Bredikyte, 2011, p. 80). When we teach children reading, writing or other academic staff we do it during the time that otherwise would be used for play and communication. So, young children learn to read and write quite early but they don’t learn to play, to communicate and to self-regulate. According to Kudriavtsev (1997), childhood is a period of the development of human potentials, the basic possibilities for future development. With the help of appropriate educational guidance and support, a child masters the fundamentals of the creative potential of culture.

According to many authors (e. g. Fogel, 1993; Lobok, 1997; Hobson, 2004; Greenspan & Shanker, 2004; Fogel, King & Shanker, 2007) children are active participants in the cultural system from the very beginning. Their cultural life begins from the simple actions of creating elementary cultural forms (gaze,

smile, movements and sounds). By performing all these actions the child is starting the process of self-development: through creating the culture they are simultaneously creating themselves.

Corsaro (1997) proposes a new notion of interpretive reproduction, instead of the old term socialization, which traditionally meant adaptation and internalization. “The term interpretive captures the innovative and creative aspects of children’s participation in society. ... The term reproduction captures the idea that children are not simply internalizing society and culture, but are actively contributing to cultural production and change” (p. 18).

According to the reproductive view, children do not simply imitate or internalize the world around them, but they strive to make sense of the adult world and to participate in it. In doing this they come to collectively produce their own peer worlds and cultures.

Kudriavtsev & Nesterova (2006) also point out that the development of imagination before school is the only proper strategy supporting psychological readiness for school. He calls imagination “a bridge” that connects preschool and primary school education. His conclusions are made on the basis of a study of relationships between creative imagination and logical thinking in preschool children. The results of the study revealed the interdependence of imagination and thinking. Analysis of the results of the study yielded the following conclusions: (1) the better the pre-schoolers’ imagination, the easier they became involved in the training situations and into meaningful collaboration with an adult; and (2) poorly developed imagination made it difficult for the children to become involved in training situations and to build a constructive dialogue with an adult. This happened in spite of rather highly developed specific skills such as basic literacy and math.

Peter Grey (2015) in his article “*Early academic training produces long-term harm*” is writing that research reveals negative effects of academic preschools and kindergartens. He is pointing that the results from a number of well-controlled studies that compared the effects of academically oriented early education classrooms with the play-based classrooms revealed that early academic training increases children’s immediate scores on the specific tests that the training is aimed at, but these initial gains wash out or are even reverse within 1 to 3 years. In his opinion, early academic instruction can produce long-term harm, especially in the realms of social and emotional development.



Figure 1. Playing “The Journey to Good Fairy”:
Children are creating the journey map



Figure 2. Playing “The Journey to Good Fairy”:
Children are solving challenging problems



Figure 3. Playing “The Journey to Good Fairy”:
Children get some magical gifts (carpet, ring and glasses)



2. WHAT IS NARRATIVE PLAY?

PLAN:

- Short description of narrative play approach
- The history of NEPL in a nutshell: Kajaani and Vilnius play research laboratories
- What do children learn in narrative play?

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF NARRATIVE PLAY APPROACH

Narrative play is an imaginative, collaborative role-play activity where children jointly construct a storyline.

The **narrative play and learning approach** is based on the ideas from John Dewey (1933), Lev Vygotsky (1977, 1984, 1997, 2001, 2004), Aleksandr Zaporozhets (1986), Jerome Bruner (1986, 1996), Margaret Donaldson (1987, 1992), Michael Cole (1996), Kieran Egan (1986, 1988, 1991, 1997, 2005), Merlin Donald (1991, 2002), Gunilla Lindqvist (1995, 2001), Pentti Hakkarainen (2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2010), Pentti Hakkarainen & Milda Bredikyte (2011, 2013, 2014, 2015), Pentti Hakkarainen & Marja-Leena Vuorinen (2014), Pentti Hakkarainen & Beth Ferholt (2014), Milda Bredikyte, Pentti Hakkarainen, Kaisa Jakkula & Hilikka Muntter (2013) and many others.

The approach combines children's narratives, play, exploration and learning in a specific way in which all

the activities are embedded in the context of jointly constructed story line. It is contextual and collaborative endeavour. It requires genuine involvement and creativity from all participants both children and adults. An idea of "playworlds" developed by Lindqvist (1995), which is based on Vygotsky's (2004) analysis of children's creativity and imagination is behind the narrative play and learning approach.

According to Lindqvist (1995), a playworld is a conscious effort to create a "shared culture" or imaginary world, which "children and adults come to share when they interpret and dramatize the theme in the classroom" (p. 70). By taking different roles and enacting the dramatic events of a story, the participants become involved into the *perezhivanie* (emotional experiencing/living through) of common phenomenon. It moves adults 'inside' the play activity and puts them on a more equal position with the children. From a developmental point of view, this is a very challenging situation that requires genuine involvement and a high level of sensitivity and creativity from the participants.

"*Narrative play*" is a term introduced by Hakkarainen & Bredikyte (2010) and it could be defined as an imaginative social role-play activity where children jointly construct a storyline. We tend to call it *narrative*

play mainly following Bruner's idea of "narrative mind". At the bottom of narrative play activity is a collaborative construction of a "lived" narrative but not a dramatization of a known story. The chosen story only creates certain frame or context for narrative play but participants in play *improvise* and *re-create* the events. The most important thing is that it is *interpretative* activity, where *child's own point of view* is of greatest significance. Through play the child tries to formulate and express + enact his understanding of the events. Very often real-life events but also events from other stories that children like and know are incorporated in narrative playworld.

The main features of high level (mature) narrative play is the ability of the players to develop shared ideas and to construct a storyline together. We use the following criteria to define it. Such play is:

- social/collective in character (several participants);
- imaginative (based on productive imagination);
- creative (not stereotypical and repetitive);
- developing over time, lasting several months or longer (developed by individual children, a group of children or adults);
- challenging (demands action at the highest level of play skills);
- having a narrative structure (a storyline is constructed during play).

This type of play constitutes a motivating narrative, and its enactment provides exciting experiences that results in a new and deeper understanding of phenomena in children. Involvement in such creative play activity provides the opportunity for the child to experiment with different psychological states, social roles and human relationships.

THE HISTORY OF NEPL IN A NUTSHELL: KAJAANI AND VILNIUS PLAY RESEARCH LABORATORIES

NEPL approach was developed in the research laboratory of play “Silmu” in Finland and later elaborated at Play research laboratory in Vilnius, Lithuania. The research laboratory of play “Silmu” was established in Finland at Kajaani campus, University of Oulu in 2002-2010 as a setting for the development of creative forms of children’s play. The laboratory was created bearing in mind three main functions: (1) a creative play club for children and families, (2) a learning and research site for students, and (3) an experimental site for university researchers. Creative club activities for children were organized as a part of the obligatory university courses for teacher education students (future kindergarten and classroom teachers). After Kajaani campus was closed Play research laboratory moved to Lithuania and started activities in Vilnius, LUES in 2013.

WHAT DO CHILDREN LEARN IN NARRATIVE PLAY?

Bruner (1986) proposed that narrative is a universal mode of human language and a universal mode of thought. Nelson (1998, p. 346) defined narrative as a universal way of organizing memory and knowledge, a “general processing mechanism”. We define narrative as the smallest cell and a basic unit of human thinking – a unit of human thought (Bredikyte, 2011).

Narrative is the smallest cell and a basic unit, of our thinking – a unit of human thought.

According to Engel (1999): “A narrative is an account of experiences or events that are temporally sequenced and convey some meaning. A narrative can be of an imagined event or a lived every day event. But, unlike a story, which is told or communicated intentionally, a narrative can be embedded in a conversation or interaction and need not be experienced as a story by the speaker” (p. 19). It should not necessarily be expressed in a verbal form. We consider children’s play, drawings, and representational body movements as narratives because they provide insight into the development of abilities that will later yield full-blown adult-like stories. The most important thing we are looking for is the child’s personal view of the events, a personal sense or personal “theme” – the child’s *own authentic narrative voice*. This personal voice is used to build a personal history. At about 4 years of age a long-lasting narrative-based autobiographical memory system begins to emerge. “Narrative models and influences in early childhood help to transform the episodic memory system into a long-lasting autobiographical memory for significant events in one’s own life, and thus a self-history” (Nelson, 1998, p.181).

Children tell stories not only to represent experience as they know it to be, as they know others know it to be, but they also tell stories to represent experience as they would like it to be. Children use stories to understand their world, but also to invent and re-invent their world. The act of remaking your world,

the imaginative control over that world, is a vital component of human experience and one of the main aspects of imaginary play. In play children weave together real concerns (worry, care, duty, interest, etc.), real experiences and fantasy are used to convey what is important for them.

The main function of narrative play activity is to support the development of personal narrative voice and personal self in young children.

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Bruner and Lucariello (1989) argue that narrative language and narrative thought play a special role in integrating *affect, cognition* and *action*. They begin with the premise that early in life, action, feelings and knowledge are undifferentiated. Young children experience these aspects in a holistic way. Once children recast their experience into story form, they distance themselves from the experience. Narrative gives child a form for distancing themselves, for disentangling feelings, thoughts and actions (Bredikyte, 2011, p. 62).

Mature forms of imaginary play develop general abilities (learning potential) in children:

- general creativity (creative improvisation, symbolization, etc.);
- motivation;
- imagination;
- volition and self-regulation (executive function);
- understanding of the other person’s point of view;
- role-play orients children towards the universal meanings of human activity, relationships and towards the sense of life (El’konin, 1978; 1999a).

There is no doubt that the child can acquire certain academic skills more easily during play, but such learning should not be the main goal of play activity. In narrative play and learning approach joint creativity and improvisation is the central focus. Our goal is that the children move to more mature forms of play and take responsibility for organizing and developing their play activity. The participation of adults is an appropriate method for the co-construction of joint “playworlds”.

The *basic structure of a narrative form* and a *model of communication* are mastered at this stage by young children. We view the development of narrative thought in children as a necessary step towards formal thinking (concepts) and theoretical comprehension of life.

In narrative play the child is developing personal narrative voice and in this way constructing personal self and personal worldview.



Figure 4. Playing “Finding the Cat”: Children find cats’ footsteps, “broken window” and “blood drops”



Figure 5. Playing “Finding the Cat”: The cat is in the tree!



Figure 6. Playing “Finding the Cat”: You are our Susans’ cat.



3. STORY AS THE MAIN COMPONENT OF NARRATIVE PLAY

PLAN:

- Narrative form
- Construction of personal self
- Finding a suitable story

NARRATIVE FORM

Narrative in a form of a story or myth has been used for ages as is one of the most powerful and effective sustainers of cultures across the world. No wonder that the story form is culturally universal. It is a unit of particular kind: it has a beginning that sets up a conflict/expectation, a middle that complicates it, and an end that resolves it.

We believe that the narrative form supports children's "thinking" and "understanding" of the world and themselves, because: (a) its structure is very similar to the children's play; (b) the content of a really good story deals with universal concepts and values most of which are already familiar to children; (c) it is a piece of art and through triggering an aesthetic reaction it involves children in the process of emotional "perezhivanie" ("living through") of a particular content. This stimulates children's own attempts to express their experiences in creative play.

CONSTRUCTION OF PERSONAL SELF

Fairy tales are unique, not only as a form of literature, but as works of art which are fully comprehensible to the child, as no other form of art is. As with all great art, the fairy tale's deepest meaning will be different for each person, and different for the same person at various moments in his life. The child will extract different meaning from the same fairy tale, depending on his interests and needs of the moment. When given the chance, he will return to the same tale when he is ready to enlarge on old meanings, or replace them with new ones (Bettelheim 1982, p.12).

It is generally agreed that stories represent culturally accepted - "ideal" forms of behaviour. Traditional stories and myths do not directly reflect reality, but they express particular attitudes towards the world, particular cultural values.

For a very young child an adult personifies culture and "cultural" or "ideal" forms of behaviour. Small child has no access to cultural resources without an adult. Gradually, by introducing cultural stories the adult

acts as a mediator of culture for the child. In this way, the child obtains his own "independent" path to the world of culture and gets the opportunity to "compare" cultural forms of behaviour with those surrounding him in everyday life situations. Adult is not any more the only source of information for the child. At this point the child starts interpreting the world.

Different stories and narratives create a contradictory situation, which serves as the *starting point of own independent thinking* in children. The construction of child's *personal self* starts on the crossroads of at least three lines: (a) *subjective* - what I want to do; (b) everyday, "*realistic*" - how others (adults and peers) behave; and (c) cultural, "*ideal*" - how to behave correctly (morally).

And this is the point where STORIES and NARRATIVE PLAY meet as we believe that play is a way for a child to "test" their own ideas about the world and themselves and to solve the contradictions. In NEPL approach children are invited to do this collaboratively with peers and adults. The role of a good story is crucial.

A good, multi-layered text can provide a beginning point for developing different meanings and orientations in narrative play activity. Adults and children together “step into” the text and start to jointly create a shared imaginary playworld. An important character of texts used for this purpose is their dramatic quality and challenging plot. The text should be open to a wide range of interpretations. Usually, good texts are written for both adults and children.

FINDING A SUITABLE STORY

Choosing a suitable story for a longer narrative play period is not an easy task. No wonder, that sometimes the first trials fail. Don't worry, listen to children's ideas and keep searching for an appropriate story.

There are hundreds of good stories, how on earth one can choose the best one?

Some general hints...

The story should bring a spark in children's and in adults' eyes and it should resonate to some of the children's and adults' experiences.

The right story should hold children's interest. Not too simplistic but not too complicated. Children need to be able to understand the events and shape what happens next. They must be able to grasp the meaning and purpose of the ideas. If the story is too abstract it would be difficult for them to identify themselves with the events and the characters in the story.

A practical advice could be to think about own childhood memories: what tales or stories have been most impressive in your own childhood? What features of the story were so attractive: the characters or the storyline? Try to catch the charm of the tale or story. What was the message of the story? Remember classic fable “Ant and the grasshopper”. What was told and what was the hidden message?

Ask from the children, their families, what are their favourite books, heroes, characters and etc. Read once more old/traditional story books and some new ones...

What makes a GOOD STORY?

- *Fascinating theme.*
- *Exciting and contradicting ideas (moral dilemmas), both good and dangerous, expressing different values and viewpoints.*
- *A good story provides emotional involvement and motivation of the participants.*

Models of story building:

- *Cumulative model.*
- *Two world model.*
- *Journey model.*

Classical tales: Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs, Hansel and Grethel, Goldilock and Three Bears, Jack and the Beanstalk, Three Silly Goats and others.

And books of famous authors – Moomin books by T. Jansson; Shhh!.. (S. Grindley, P. Utton), Alice in wonderland (L. Carroll), Doctor Doolittle (H. Lofting), Chronicles of Narnia (C. S. Lewis), books by A. Lindgren (Pippi Longstocking, Ronia, the Robber's Daughter, Mio, My Son, The Brothers Lionheart, Karlson on the Roof) and others.

4. STARTING POINTS: NARRATIVE PLAY NEEDS SOME EXPERIENCES OF PRETENCE PLAY

PLAN:

- What kind of teacher is eligible for narrative play?
- What are the starting points of narrative play?
- How to cultivate “play capital” in the classroom?
- Physical environments

WHAT KIND OF TEACHER IS ELIGIBLE FOR NARRATIVE PLAY?

Does any teacher can try/apply narrative play approach in their classroom? The answer would be that most teachers can, no matter how old or young they are. The requirements for the teacher would be not their special artistic skills such as acting, performing etc., but rather their personal “philosophy” of childhood and personal “curriculum” that they implement in their classrooms working with children.

The teachers, who seek to develop independent, creative, self-regulating, social personalities. The teachers, who are open to unexpectedness, unclarity and are led by wonder in their work. The teachers, who see themselves as constant learners and are eager to learn together with their students.

We must admit, that it is not simple to play with children, participation in play requires:

- Learning the ‘language’ of play;
- Real involvement – “once accepted you really have to play, not just ‘pretend’ that you are playing...”;
- creative thinking, improvisational skills and the courage to explore new possibilities;

- Play with children is a challenge but also a pleasure!!!

Wonderful school psychologist Zuckerman (2007) described very precisely an adult position that could be characterized as sensitive, reflective and attentive:

For the adult, the task of constructing a meeting with the child on the territory of play, learning activity, or directly emotional or intimate-personal communication is always a new task, however experienced the adult may be in solving similar tasks. The task is new for the adult because he is seeking for the first time a method of adjusting his action to the action of this specific child in such a way that something new should arise at the place where the two actions meet (and as far as possible nothing should be destroyed) (p. 51).

In conclusion, all the teachers, who can identify themselves with some of the listed terms are eligible for narrative play:

Teachers eligible for narrative play activities (I):

- Open to curiosity, unexpectedness, unclarity, and wonder.
- Are sensitive, reflective and attentive to children’s and own needs.
- See themselves as constant learners.

Teachers eligible for narrative play activities (II):

- Practice story reading and storytelling.
- Value children’s play and believe in its power.

WHAT ARE THE STARTING POINTS OF NARRATIVE PLAY?

If you really want to start building narrative play environments in your classroom, storytelling and collaborative play activities should become most common. Children should play every day in small groups. At the beginning, this would be sociodramatic

play episodes where children choose to play family, shop, school, restaurant etc. But if the teacher now and then would join children's play "in role" and would play for some time together, this opens new possibilities for all the parties. Example of a situation where children are invited to practice how to play together in Appendix 1.

An adult playing with children acts as a model especially for younger children both in role-playing, in solving different situations, such as accepting new players, resolving conflicts, proposing new, unexpected solutions developing play activity. For the adults, important to "practice" playing with children because there is no other way to become good player. Which also means that the teacher develops better sensitivity and improvisational skills, acquires opportunities to get to know children better, to build closer relationships with them. In a longer run it develops in adult deeper understanding of children, their play and child development in general.

HOW TO CULTIVATE "PLAY CAPITAL" IN THE CLASSROOM?

Everyday play activities with different children and with adults (in peers, in small and bigger groups) allow children to move from elementary to more complex forms of play and to accumulate "play capital", which in turn enables them to construct long-lasting narrative play activities.

Cultivating "play capital" in/of children:

- *Adult "in role" joining children's play groups.*
- *Introducing new themes & topics*
- *Modeling different behavior models.*
- *Reading and telling stories to children.*

Developing collaborative play skills through organizing different types of play groups:

- *Peer play activities (2 children).*
- *Small group play activities (3-4 children).*
- *Bigger group play activities (4-5-7 children).*
- *Big group play activities (7-10 children & adults).*

To follow the development of children's play you can use different forms and checklists. For the evaluation of the level of play we use *The checklist for the evaluation of the level of play*, that you can find in Appendix 2 & 3.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS

There are many possible environments for play as play might happen or might be organised in various spaces. The most important criteria for play environment is the variety of different choices. For example, some loose parts available like pieces of furniture, boxes, sticks, blocks and etc. These pieces can be used for building safe "hidden" play spaces: houses, secret gates, ships, trains.

If the play is organised in a closed space, it is good to make use of all other smaller or bigger facilities and premises. Think about the corridors, attics, halls, cellar and other rooms where some traveling activities, secret paths, and treasure hunts might be organized. If possible, it is advisable to organise the play outside. Playing outside has its own advantages – there are trees, bushes and shrubs, holes and puddles. Playing outside there is always a bigger possibility for unexpectedness: some animals passing might become secret agents, some people – aliens and so on.

There is no use to spend much money on creating play environment. Children find fun in climbing trees, using furniture, pieces of textile, spare parts of building material, used boxes or sticks for their imaginative playworlds. If play things/props are very new, this might restrict children's ideas as they might be afraid to damage them. The used props are much better for play purposes. Children feel free to create, as they see that adults do not need these things anymore and it is safe to ruin/damage them.

To encourage children to take role it is useful that there are some robes in the environment to be used as role disguise. The most useful parts are pieces of textile to use as gowns, various caps, and hats to use for various professions, personalities, some ropes for tails or ties. The robes should be multifunctional – better to combine princess's dress from separate pieces of textile rather than have a single princess's dress.

It is important to build a "gate" or "portal" to the imaginative/magic world. This marks a border between two worlds: real and imaginative and creates certain safety for the children as they know how to leave magic world when they feel not comfortable there.

When you are already experienced in creating the environment for the narrative play, try to use some new and unexpected spaces. The play might happen in a playground, forest or a park, on a train or in a museum. Or if there is no suitable environment, you can always encourage children to play in their imagination, be creative!

After a narrative play day, you can leave some hints from the play environment for the children to explore freely. It might be some cloth elements, a building, a piece of wardrobe, any small and “special” thing. Things from the narrative play environment in the classroom will remind the children about the play and induce more related activity. And you will be able to observe, whether children play with these things and what new ideas are coming to their minds while playing.



Figure 7. Environments of children play: Outdoor kitchen.



Figure 8. Environments of children play: Repair shop of electrical equipment.



Figure 9. Environments of children play: The cafe.



5. ADULT'S ROLE IN NARRATIVE PLAY

PLAN:

- Why should teachers participate in children's play?
- The specifics of adult participation in narrative playworlds
- Forms of adult participation in narrative playworld
- Narrative play activities especially strengthen certain skills in adults
- Teachers opinions why it is important to play with children

WHY SHOULD TEACHERS PARTICIPATE IN CHILDREN'S PLAY?

There are several reasons why adults should play with children. One of the reasons is that observations in day care institutions and survey studies indicate that mature forms of play (high level play) are becoming increasingly infrequent.

Another very important reason is that play participation develops *exceptional ability of the teacher* - simultaneously to function on three levels: to be genuinely involved as a player with children and to observe the whole situation as if from the outside preserving position of a responsible adult and a professional teacher.

THE SPECIFICS OF ADULT PARTICIPATION IN NARRATIVE PLAYWORLDS

In general adults in NEPL take an active part in children's activities, and their roles are constantly changing from active organizing and guiding to observing, helping and supporting children's ideas. We defined adult roles and forms of interaction in the following way:

- Adults are organizers, creators, and mediators of cultural environments and model higher forms of behaviour for children.
- Adults actively play with children. Children and adults are co- creators of joint activities, co-players. Co-regulators
- Interactions between adults and children are dialogic and are of an improvisational character.

Hakkarainen (2010) has examined the specific pedagogical characteristics in playworlds for building a *narrative methodology* for developing children's play. The pedagogy of playworlds is framed through the telling or reading of a story and the children and the teacher work together to create the play. However, the play evolves through the introduction of new elements where the teacher and children elaborate the basic theme or plot, constructing scenes and enacting specific roles where they "agree jointly to imagined particular settings and props" (p. 210). Hakkarainen (2010) has recommended the following pedagogical principles showing the active positioning of the adult inside of children's play:

1. Children are invited to enter jointly created imaginary situations based on tales, stories and

children's fiction (ideal cultural forms), which serve as the basis of adult-child joint playworlds and child-initiated pretend play.

2. Themes are carefully selected to reflect basic human values and dichotomies as well as coincide with educational needs of the classroom and individual children.

3. The theme is brought alive with adults' participation and emotional involvement (in roles, dramatizations, storytelling etc.). Sense and significance of events and relations between characters should be emphasized and made as clear as possible (without directly telling everything!).

4. Dramatic collisions of tales and stories raise children's questions and are starting points of joint reflection (Why Kai became mean after getting a piece of mirror in his eye [Snow Queen]). Changing or adding dramatic events from other stories causes more collisions and helps in inventing dilemmas, which should be solved realistically before the story continue (Shipwreck stopped captain Hook's voyage and children are asked to help him building (planning) a new ship).

5. Creating environments and reserving time for child-initiated play is essential in the development of children's reflection on playworld events. Observation

of child-initiated play reflecting playworld events offers valuable hints about new turns or further elaboration of joint playworld themes' (p. 79).

FORMS OF ADULT PARTICIPATION IN NARRATIVE PLAYWORLD

Different forms of adult participation in narrative playworld:

1. *Adult "in role"* (character from the story) - create a story event (dramatic episode) approaching children (asking for help, advice) and challenging them.
2. *Adult not in role* (necessary) we call him "adventurer" or *play partner*. He is helping kids to cope with their feelings, and involvement into activity. Sometimes calming, sometimes motivating, helping to communicate with each other and with the characters in roles and etc.
3. Adult person outside the play – *observer*, who is documenting (video or written observations) play activities and give any kind of help that might be needed.

Adult "in role"

Creating character roles is a very important part of planning continuity in narrative play world. Adults "in roles" have very clear functions in narrative play. The overarching function of all role characters is to involve children into narrative play world events both emotionally and physically. To make children take sides, express their opinions and to start acting. Role characters always represent a set of human features, values and psychological characteristics that will interest the children and are important for them to explore (psychological function). Very often role characters "mirror" typical human characteristics and especially of young children, such as shy, breaking rules, trying the limits, troublemakers. Role



Figure 10. Characters: Preschool policeman.



Figure 11. Characters: Mrs Rosewood.



Figure 12. Characters: The Superball – very strict person; children met her before narrative play, to get used to adults in role.



Figure 13. Characters: White rabbit.



Figure 14. Characters: The Flower Lady



Figure 15. Characters: Judge Judy

character also has function of constructing storyline in the play through creating and resolving dramatic tensions/collisions.

Key elements of creating a play role in NEPL:

- Role signifiers:
- Context indicators: where this character belongs to (magic world, different planet)
- Non-verbal communication [clues]: gestures, face expressions, body movements, emotional involvement.
- Verbal communication [clues]: modifying voice, talking style, specific words.
- Attitude and feelings the character wishes to express: sad queen, who is searching for her disappeared daughter – princess;
- Background and the life story of the play-character.

All these elements must convey the intensions of the role character and to fulfil its main functions in the play world: to involve children into the events of the story and to create dramatic collisions and through them emotional relations towards characters and events. Role is a powerful educational tool for adults, which can be used to attain challenging educational goals. Role differs from neutral teacher position and its emotional potential can be used to motivate and stimulate children. Adult role character in joint play world loses teacher's authority and becomes children's pal. This opens new possibilities for contacts with children and children have in play more intimate relation to adults.

When creating a character role, adult must send a very clear message – “I am in role”. You can do this by using role signifiers – hats, costume details, other props that will let children know that you are in the role. You can modify your voice, talking style, and use specific language or words. Your gestures, face expressions, emotional involvement are very important. The role characters should be a little theatrical - possess exaggerated, grotesque, sometimes funny features. Still,

taking a role in narrative play is very different from acting in the theatre. You don't need special talents or giftedness here. Being in role means, that a person starts behaving according to different rules – not as himself but as someone else: as a mother, a doctor, a King, a Dragon, and etc.

Some examples:

The White Rabbit

- Role signifiers: a bit small outfit, has rabbit ears and white gloves.
- Context indicators: inhabitant of the Wonderland enters human world through the magic hole.
- Non-verbal communication: scared face expressions, scattered gestures and body movements, “high” emotions.
- Verbal communication: high pitch voice, speaks very quickly, repeats same things many times.
- Attitude and feelings the character wishes to express: worried, unsure, needs help and encouragement from the children, wants everybody to be friends.
- Acts as an informer/messenger between the Wonderland and the world.

The Pirate

- Role signifiers: high black hat, black beard, one eye is covered with black bandage, wears long dark cloak.
- Context indicators: inhabitant of the mysterious Forest, enters human world through the magic rock.
- Non-verbal communication: broad gestures, angry face expressions, sharp body movements.
- Verbal communication [clues]: loud, intensive and confident voice, specific “pirate” vocabulary.
- Attitude and feelings the character wishes to express: easily irritable, badly tempered, has stolen the cat and did not want to give it back and is ready to fight for it.
- Background and the life story of the play-character: has a very complicated and “dark” life story that he wants to hide.

Adult as play partner or “adventurer”

Adult as play partner is a necessary form of adult participation in narrative adventure. Children should never be left alone when moving to a “magic world”! Familiar and close adults must always be with them. During the first narrative adventures classroom teacher or several teachers, who know children well and have close relationship with them, become play partners (as adventurer in play world) and participate in all adventures together with the children. They help children to follow the events, to communicate with role characters and with each other. Their function might be to calm or to encourage children, to rise their motivation, to inspire creative ideas but most important, to be emotionally involved with them. Adults as play partners provide emotional safety in different play situations - they help children to cope with their feelings and emotions. At the same time, they are able to follow children's reactions to play events and to “signal” the role characters (adults in-roles) about what is happening among children.

Adult's roles in NEPL:

Organizer
Mediator
Model
Observer
Supporter
Helper

Adult adventurer supports children's play, comments and observes. His tasks may include:

- helps understanding of play events;
 - asks questions and explanations;
 - encourages children to comment and express their opinion;
 - helps in self-regulation and emotional expressions.
- Adult questions in play situation have to be in play

frame. Direct questions expressing adult authority effectively destroy any play.

Adults as adventures still are adult educators. An essential part of their work except following children's reactions to play events is to raise essential moral problems, which push children to think what is their relation towards play events. They might raise the question: "What is the problem of Troll? Why he behaves like that? How can we help him? (The story "Three Billy Goats"). The question can be addressed to some individual child or the whole child group depending on educational goal setting of the playworld. Often group discussion on the character of problem is fruitful for individual children. This kind of discussions also can reveal topics for the next adventures and involve children in playworld planning.

Adult as an observer

Adult as an observer is a very important form of adult participation in a narrative play adventure. The main function of the observer is to document everything what is happening and what might be relevant to the playworld.

Observation has to be focusing on children's play initiatives. Observation is sometimes divided into two stages: 1) preliminary "free" play observation before selecting the theme of play world, and 2) observation during play world activities.

It is important to use writing tools or video recording in observations in order to be able to remember and reflect observed events in adult teams. The following phenomena have been the focus of observation and planning at "free" play stage;

- what kind of discussions children have about people and human relations;
- social relations between children (friendship, teasing, bullying);

- children's play initiatives; play level, reactions and discussions;
- play participation of individual children and the whole group;
- involvement and sense making of individual children (emotional reactions, concentration, contemplation).

On the basis of observations lasting for three months individual goals and educational goals of the whole group are formulated. A preliminary theme of play world theme is also selected.

More about observation is in the chapter 9.

NARRATIVE PLAY ACTIVITIES ESPECIALLY STRENGTHEN CERTAIN SKILLS IN ADULTS

The teachers who are participating in children's play on a regular basis develop certain professional skills and gain deeper knowledge of young children that could not be developed otherwise.

Playfulness and improvisational skills: unconventionality, yield to unfamiliar worlds, openness to new visions, curiosity to new experiences, tolerance toward insecurity, accepting other's point of view, listening to others, elaborating told and observed information.

Ability to visualize and future orientation: transforming tales and pictures into live interactive processes, imaginative abilities e.g. how to construct a cloning machine, how it feels to be a real pirate or in the castle of the Queen of Hearts.

Ability to work in teams: coordination of adult team role activities (characters in role, helper of children, adventurer) and supporting other adults for attaining educational goals of narrative play. Ability to facilitate warm, constructive, and reflective discussions with children and adults (team).

TEACHERS OPINIONS WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO PLAY WITH CHILDREN:

- You start to know the children better and children also get to know you better. You start to see them more accurately. You develop some empathy, you get to see emotions and intentions, you start to hear them. Playing with children helps to understand their ideas, their thinking and their world better.
- Through play you can build a relationship with a child more easily. Nothing works as good as play! Play – is the way to get to know each other.
- Children like adults who play with them; they view them as friends.
- It is amazing how easily an adult in role can influence a child's behaviour!
- If children are deeply involved in play, they can concentrate well for a long time.
- If play is motivating, children can learn many things that are necessary for the activity.

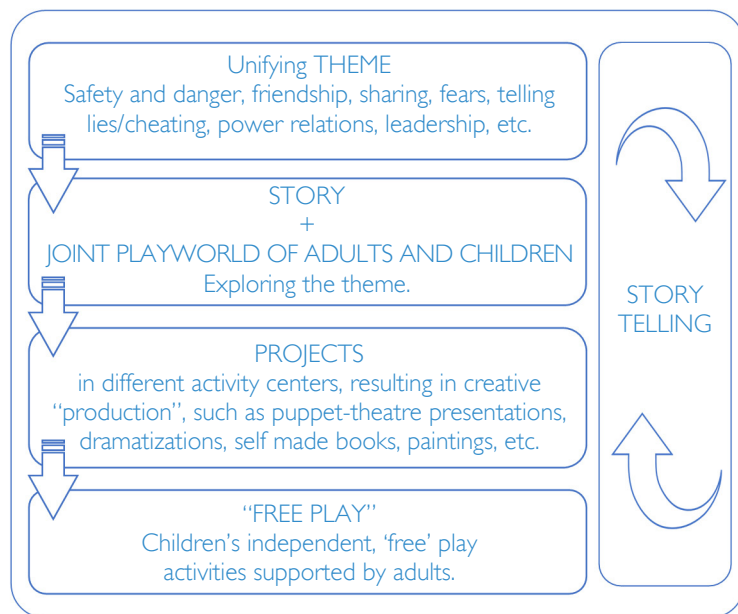
6. FRAMEWORK FOR NARRATIVE PLAY

PLAN:

- General planning frame
- Main steps of implementation of a narrative play project

The following general planning scheme has been used in our play projects with children.

GENERAL PLANNING FRAME



Unifying theme – children's interests are revealed in their (play) behaviour and activities. The selection of a theme is based on observations. General themes introducing basic human values are planned during the year. The closest themes for young children are usually: safety and danger, helping and friendship, coping with fears, cheating or telling the truth, breaking the rules, fighting for leadership, etc. One quite concrete aspect of the theme is the so-called "hot topic", which is revealed when observing children and their play activities, listening to their conversations and comments, talking with parents.

When a topic is clear an appropriate *story* is chosen or created. With the first intervention with new children it is convenient to start from some known children's story. We often use animal folk tales with small children as a starting point. When reading books to the children or telling stories we try to find out which story or character they like most.

In our experimental site, traditional folk tales such as "Turnip", "Jack and the Beanstalk", and "The Mitten" were used. "Winnie the Pooh" and "Kalevala" projects have also been successful.

Story is used as a tool of "opening" and clarifying the theme. Stories are used for raising questions and aggravating contradictions. There is always a dramatic collision in a good story, some exciting events to which children respond. Story works as an integrating tool: story form creates a frame, a "world", a context and a background for the events.

A well-chosen story provides emotional involvement and motivation. A motivating story helps children safely explore some of their most painful experiences and provides safety because the child is constructing the story on the edge, as "dangerous" or "frightening", as far as they are able to deal with it.

Projects are in different activity centres that clarify and explore specific aspects of the selected theme. After story presentation children are free to choose what they want to play; the choices are presented to them at the end of the morning

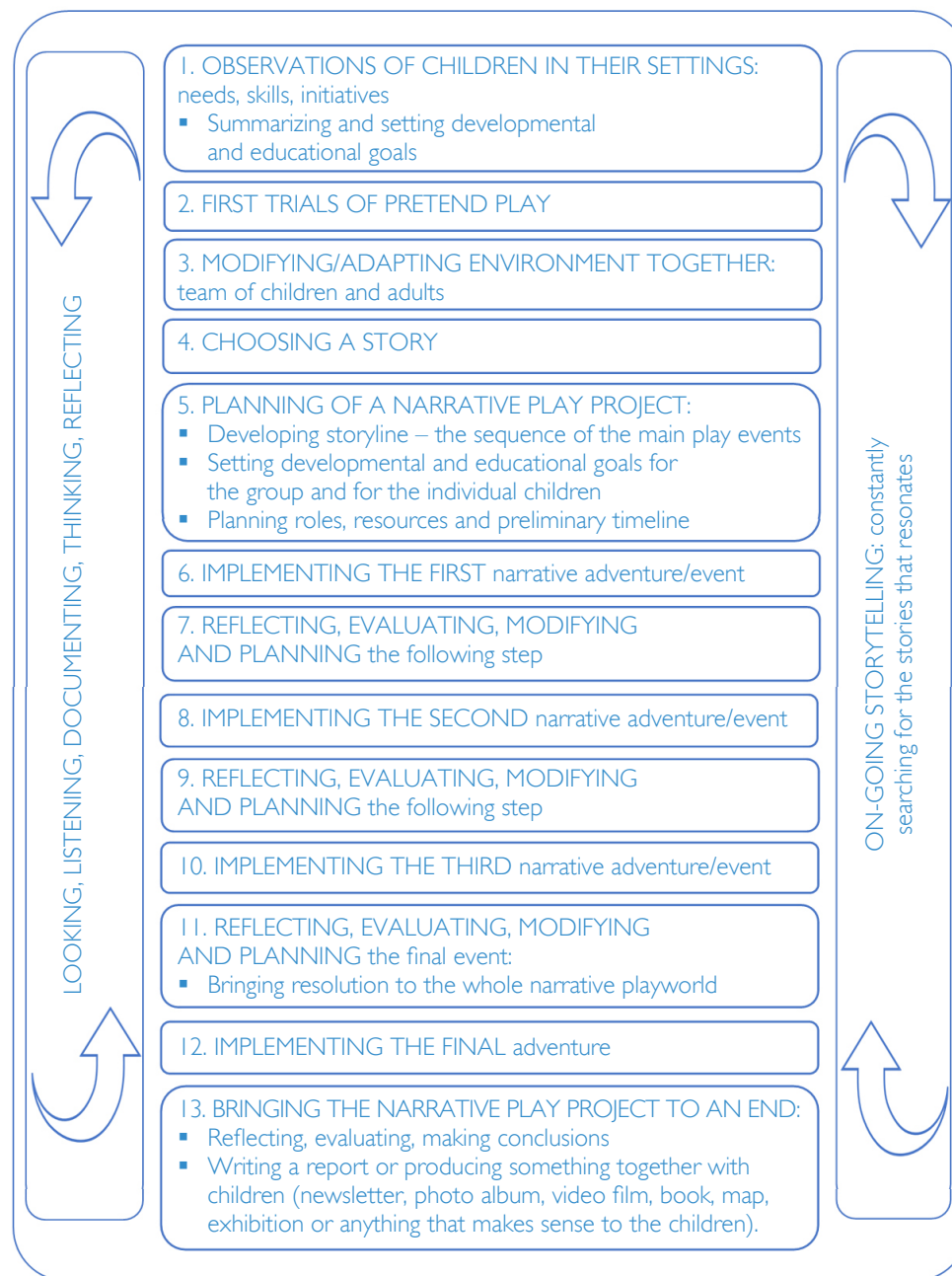
circle and once more after story presentation. Children can freely choose between their own ideas and projects in different centres. Sometimes they are activities, sometimes ideas and at other times, just centres.

The idea of initiated and supported activities is to propose activities for the children by introducing new materials, new tasks, developing particular skills or supporting children's own ideas. Our observations over five years demonstrate that children's activities develop along three main lines: reflection of a presented story in different activities, developing a long-lasting play activity (formula play, Castle play, Dragon's play, Princess play, etc.), practicing skills such as gross motor by climbing, jumping, swinging, etc. Children's ideas and narratives revealed in independent play activities are used to develop future story presentations.

Independent, free play – Children develop the theme further and new sub- themes emerge. Child's independent play activity is a space for self-development, their growth, creativity and learning. The child's "problems" are best revealed in independent play. Observing children in free play the teacher can see how children apply the knowledge and skills they were aiming at. Children need to have enough time and space for their independent activities. Our goal is to keep a balance between adult and child initiated activities. The general expectation is that child initiated activities and especially independent play activities should increase.

Here are the main sequential steps of implementation of a narrative play project:

MAIN STEPS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF A NARRATIVE PLAY PROJECT



OBSERVATIONS OF THE CHILDREN IN THEIR SETTINGS: NEEDS, SKILLS, INITIATIVES

On-going observation and documentation is a “must” activity for the successful narrative playworld. Observations allow you to know children and their skills, be aware of their needs and notice their initiatives. Write down your observations, videotape the activities. Share and discuss together with a team. All this work helps the educational team to set the goals for the narrative playworld project.

Questions for your thinking: What is the atmosphere of the group? How do the children feel? How children interact with each other, how do they treat each other? How do the children relate with the adults? What dilemmas appear in their everyday and group life, what are the individual and group's values?

What do the children like to do? What are their play skills, play experiences, play topics, and play initiatives? Who are the friends in the group and like to play together? What is the setting, what toys and props they use?

What are the developmental and educational needs of the individual children, and of the group?

More ways and methods how to observe children is in the chapter 9.

FIRST TRIALS OF PRETEND PLAY

Before starting the real and “big” narrative play project you should practice role-play on a regular basis in your classroom. You can also organize one time narrative play episodes taking character roles, creating imaginary situations and entering magic world. Observe children and situations, write down your observations, reflect and discuss with your team.

More about first trials of narrative play in the chapter 4 & 7.

MODIFYING/ADAPTING ENVIRONMENT TOGETHER WITH CHILDREN AND ADULTS (TEAM)

After the first trials of the narrative play episodes and discussions with the team and the children you probably will want to modify and adapt the environment, resources, and the themes of the play. Act according to your observations, your own and other team members' feelings, and feelings of children. Don't hesitate to use new spaces and environments: school hall, corridors, outdoor spaces, forest, garden, attic or cellar and etc. Invite volunteers (students, parents, other teachers) to come and join your narrative play adventure.

CHOOSING THE STORY

First narrative playworlds usually start from some exciting story that children and teachers like. This is not a necessary requirement but a good story always creates a wider context, the whole world that is attractive to the children. If after reading or telling a story you notice that: (a) children keep taking about it, they keep asking to read or tell it once more, (b) they play certain episodes from the story during their free play activity. If this happens that might be the sign that you have a right story and it is time to start narrative play.

Sometimes, after first trials children start exploring known stories on their own...

An example of children exploring a traditional fairy-tale Goldilocks. *After reading a story about the Goldilocks, the children wanted to play the story. Some boy asked, if a boy could be a Goldilocks? Children decided that probably yes. Because the players were all boys, they decided to have three papa bears and a boy as a Goldilocks. All boys wanted to try Goldilocks role. It was real fun for them to try the role. Then other boys also wanted to be the Goldilocks, because it was the most fun role in the story. They also found out that they can pretend to be a girl or a boy in play. During the play, they decided that the Goldilocks behaviour was wrong*

– she came to someone's house without an invitation! Then there was a continuation of the story. Children asked the Goldilocks' mother to tell her how she should behave.

As the story does not coincide with the children's values (go into other people's houses only when invited), they have to find out the solution for the moral dilemma themselves. And this is one of the goals of the narrative play – to encourage children to transform cultural stories and reveal their views of the problems and propose their solutions.

More about how to choose an appropriate story and a list of good stories is in chapter 3.

PLANNING OF A NARRATIVE PLAY PROJECT

Developing storyline. Narrative playworld is not a dramatization of a chosen story. Story serves as a frame and an inspiration for you play. The participants should *improvise* and *create* their own events as they wish. When planning narrative play you should chart only *the chain of main events* – blueprint of the future play. This chain of events is what reveals the main message/idea of your narrative playworld. But even you have this initial chain of events, this is never the final version, all events could be changed depending on the flow of improvised play.

Joint play in narrative playworld at its best can go on several months and planning the continuity is a challenge. Children can be involved to indirect planning of continuity when adult role characters invite children to it after the joint adventures. Narrative playworld adventures are not limited to one story. Several stories and storylines can be integrated in a playworld depending on children's initiatives and educational goals.

One more very important step in planning stage is to come up with a good idea for the start of the whole adventure.



Figure 16. Good ideas to begin with: Magic door to enter other world

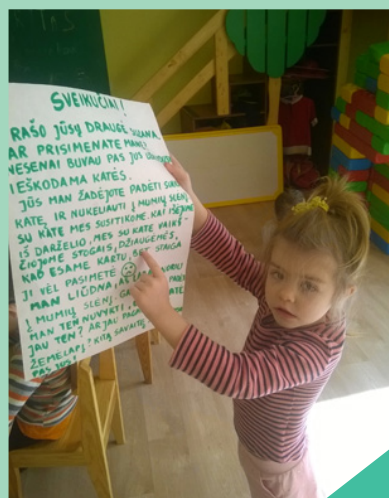


Figure 17. Good ideas to begin with: We got a letter!

Some ideas for a good start: you get a letter or a phone call from a stranger; a guest comes to the classroom; a secret plan or very strange drawing appears; a passage to the unknown, possibly magic world is found, etc. Involve the whole team and pick ideas from the kids!

Setting developmental and educational goals for the group and for the individual children.

We use one very simple planning form that you can find in Appendix 4 & 5

Planning roles, resources and time. With your team you have to decide, who is taking the active role, who is going to be the play partner of the kids, who will help if the situation seems uncontrollable and needs some help. More on the adult's roles read in the X chapter.

Assigning time for play. Children must have time for play on a regular day-to-day basis. Play should be regarded as equally important learning activity for young children. When you decide to start the narrative play sessions, you should choose the weekday and time for that. Children must know when is the DAY. And you should keep to your plan! It is advisable to have a 1.5 - 2.5 hours' time for the narrative play. It could be organized once in a week or once in two weeks. You should also plan the time for children's free play during the week, as the most important goal of the narrative play is to encourage children's own free narrative play. It also advisable to read the stories with kids one or two days before the organised narrative play. The suggested arrangement could be as follows: you read the story you want to introduce, next day you listen, observe children's play and plan the play incorporating children's ideas. In a day or two you organise the narrative adventure.

IMPLEMENTING THE NARRATIVE PLAY PROJECT

When you are ready, just START! For the first event, it is important to plan one short event, that would capture attention and raise a surprise, interest, and raise questions. The most important thing to remember during the play – you are responsible only for the main event that you planned together with a team and then leave space for the children to react, to explore and to ask questions. The good thing about narrative play is that there are no mistakes! Of course, you will find yourself in the situations, where you will not know what to choose or what to propose and then, just ask the children. You will be surprised what ideas and solutions they will propose!

It takes practice before you feel free incorporate children's ideas on the spot and not be afraid to change the initial plan, but the more you play, the more comfortable you will feel in such unpredictable situations.

REFLECTING, EVALUATING, MODIFYING AND PLANNING THE FOLLOWING STEP

Discuss with the children. After the narrative play day children will probably want to discuss, what happened. Make an opportunity for them to discuss it together with you, ask questions and listen to their stories. We often use drawing activities as a form of reflection. Children might draw a big drawing together or in few small groups. Do not be surprised to hear as many different stories as there were children involved in the play. Try to figure out what captured their attention the most and what are their expectations from the adventures to follow? You need all their ideas for the evaluation and further planning of further play events. *Discuss and evaluate with a team.* Evaluation should go hand in hand with you planning and arrangements. It is important to evaluate what you planned and how it really went. The narrative play activities proceed

in a spiral format: observation, reflection, planning, implementation of narrative play activities, observation, evaluation, reflection, planning and so on. These steps are all very important and interconnected through all the process.

IMPLEMENTING THE FINAL ADVENTURE

The final adventure of the narrative play project is always a result of joint creativity and often is quite unexpected.

BRINGING THE NARRATIVE PLAY PROJECT TO AN END: REFLECTING, EVALUATING MAKING CONCLUSIONS:

writing a report or producing something together with children (newsletter, photo album, video film, book, map, exhibition or anything that makes sense to the children).

It is up to the teachers and children what they will “produce” alongside or after the play project. This “product” must be a natural outcome signifying the project. Is it necessary? We believe it is important to have in the classroom certain props, play things, signs or symbols reminding for the children a certain play project. All these objects concentrate the essence of the project and they become like symbols of certain projects/stories. When using them children bring also the stories that they represent into new play projects. In this way, their play context become richer, deeper and preserving very special emotional memories for each child.



7. PUTTING NARRATIVE PLAY IN PRACTICE

PLAN:

- First trials of play in small groups
- A “strange character” visiting the classroom
- Importance of the children’s ideas

FIRST TRIALS OF PLAY IN SMALL GROUPS

As already mentioned in the chapter 4, children and adults need to practice playing together in small and bigger groups on a regular basis before they start to know each other as players. In Finnish day care classrooms teachers practice the principle that everybody plays with everybody and no one could be excluded from play. In practice, this means that children are rotating from one small group to another, staying each week in a different group. During the week group activities are carried out in this small group including play. In this way children have opportunities to play with every child from the class and to build closer relationships between themselves. Adult is always observing carefully children’s play and ready to help individual children when that help is needed. Adult help and participation is very important during initial stages of play, usually it is at the beginning of the school year.

You can try many times with one day narrative play episodes before you decide to plan a longer project. This is a good preparation for teachers and kids – taking small roles, imaginary situations - and a bit of acting before the narrative play. Before you decide what story you want to use for narrative play try to introduce

some ideas or characters from several stories into children’s free play. Try *only one event* or idea at a time, don’t hurry, let children react, express their emotions and opinions. Be sensitive and attentive to children’s reactions, emotions and ideas. After the play session write down immediately your comments of what happened during play. During the following days listen to children’s discussions, observe their play and other activities, collect their ideas. All these observations are needed for planning and constructing following step of narrative play.

A “STRANGE CHARACTER” VISITING THE CLASSROOM

The first trial does not have to be an event from the future narrative adventure based on a chosen story. You might just introduce a character from the story, for example a “doctor” (teacher in role) coming to the classroom to do health check. This “doctor” is a bit strange and some interesting or funny things happen while he is in the classroom and his health check is real fun for children.

At this stage, it is important to see how children react to a stranger - a character in their classroom. What are their emotions, how they behave, do they participate in

proposed activities and etc. Adults plan this first visit and try to carry out at least the main planned activities (to measure children’s height and weight and to give them prescriptions for healthy and happy life). Still all interactions with children are improvised and are free.

After the character leaves teacher should reflect with children what happened and how they feel and think about the visitor. BUT... ALWAYS before leaving the character should say or do something that allow you later to continue and connect new events with this first visit of a character. For example, the “doctor” forgets his spectacles or bag or some instruments that children might use in their play. But also, they might want to give those things back to the doctor and they need to contact him in some way... You might want to write a message to the doctor, but if you don’t have his address, what can you do? Teacher should turn all these questions to the children and just listen to their proposals and ideas! This is how children become very much involved into further planning of a narrative playworld.

IMPORTANCE OF THE CHILDREN’S IDEAS

It is very important to include children’s ideas to the plan. You may get too many ideas at once and this will



Figure 18. A visit of doctor Šmyšė and her assistant

need to be managed. Which ideas to choose? How much of children's ideas do we follow? How much do the teachers lead? How to balance between all the ideas? Children's ideas do not need to be used straight away during the play. Ideas can be developed later when it is a more appropriate time.

The teacher (together with the team) needs to assess how many children have shared similar ideas and choose those, that have the most potential for the play. Not all children's ideas are relevant and could be used but they reveal/show the direction of their interests and this is important for planning. At this point the question might arise, what is more important for narrative play: original story events, or children's interpretations of the events? Certainly, children's ideas are more important! The whole idea of narrative play approach is that the original story creates the context but participants develop and interpret the events of the story. In this way, they create a new version of the story and this becomes THEIR STORY.

After each play session, the whole team of teachers working in the group should sit down to share their observations and reflections and to discuss children's ideas that they were able to capture. Here video recording is of tremendous help. We advise to record at least organized narrative play sessions. At this point we want to stress, that narrative playworld requires team working from all adults available. If there is only one teacher working in the classroom, volunteer participation of parents, students or other day care staff is highly recommended. All these adults are needed during planning stage but even more during narrative play activity. All adults planning together, have a common understanding of the plot of the play. This can allow them to be spontaneous within a discussed framework.

Recommended adult team is at least 2-3 people: *Adult "in role"* (character from the story) - create a story event (dramatic episode) approaching children (asking for help, advice) and challenging them.

Adult not in role (necessary) we call him "adventurer" or *play partner*. He is helping kids to cope with their feelings, and involvement into activity. Sometimes calming, sometimes motivating, helping to communicate with each other and with the characters in roles and etc.

Adult person outside the play – *observer*, who is documenting (video or written observations) play activities and give any kind of help that might be needed.

Balance between child led and adult led play.

IMPROVISED DIALOGIC INTERACTIONS

PLAY IS CONSTANT IMPROVISATION!

A set of guidelines for improvisation:

- *No denial (yes, and...);*
- *Don't write script in your head (no advanced planning);*
- *Listen to the group mind (don't try to be funny or clever yourself, but listen to others and work to further the evolving group mind).*
- *Trying to stay in the improvisational zone, which is between complete predictability and going too far.*

8. IMPLEMENTING A NARRATIVE ADVENTURE: DO NOT EXPECT EVERYTHING TO GO SMOOTHLY

Even experienced teachers who use narrative approach for a longer period will tell you that it doesn't go smoothly every time. Various unexpected and even difficult situations can happen. Here you will find some of the typical situations that might happen when you start narrative play and give some specific or general recommendations, what to do.

Some general advice from the experienced adults. Take your time and do not hurry. The play is not a race. Take time for planning, observations, thinking and rethinking, your feelings and their reflections, discussions with your team, and evaluations. Every participant who takes part in the narrative play should feel comfortable in their roles, in their preparations and chosen activities. Start from small steps and just one step at a time. Play when you are ready not when you "have to". Remember, it must be FUN for the teacher too!

When the teacher "in-role" comes to the classroom for the first time. Children might react quite strongly emotionally. They need time to understand and to accept the rules of this new activity. Still some children might be over excited and some children can be even

scared. What to do? If you see that the role causes too strong emotions in children and there are not enough adults to help the individual children to cope with the emotions, you should take a break. You can modify and adapt the plans according to the situation. But be attentive, sometimes you should immediately change your plan, use some "magical powers", and leave to safe and comfortable place. Make sure that the children get enough explanations and possibilities to talk and express their feelings after this. Use your imagination!

If the adult in the role is too stressed for some reason, this will not work. You should be ready to reflect your feelings and try to understand them. Talk about your feelings with the team. Are you stressed of being in role? Do you feel this role is not for you or you feel that you are not capable of being in role? Practice mindfulness. Be aware of your feelings and physiological reactions – they will help you to understand, what is going on. It will help you to anticipate, what is going to happen – follow it, trust your gut J It also comes with practice, time and patience. Take it slowly and easy. Children are sensitive and will feel your stress and being not in your place/not in your shoes.

Be ready to change the plan according to your feelings, children's ideas and situations. If you feel you should stop just stop. Nobody from outside could say what to do. Sometimes you just don't know how to solve the situation and then you need break, use your "magical powers" and move to different activities.

When it seems that it is too difficult to pick the ideas and to follow the play. Be aware that children's ideas may not come out during the play but at other times in between the sessions. Listen to these and find a way to record them. Some children may not share their thoughts or ideas verbally but this may be seen in their free play. Teachers need to be aware of this too. Listening to children's ideas and teachers acting as facilitators to make that happen. Allowing the children to feel that they have influence on the story and the group – building their self-esteem. Adults also can say "no" to the children when their ideas or behaviour are not appropriate.

How to respond to very different reactions of children. Always respond to children's reactions and responses, not to your initial ideas. Move step by step, do not push your ideas and plans forward. Wait if children

will accept them. The main rule – follow the child. Sometimes your ideas will not be accepted. That is ok. You can always change the plan and try not to be disappointed by that.

Don't be upset by children's reactions to play situations. Children react genuinely, there are no good or bad reactions. If you do not like it – think about the meaning of those reactions and how to respond to them.

Kids are different. Some like to stay out of play and to observe for a longer time, physically staying in the play, but not taking roles and not acting, just observing. Do not push – let them be. After some time, when they feel comfortable, they will join. Others like to take the most important roles or the most dangerous and etc. You should provide choices for every child. Leave the possibilities open, you never know when the child will dare to take the challenge.

Be open, if a child tells, that he/she will be a cat, don't say: "there are no cats in this story" – better to change the story and include the cats. This is kid's play. All should feel included: create roles for everyone and especially for special kids (we are having in mind children with special needs).

Experience and confidence comes with time and practice. At the beginning, you might feel that you are too involved too overexcited, that you are not able to see and hear all kids and to respond to their needs. But the more you play the better you will be. You should seek the state when being in role at the same time you are able to grasp the whole situation and monitor it without "dropping" your role.

Don't overreact, don't try to be too theatrical! Have fun, be playful and try to involve children. Start your participation from simple roles of a helper, the "adventurer" and later try more central roles. Observe each other (in the team) and learn from each other. Prepare your roles together in a team, when planning main events also plan important interactions between the characters and other adults.

When there are some doubts – to play with kids or not to play. Playing in adulthood may bring some issues from your childhood. It is not easy to overcome them; lots of adults have negative experiences of play from the childhood. Some of the adults were good players and it is easy to play for them. Some never played and they should start from the beginning. Others have traumas (were not accepted, etc.). Reflect on your experiences.

We can keep repeating that play is important, but nothing will change till you try it. Participating in play you start to understand the emotional side of it, the meaning, the importance of play for the child. If to think of kid's emotions they are even stronger, more intense during the play. The play is experienced differently by children and adults. Without experiencing play, you cannot understand what play means for kids. If you become involved in a play truly, you understand it more deeply. Only playing together you share the experiences. Play helps to create relation with a kid. They react very differently to adults who play together with them.

You learn to play only through playing. Take small steps. You will learn little by little, it will become easier with each step. Do not try too hard or too easy. Playing with a group of children is always challenging enterprise but gradually you will start experiencing satisfaction from finding creative solutions, flexibly resolving critical situations, incorporating craziest ideas flowing from the children's and your own minds. Joint play is about reaching a state of *creative flow*. When you reach such state, you would feel totally immersed in the activity. In this state, you start constructing narrative events as if from "inside" the play activity and most of your proposals would be to the point!

The overarching goal of the narrative playworld. Narrative play in joint play world is educational tool aiming at child-initiated "free" play and child development. Adult introduced narratives and constructed play worlds offer joint exciting play experience to all children (common exciting themes for all children often are lacking and this why creative play of several children seldom can be seen), which might lead to children's growing initiatives in play. (There are examples in which play world adventure in educational institution has launched yard play in the neighbourhood initiated by children participating in the play world adventure. Yard play continued in some cases over half a year after the end of play world adventure. Information about the yard play came from parents complaining that children forgot regular meal times and come late to home at evenings. Parents wanted to know "What are you doing with our children in preschool?" "Who is Rumpelstiltskin?"). Not all play worlds stimulate child-initiated yard play or play during breaks. Careful child observations and selection of challenging play themes (dealing with genuine human values) are preconditions of success.



Figure 19. Playing "The Meeting of Wizards":
Children get a letter from the world of wizards



Figure 20. Playing "The Meeting of Wizards":
Two wizards are cooking magic mixture



Figure 21. Playing "The Meeting of Wizards":
Children ask the wizard to give them calming pills



9. OBSERVATION AND DOCUMENTATION

PLAN:

- What to observe?
- How to collect observational data?

WHAT TO OBSERVE?

The very initial steps to building narrative play activities is observation of children, and their activities. Usually teachers do observations of children in their classroom. They must evaluate where their children are developmentally before setting up goals for their development and learning. In addition to these observational goals we focus our observations specifically on children's play initiatives. Our goal is to figure out what are the topics of children's play, what are the play skills of individual children, what are their favourite play props, play areas, play friends etc. It is equally important to observe the atmosphere in the group. To observe the interactions of the children, how they talk to each other, how they treat each other, do they help others, what are the power relations in the group, what kind of temperaments there are in the group, what "cultural practices" are prevailing in the group (certain toys, media, games, topics and other), is there teasing? The atmosphere is also influenced by the habits, values and experiences different children have had about life e.g. from the parents, relatives, previous adults in day care.

HOW TO COLLECT OBSERVATIONAL DATA?

Every day teacher makes short written records of children's play behaviour and these records are the first

and the most important source for the planning of narrative play activities. We also recommend making video records of children's play activities if this is possible in your classroom. Video records are the perfect data for later observations with your staff/team when you plan further activities with children. Short video episodes could also be viewed together with kids to recall some reflections of the important play events. When you have done some part of the observations and you have written them down, it is important to think and discuss them with your team. That is a good possibility to find out what other team members saw, how they interpret the same situations, what else they have noticed, what can be useful in narrative play. If you are not used to write observations you need some practice before you become good in doing this. The following quotation provides an answer why and how do we need to observe children:

Children communicate with us through their eyes, the quality of their voices, their body postures, their gestures, their mannerisms, their smiles, their jumping up and down, their listlessness. They show us, by the way they do things as well as by what they do, what is going on inside them. When we have come to see children's behaviour through the eyes of its meaning to them, from the inside out, we shall be well on our way to understanding them. Recording their various ways of

communicating helps us to see them as they are (Cohen et al, 1997, p.6).

Children's diaries. You can also encourage the children to write their own diaries about the play. It might be anything – paintings, drawings, writings about the play or the story, expressions in colours or forms after the narrative play. Every child can have their own book of the narrative play, where they write themselves their impressions. They can take their diaries home and reflect together with their family. Putting down their impressions encourages children to be more attentive, to notice important things. It also helps them to become the narrative tellers themselves. Very important to leave the freedom to create the diary as the child wants, not "as everybody does". Children should express themselves freely, as the painting and storytelling is also a part of narrative play.

We propose a very general form - A framework for recording child's activity, that you can find in Appendix 6.

To learn more about how to observe and record the behaviour of young children you should look at the reading list at the end of the guidelines.



10. THE ROOTS OF PLAY ARE DEEP IN HUMAN NATURE

PLAN:

- Multiple definitions for play confuse us
- Play helps children to make sense of the emotions, of the world

MULTIPLE DEFINITIONS FOR PLAY CONFUSE US

“Play criteria” proposed by Krasnor & Pepler (1980): *enjoyment, flexibility and pretence. Intrinsic motivation* among the criteria, that is singled out by most of play researchers but it is a tricky criteria as careful observations of young children allow us to suggest, that any self-chosen activity carried out by a child for a longer period is always intrinsically motivated.

Play has five essential characteristics. It is intrinsically motivated, freely chosen, pleasurable, non-literal, and actively engaged in by participants (Hughes, 1999, p. 25).

Play is the highest level of child development. It is the spontaneous expression of thought and feeling, and an expression which his inner life requires....It promotes enjoyment, satisfaction, serenity, and constitutes the source of all that can benefit the child...At this age play is never trivial; it is serious and deeply significant (Froebel in Lilley 1967, p. 84).

This links with the thinking of Vygotsky who proposes that:

In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all the developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102).

Child therapist Violet Oaklander valued children's play in her therapeutic practices:

Playing is how the child tries out the world and learns about his world, and it is therefore essential to his healthy development. For the child, play is a serious, purposeful business through which he develops mentally, physically, and socially. Play is the child's form of self-therapy, through which confusions, anxieties, and conflicts are often worked through (Oaklander, 1978, p. 160).

Play also serves as a language for the child – a symbolism that substitutes for words. The child experiences much in life he cannot yet express in language, and so he uses play to formulate and assimilate what he experiences (Oaklander, 1978, p. 160).

Play can be a good diagnostic tool. Often when I am asked to “evaluate” a child I will spend some time allowing him to play. I can observe a great deal about his maturity, intelligence, imagination and creativity, cognitive organization, reality orientation, style, attention span, problem-solving abilities, contact skills, and so forth (Oaklander, 1978, p. 160).

Tina Bruce distinguished *12 Features of Free Flow Play* (Bruce, 1991; 1996; 2005):

1. Play is an active process without a product.
2. Play is intrinsically motivated.
3. Play exerts no pressure to conform to rules, goals, tasks or to take definite directions.
4. It is about possible, alternate worlds which involve the concepts ‘supporting’ and ‘as if’ and which lift the player to the highest levels of functioning. This involves being imaginative, creative, original and innovative.
5. Play is about participants wallowing in ideas, feelings and relationships, and becoming aware of what we know (metacognition).
6. It actively uses first hand experiences.
7. It is sustained, and when in full flow, helps us to function in advance of what we can actually do in our real lives.

8. In play we use technical prowess mastery and competence that we have previously developed. We are in control.
9. Children or adults can initiate play but each must be sensitive to each other's personal agenda.
10. Play can be solitary.
11. It can be with others, each of whom is sensitive to fellow players.
12. Play integrates everything we learn, know, feel, relate to and understand.

PLAY HELPS CHILDREN TO MAKE SENSE OF THE EMOTIONS, OF THE WORLD

Historically play, as an activity will have a growing importance as developmental factor. A recent analysis of the historical development of human species showed emotions to be essential to all aspects of thought to such a degree that without them the ability to reason vanishes (Greenspan & Shanker, 2004). Emotional development to a great extent is based on children's joint play. Play is the laboratory of children's emotional experiences. In play, a child develops and masters the structures of their own thinking. They lay the foundations of the inner forms of basic human notions. Play provides the channel of expression of the child's emotional experiences and releases their spiritual potential.

The evaluation of play and play development depends on the point of view of the evaluator. Adult perspective is different from children's play experience. For adults, the same play situation may be important as learning opportunity and for children as having fun together. Mouritsen (2002) claimed that adults understand play as an instrument of acquisition going from their educational project with children and look for functional elements of socialization in it. From the point of view of children's play culture play can be looked at as a form of aesthetic or symbolic expression, where life is given shape and meaning

and is interpreted. So, the understanding of development in play is very different depending on the chosen aspect: children's own play culture or adults educational project with children.



Figure 22. Playing "Meeting the Moomins": The Moomins are frozen after the crash of their air balloon



Figure 23. Playing "Meeting the Moomins": The whole Moomins family!



Figure 24. Playing "Meeting the Moomins": The Moomin Mother talks very strange language

II. PLAY AND BIOLOGICAL REGULATING SYSTEM

PLAN:

- Stress regulating system need practicing
- The function of play in stress regulation

STRESS REGULATING SYSTEM NEED PRACTICING

Children are responding to any kind of stressors with a set of highly integrated, neurobiological stress responses. Events that trigger stress responses vary from actual threat to potential positive learning experiences. On general, all emotionally loaded events arouse stress and prepare body to act – to beat the danger or to avoid it. These immediate *fight, flight* or *freeze* responses are energy consuming and they prevent human beings from utilizing higher-order prefrontal function. The challenge throughout life is how to function in emotionally loaded situations without drawing on unnecessary extremes in behaviour. In other words, how learn to tolerate arousal in the zone of proximal development.

Regulated stress is a positive power. It enables children to be alert and easy-going at the same time. Stress regulation is an acquired ability that develops in attuned social interactions, in moments that arouse excitement and thrill and where somebody is transmitting calming signs of safety. The context of learning stress regulation

in children is sense of belonging, relationships to adults and peers. Both being an accepted part of the group and getting sensitive support from the adults in charge are crucial elements of child wellbeing. Wellbeing is a state of relatively low stress, in which children can test the boundaries, and play with curiosity and creativity.

THE FUNCTION OF PLAY IN STRESS REGULATION

Urge to play is a basic drive, it is hard-wired to be rewarding and it has always been there. Nature barely preserves anything that is unnecessary for adaptation and survival. The evolutionary meaning of play might lie behind regulation of stress-induced behaviour and making sense of experiences. During various forms of play, children are practicing ways of being connected to social and cultural environment they are living in.

The social engagement system during play provides direct social contact with others, but also regulates stress to support positive social behaviour by exerting an inhibitory effect on alarming brain. In challenging,

stressful moments children have difficulties in inhibiting reactive fight or flight responses especially when responsive and engaged adults are not present. Guided play is one of the best arenas to experience different states of alertness and excitement and to learn to regulate it.

During reactive states of behaviour, induced by stress, there are ruptures in connections and lack of prefrontal regulation. Children are not responsive, cautious or thoughtful. They do not have the capacity to listen, reflect and obey. It has been shown, that the worst thing to do in these moments, when a child exhibits a reactive state of behaviour, is to isolate children as a punishment. Isolation is biologically alarming and it does not help children to learn ways to navigate the situation with others. Inviting children to play, letting them go through excitement and even fear, and at last mount the dangers with bravery is supporting regulation as its best.

On the contrary, isolation strengthens the tendency to be reactive when something unexpected or

uncomfortable is happening. The responsibility of the adults' present is to help children to slow down when they recognize that children are exhibiting a reactive state out of their control. Emotional expressiveness plays a crucial role in calming children and in repairing ruptures in the social connection. When the social engagement system is activated in a child's brain-body system, they are able to calm and can then become ready to listen and understand. Professionals should, therefore, understand the power of voice and facial expressions and use these instruments consistently when working with children.

12. NARRATIVE PLAY AND HIGHER MENTAL FUNCTIONS

PLAN:

- Narrative as a form of child's thinking
- The complexity and developmental potential of play

NARRATIVE AS A FORM OF CHILD'S THINKING

Research shows that there is a clear structural similarity between play and other narrative forms. Bruner (1996) even claimed that narrative is a structural unit of child development through which the child interprets the world. He writes about “narrative construal of reality.” Donaldson (1993) talks about “narrative mode” as a developmental stage in a child's life. Narrative and story mediate and create sense and meaning in a child's life and children gradually learn to express their own worldviews by means of narration.

Zaporozhets (1986) compares the structure of a fairy tale and play. He saw the difference between them in terms of abstractness. A fairy tale requires imagining the whole story: the event, physical environment, persons, their relations, emotional states etc. But in pretend play peers and the use of concrete props and tools may support story construction. He points out that one of the most important changes taking place at preschool age is the development of an ability to act mentally in imaginary circumstances (an imaginary situation according to Vygotsky). Clear composition, dramatic events and rhythmical movement of the events help the child to

step into the circle of imaginary circumstances and assist mentally the heroes of the story (Zaporozhets, 1986). Story and play are so closely connected that they are often inseparable. Sutton-Smith (1981) shows that children's stories many times originate from their dramatic play. Mouritsen (2002) claims that play for children is a way of telling a story and dramatizing at the same time. Why play should be interpreted as a story? A strong argument for this is the use of the preterite tense: “Once upon a time, there was...”. Storytelling is a crucial structure of thought, in Sutton-Smith's (1981) opinion.

We argue that play is the primary form of a child's thinking at an early age. Play actions can be understood as materialized thoughts (needs, wishes, ideas) of which a child is not completely conscious. First play actions are the only possible forms of expressing ideas and the substitution of language.

We believe that narrative is “a universal mode of thought” and “a form of thinking” (Bruner, 1986; Donald, 1991; Nelson, 1998). The development of narrative thought in children as a necessary step towards formal or abstract thinking (in concepts).

The development of a child's thought and ability to express thinking, first in gestures and actions through

play and other symbolic media, and then gradually through oral narratives, is our primary interest. A child uses play as a medium to create narratives about themselves and the world.

THE COMPLEXITY AND DEVELOPMENTAL POTENTIAL OF PLAY

Trying to understand play it is important to keep in mind the fact that play activity always proceed on two planes, as Vygotsky (1977; 2003) has indicated. It is crucial to look not just at the child's external actions but to try to find out the real meaning (the child's initial idea) that is behind the external form. This deeper meaning can be “grasped” by observing children's play for a longer period or stepping into the play and “provoking” the child to respond, thus revealing the basic idea.

All children can be included into narrative play, not considering their developmental stage, age or abilities. Everybody can have a part in the playworld because it has many different levels and proceed in various spaces. Creative, imaginative play is enormously spacious; it can accommodate all possible experiences of the young

child and provide the space to explore those experiences and enact them with other children. When we observe children playing we can follow the visible events, the external narrative. Each individual child participating in the same play activity constructs their own version of the narrative. Often children incorporate their own play themes into a bigger play. When we play together for a longer time we realize that there are many different levels of play and many small themes in one big play activity interacting with each other.

The potential of advanced imaginary play is enormous and everything depends on the skills of the players. These skills are developed only through playing together. Skilful adult participation helps to incorporate several children and their themes into one creative endeavour. The more experienced children become, the easier they construct long lasting play activities on their own.

Child's movement to a new level of play marks more advanced level of his mental functioning and helps to develop more complex hierarchical system of motivation. He learns to postpone immediate reactions in favour of longer-term goals. Play facilitates the ability to take other person's perspective, movement to so called cognitive 'de-centration' or (overcoming egocentrism) and leads to reflective thinking. Play advances the development of mental representation. This occurs when children separate the meaning of objects from their physical form: at the beginning children use real objects, then – replicas or substitute objects ('pivots'), later – words and gestures, and finally – just words. Advanced forms of play fosters development of volitional behaviours in children. Taking roles and performing them according to the rules of a certain role, children practice other and self-regulation. This is a step towards metacognition – planning and monitoring one's mental processes.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

For what age NEPL is recommended?

- NEPL approach was applied with children from 2 to 15 years old, the guidelines focus on 3 to 8 years old children.

What should come first developmental goals, learning goals or story events in narrative play?

- When choosing a story for narrative playworld you should always think about the developmental goals for the children, about the moral and cultural values, but when planning concrete narrative play adventure story line and events comes first. The adventure has to be exciting and interesting for the kids!

What should adults do when the situation is difficult: the child does not want to play, is crying, overexcited and etc.

- Teachers need to show sensitivity in such situations. Adult, who is acting as play partner or adventurer can support the child and propose the best solution. This could be a totally different activity even in a different space with an adult or with some other children. Such situations usually happen at the beginning of the narrative adventure when children are not very skilful players. For that reason, it is very important to propose several options for the children, for example, one group of kids are travelling to the “magic” world to save some characters and the rest of the children are staying in the “real” world to build a house,

prepare food or arrange the hospital, which might be needed for further narrative events.

- It is important not to let some children to “drop out” from narrative adventure. When the kids become better players, they propose themselves different interesting solutions in such situations.

When the adults in roles return to the room how do they act? What do we say to the children if they recognize that the teacher was the one in role?

- For young kids, you answer “yes”, because that was play. It should not be a secret, because the kids also take roles. This will be very important for the children who are not used to take role. But the situation might be different with older children. Sometimes you may not acknowledge directly, but say „really? „you think so? “. Both ways are good and they depend on the kid’s age and concrete situation. But in principle the discussion should be short. Better to move the discussion about who was in role to what really happened when that character in role came. At this point children start reflecting and telling their versions of the events.

After the play how do we regulate the children? Free play? Rough and tumble play? Music?

- Right after a very tense play adventure when all

feel tired of excited have some relaxing activity like dancing, breathing and etc. Then some reflecting activity with older children and/or free activities – drawing, playing. Should not be structured activity.

Restrictions placed on teachers to follow the curriculum or teach in a certain way. How can they implement narrative play into their classrooms?

- Current research reveals that play is very important for the children. There should be possibilities for the free play in the classrooms of 3-8 year olds. The teachers should be advocates for play if parents and school administration does not have enough knowledge. Still a decision to start narrative play activities in the classroom must be negotiated with children, families and school authorities.

Who proposes/chooses the roles for the children in narrative play: teachers or children choose them spontaneously?

- It could be both but it is important to discuss the roles that everybody knows who is who.
- Sometimes there can be collective roles – several children might have/be in the same roles: researchers, adventures, cats, and so on. Depends on the story and children’s interests, but especially young children might want to have the same role, like five Princesses or six brave Knights, Monsters and etc. ☺

How long narrative play episode might last? Could it last as long as children are motivated?

- Yes. How long one episode should last? You can see from the children, when it is too much or too long. But sometimes some are interested and others are not. You should have several endings in the same episodes – some can finish earlier, others might continue on their own or have a continuation. But there should be an ending quite clear for the main group. Very interested kids might have some more tasks or actions. Children should not be tired and you should not feel stressed (what to do??). One event should be like one breath. That is enough. Do not plan too much. Children are different – some are slow and some are quick. Some will only start the play when others are finished. If the kids drop their interest and it is important to continue try to use their own ideas – the motivation returns very quickly 😊
- When there are quite different ideas and you take one kids idea, some of them might lose their interest. But then helps if you have more adults – they can follow other kid's ideas. Children have different ideas. You should not use all the ideas. Feel the direction and propose something similar, appropriate for many kids. E.g. They draw different maps but they agree where to go and even change their plans because of the common goal.

If narrative playworld is based on a concrete story or book, do children have to be familiar with the whole story?

- Better yes. Narrative creates the context, the world for play activities and children should be familiar with it. Otherwise they will be not able to participate. But for the advanced players with a rich “play capital” it can be different. Sometimes teacher can pick one page, one picture from a book and that's enough! Experienced players are able to connect this

one picture to the bigger context, bigger picture, which they already have in their minds. When the kids are experienced and have a history of common narrative play they can create a new playworld from just one picture.

Is it necessary that after the narrative adventure children need to spend some time in free play?

- Yes, or some other activity that would provide them possibility for free reflection.

How to write a plan for narrative play?

- How to write the plan of the narrative play? For experienced teacher applying narrative play approach for several years just thinking might be enough. But planning is a necessary part of narrative play. We propose an example in Appendix 4. You can create your own form if you like.

What are the most frequent mistakes that teachers make when they start narrative playworlds?

- We don't use such term as “mistakes” rather missed opportunities. Everything what happens - unexpected turns of events, confusing reactions, chaotic and messy moments – are new opportunities. They should not be interpreted as mistakes rather as the possibilities to learn something new. Nobody knows, how narrative adventure should proceed except the participants – the players. At the beginning, you might feel frustrated that everything went differently from what you have planned, but that's how play activity evolves – it lives its life. Do not seek some perfection, ideal, or some clear educational goal. This will destroy play! Seek togetherness and enjoyment.
- Even if you sometimes forget to prepare or hide secret place or leave the door to “magic” world open,

which might be a clear threat to further adventure, just be creative and improvise. Learn from kids, as they will always have explanations for everything. In fact, most valuable learning situations happen exactly in those moments when things don't go according to the plan.

- After the narrative play day watch video recordings in a team and share your feelings and impressions. If you decide that something did not go well, discuss, what might be done differently the next time. Use this as the platform for new learning.

How many teachers (adults) should be in a narrative playworld?

- The number of adults needs to be considered. If there is only one teacher in the classroom he/she cannot play several roles at the same time. Instead of playing a role a teacher could have an external prompt for the play: a letter, magic box, finding something unexpected and etc. When you finally decide to take a role, make sure there is an adult acting as play partner or an “adventurer” who can support and coordinate the children.

GLOSSARY

Academic learning - teacher-directed more formal instruction; paper-pencil tasks; goal directed learning, e.g. to read, to write, to count and etc.

Dramatic collisions (in play) - clash of opposing interests, views and ideas.

Dramatization – re-enactment of the story or tale events in play with other children.

Free (independent) play - unregulated or unrestricted self-organized play of children.

Imaginary play, make-believe play, pretend play, fantasy play, symbolic play – often used as synonyms - pretend play activities are the subset of play activities characterized by an “as-if” stance (Garvey, 1990).

Joint play – involvement in play activity of several children.

Make-believe play is a kind of *mental activity* whose outward manifestations are verbal or nonverbal or both. This mental activity includes the following *mental operations*, performed simultaneously: *evoking* some *mental images*; *animating* these mental images; *verbalizing* the mental operation of animating, or *identifying* some perceptible entity in the immediate play environment with it (Ariel, 2002, p.140).

Mediator – in cultural-historical developmental psychology adult is understood as a mediator of cultural forms of behaviour.

Narrative - a spoken or written account of connected events; a story (fabula).

Narrative environments for play and learning (NEPL) – is a practical method of narrative (developmental) play

pedagogy. At the centre of the NEPL curriculum is narrative play jointly created by children and adults. Starting point for narrative play usually is a good story book. Children’s developmental and learning goals are realized/achieved through participation in play activity.

Narrative play - an imaginative social role-play activity where children jointly construct a storyline (plot). Participants in collaboration create a joint playworld through conflicts, dialogues, negotiations and sharing.

Perezhivanie - emotional experiencing (living through) of a certain phenomenon that brings new and deeper understanding of that phenomenon.

Playworld - a conscious effort to create a shared culture of play - imaginary world, which children and adults come to share when they interpret and dramatize the theme in the classroom (Lindqvist, 1995). By taking different roles and enacting the dramatic events of a story, the participants become involved into the perezhivanie of common phenomenon. It moves adults ‘inside’ the play activity and puts them on a more equal position with the children. From a developmental point of view, this is a very challenging situation that requires genuine involvement and a high level of sensitivity and creativity from the participants.

Role-play – is the act of imitating the character and behaviour of someone who is different from yourself.

Storyline - is the re-presentation of those events (through narration, metaphor, the re-ordering of the temporal sequence, and so on).

The child’s own narrative voice - the child’s ability to express his personal view of the events, a personal sense or personal “theme” in a cultural form of play, drawing or spoken language.

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EXAMPLE OF FIRST PLAY TRIALS

Appendix I

Episode of a situation where children are invited to practice how to play together:

Two boys are engaged in the joint play with small cars. One boy is hanging around and just looking others play as a bystander. Adult observes the situation for a while. The bystander boy tries to joint to the others play by suggesting that others would share some cars with him. This suggestion does not suit for the pre-present players play idea and they block the boy's access to the cars. While observing this very moment adult decides to intervene with play suggestion. Adult approaches the boy and whispers: "What if we were car mechanics, who are skilful to fix any car?" Adult and the boy share mutual gaze with excitement. Also, the two pre-present boys recognize this play suggestion.

Adult keep on suggesting different props and options how to proceed: "What could we do with the cars, if we were mechanics? Do you have a car at home? Is it ever been broken? What kind of problems we could fix as mechanic? Should we wear some working outfits? What kind of tools we need?" The boy listens intensively and finally suggest that they could build their own garage where to fix cars. The adult and the boy starts to build the garage by using blocks, art and craft material etc. Before they have even finished building the garage the other two children approach with their cars and tell that there has been terrible car accident with a lot of broken cars. The boy and the adult agree that they have services just for this kind of situations. Joint play is about to start. In the joint play the story guarantees the equal participation.

Observation
Milla S. 24.4.17

Color used represents date of observation

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Child's initials

Child's age

Child's gender

Child's group/class

The checklist is meant to evaluate the *level of child's play*. Lithuanian research team (Bredikyte, Brandisauskiene, Sujetaite-Volungeviciene) elaborated the checklist in

1. Level of child's play. Evaluate each statement (1 to 7) by selecting the most appropriate answer (a, b, c or d) and marking an X in the option box:

1.	Play objects	Option		
a	Child uses objects according to their intended purpose			
b	Child plays with real objects, sometimes with substitutes			
c	Child plays with substitute objects, sometimes with imaginary objects			
d	Child plays with imaginary objects			
2.	Self-position of the child	Option		
a	Child has no role			
b	Child has a role, but does not keep to the rules of the role or is inconsistent			
c	Child has a role and keeps to the rules of the role			
d	Child is flexible and freely improvises roles			
3.	Play partner	Option		
a	Child's play partner is real, but has no role			
b	Child's play partner is real, has a role, but very little interaction			
c	Child's play partner's actions are determined by rules of the role			
d	Child's play partner has a role or partner may be imaginary			
4.	Play space	Option		
a	Play space is real			
b	Play space is real, purposefully chosen			
c	Play space is constructed, created			
d	Play space is modelled, may be part of an imaginary game and marked by words and actions			
5.	Play actions	Option		
a	Child plays in separate operations (feeding a doll).			
b	Child plays is separate actions (combines separate operations - undresses doll, puts it to bed, covers it)			
c	Creates and sustains a schematic play situation (playing house)			
d	Creates a sustained chain of events with some event situations (combines a few events)			
6.	Play script/narrative	Option		
a	Realistic repetition of daily events			
b	Short, improvised daily episodes			
c	Adventure			
d	Fantastic / magical			
7.	Main content of play	Option		
a	Action with objects			
b	Actions determined by role			
c	Interaction with partner			
d	Play narrative is created			

Play objects – the things and objects that are used for play

Real objects can be toys used according to their intended purpose.

Real dishes or can be toy dishes used to play “eating dinner” or “eating at the restaurant”

A doll used as a baby, a teddy bear used as a teddy bear and so on. A doll is “eating” from real or toy dishes.

Substitute objects

One object is used to substitute another object. Playing a shop and using small blocks as “bread”, plastic forms as “milk”,

Imaginary object

No objects are used for play, only body gestures and movements are performed with imaginary “as if” objects. For example, jumping around the room as “riding” a horse, “driving” non-existing car. While playing a shop children often pay with imaginary money: stretching a hand as if giving money: “please, 10 euros” and if another child is on advanced level of play, he would take the money and put them into imaginary pocket and give back some imaginary “change”. ☺

Self-position

Real “I”, no role in play situations. For example, Oona is “cooking” dinner as herself but not as a “mother” or a “chef”, or Tuomas is “driving” a car as himself but not as a “father” or a “driver” and etc.

Role position, actions determined by the rules of the role. At the very beginning of role play, the child would not name his/her role but only perform some characteristic movements or voice intonations or face

expressions. Later the child is naming her/his role, saying “I am a mother, making a dinner for a child”. A boy is saying: a “driver is driving children to school” and etc. When children start role-play they might be very strict following the rules of the role. They play the same actions and same events on and on. Another indicator of the flexibility is that the child is playing only one role for a longer period of time and would not take another role.

By the end of role play period the children are more and more flexible, they can improvise, role behaviour is less schematic and fixed also they can play different roles.

Roles are flexible, could be changes according to the plot, more like director’s position

Play partner

(This parameter describes how the playing child relates to the position of his play partner. In fact, young child is not allowing his/her partner to behave, as they want in play.)

Real partner, no role. At the beginning of role-play a child does not allow his/her partner to take a role. It is very often when child is already “in role” position he is protesting severely if his/her partner also takes some role. The partner is allowed to carry out some concrete actions. Often the child would tell his partner: “now you sleep

In role position, but very little interaction more like parallel play. Gradually a child is accepting a partner in “role” but is not interacting much or sometimes interacting, but not from the role perspective (“in play” position) but from their own perspective (“out of play” position).

In role, actions determined by rules of the role. When gradually the child is able to accept his/her partner as being “in role” position, they don’t allow any free improvisation for them, demanding to follow the simple schema of role behaviour. On advanced role-play level players are in roles and interacting as more or less equal partners.

In role often imagined partner. Advanced player (child) can play alone interacting and speaking and performing actions taking different roles. For example, the girl is playing a mother with a sick child visiting a doctor. So, first, she is a mother and telling the doctor about her child’s sickness and the next moment she is a doctor giving directions how to cure the baby.

Play space

Real, for a very young child the space is not so important, she/he can use the space that is already available. It is more important to perform certain actions with the toys. For example, a girl can “feed” or put a doll to “sleep” in almost any place. The action and a role what matters.

Constructed using real objects, children need to organize play space before they start to play. They name: “here is the shop” and organize the space, mark the borders, make shelves, arrange the goods, place for the shopkeeper and etc. At the beginning, they might spend hours arranging the space and then playing only 10-15 minutes.

Only marked (by words or actions). The child does not have to organize and mark material play space, it is enough for him to mark it with movements, sometimes few blocks or only words. For example, he might

put few blocks in the middle of the room saying and showing with his arm: “this is my house and here is the forest, behind this line”. Children around 6-years-old might just name and show with symbolic gestures: “this is our house and here is your house” or “don’t cross this line, magic forest starts here”, and etc.

Play actions

Play actions is the unit of the development of play activity. This means that play actions can help to define the level of play. Children’s play activity starts from **separate operations repetitive chains of operations - play actions - chain of successive play actions - separate play events - chain of successive play events**

The main point about

Separate operations – “making food” again and again; “feeding the baby” again and again; “driving the car” on and on and etc., then moving to

Chains of operations – “making food and feeding the children”; “driving the car and bringing food to the kindergarten” and so on

Separate play actions – shopping: choosing products, paying money

Chain of successive play actions - “making food, feeding children and then taking them the kindergarten”

Separate play events – birthday party; flight to Spain; [car, train, ship] accident; going to the circus; traveling to the mountains. All these play themes are separate worlds for a young child but the more child knows, the more experience he/she has the more these worlds become interconnected. This brings children to

Chain of successive play events – they start playing: “mother and child having a dog, traveling to the mountains for vacation, getting lost, falling and breaking a leg, asking for help, helicopter coming and taking to the hospital” – all events connected into one big world.

This high level of play from the first sight might look similar to early stages of play but at this higher stage children will not play all the events in detail. They might play only the most interesting and other events just mentioning: “now we are flying in an airplane!” and then “we are already in the mountains!” The main criterion is the “inner plane” or “inner image” the child has. On initial stages the child has no inner image of the whole context, whole world except few operations he is performing. The words: “flying in an airplane” does not create a picture of flying in young child’s imagination. He needs to perform many detailed actions of building a physical space - an airplane, to play “flying in an airplane”, “driving to the mountains”, “climbing” and so on.

Play script / narrative

Repetition of emotionally significant daily situations. First play episodes usually are memories of the child’s everyday life events. Not any events, but emotionally significant, those, which child can’t forget for some reason. The episodes are short usually one event.

Short, improvised daily life episodes. Daily life episodes are not merely repetition of what happened but more freely improvises scenes and longer episodes. Child combines his experiences and knowledge from different sources in play. The main characteristic is that events are realistic life situations.

Adventure – children start playing “dangerous” events, overcoming certain obstacles. This might be car accident, robbery, firefighting, saving someone from someone, searching for treasure, for bad guys, and etc. Fantastic / fictional – children construct their adventures mixing real life episodes with fantasy: they travel to new planets in a spaceship, to fantastic worlds. They constantly cross the border between this world and fantastic world. They create the rules for that fantastic world. The most important is that they are totally in

control of what might or might not happen in the fantastic world. Children practice creating rules in total freedom.

The main content of play

Actions with objects. The main (unconscious) goal of a child is to perform certain actions with play objects. For example, a young boy is “feeding” everyone with “porridge” - mother, father, teddy bear and a doll. He is carrying on the same operation many times. A girl is putting her “children” to sleep; she might try to put to sleep all toys available and even her family members. On this level children might act from role position: “mother”, “doctor” and so on but they not always name their role and not very conscious of the role. At the same time, they might not allow a partner to be “in role”, especially if the partner is a child (adult might be different).

The role and the actions determined by it. It is very important for the children to perform certain role. They would not agree to take another role (many conflicts might arise if other child wants the same role in play) and will not interact between themselves much. Often, we might see the situation when few children have the same roles and perform identical actions not very much interacting between themselves (more interactions are “out of role”). For example, three five-year-old girls playing princesses all the time imitating each other: first all are having birthdays, then going to amusement park then participating in horse race. All shouting: “I am the first”, “I am the first”, “I am the first!” Similar situation with the three boys - all knights fighting a dangerous Dragon, later robbers and then pirates. All three boys are performing the same actions and repeating the same events, in fact, one event. It looks like actions with objects but on a higher level because they take the role consciously and their actions are very much defined by the role. Characteristic that on this level children don’t

interact between themselves “in roles” but mainly from “out of role” position.

Interaction with a partner in role position. For this level play it is characteristic that children are interacting between themselves in roles. They use role specific “language”, mimics and gestures. They separate/ differentiate “in role” and “out of role” communication. If something doesn’t go, as they want, they “step out of roles” and discuss what they should do and then return back to play. At this level, it is still very important for the children to perform a particular role, they might not agree to take a role that they don’t like for some reason (negative, coward, old person, and etc.)

Construction of play narrative. At this level children become more focused on interesting and exciting events than on roles. They become more flexible and can take different roles if the plot requires. It is characteristic that in one play episode they can be in one role and in another they might change the role. For example, they would say in role: “now mother has to go to work” and then out of role: “I am as if going to work and then I will come as a witch. A witch will kidnap the children and then I will come back as mother and see: oh, no children! Where are my children?”

PLAYWORLD JOURNAL (EMPTY FORM)

Appendix 4

DATE:
REPORTER(S):

PLACE:

<p><u>PLAY SESSION PLAN</u> <i>(Concrete steps of play are planned; also, the roles of adults, positions of children in play)</i></p> <p><u>ADULTS/PLANNERS:</u></p>	<p><u>OBSERVATIONS: (WHAT HAPPENED?)</u> <i>(How did the play developed, how did the play changed?)</i></p> <p><i>What the kids added to the play?</i></p>
<p><u>PARTICIPATION CHILDREN</u> <i>(individual and collective developmental aims; roles for children)</i></p> <p><u>ADULTS</u> <i>(Experience of being in the role; observation of kids, implementation of the goals)</i></p>	<p><u>EXPERIENCES INVOLVEMENT AND EMOTIONS</u> <i>(Experiences and emotions of kids and adults; whether the kids were involved in the plot of the play; whether they liked it; which moments were the most attractive)</i></p>
<p><u>ADULTS' DIVISION OF WORK</u></p>	<p><u>HOW ADULTS SUPPORTED CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT? (GOAL SETTING)</u> <i>(Does your role helped to reach the goals for the kids? Which goals? What other goals can be set?)</i></p>
<p><u>MY OBSERVATIONS</u> <i>(Commentaries and observations for each member of the team)</i></p>	<p><u>WHAT I SAW?</u> <i>(Observations 1,2, 3..., which will help to plan the following/future play activities)</i></p>

2016.10.10. Group of Butterflies

Filled by: Gitana, Rasa, Agnė

PLAY SESSION PLAN

(Concrete steps of play are planned; also, the roles of adults, positions of children in play)

1. Teacher tells kids that some guests will arrive and there will be an interesting play.
2. The guests (doctor with assistant) call by phone to the group. (doctor Šmyšė and her assistant Šyšė)
3. Children greet the guests.
4. There is the „health check“ for kids (the height is measured by zucchini; the throat is checked – whether she talks loudly with others, makes noise; hearing check – whether she hears others, who lives in their ears; the heart check – what feelings live in their hearts, whether they are angry, joyful, friendly, feel love).
5. The doctor comments everyone's health.
6. Doctor writes a prescription for everyone and gives magical nuts.
7. Children paint their self-portraits on their health cards.
8. The doctor gives a present: the barometer of loudness, the bag to blow and leave the excessive energy.
9. The doctor and assistant say goodbye for the kids and leave the doctor's glasses in the group.
10. Children discuss what to do with the glasses.

ADULTS:

Doctor and assistant

Teacher and assistant („patients “ – observers)

Teacher – took pictures and filmed

Children – patients.

OBSERVATIONS: WHAT HAPPENED?

(How did the play developed, how did the play changed?)

- The play was developing according to the plan.
- Children were happy to know about the visit of the guests, though some of the kids kept distance.
- Children were surprised, interested, some of them were frightened and they were sitting in the back row, but some of them moved closer.
- Two girls commented: “Look, they play as small kids”; when the play developed, these girls believed in the play and said: “probably they are real doctors”.
- Two kids (3 years old) did not dare to check their health.

What the kids added to the play?

- Children brought chairs, created the “hospital”, children who were involved the most, were sitting in the first rows near the doctor.
- Children interacted with the doctor, commented on the health state of their friends.

PARTICIPATION CHILDREN

(individual and collective developmental aims; roles for children)

General aims:

Children will involve into the play with characters: they will use imagination, they will take roles.

The children who take part in the play later will know how to offer ideas, will have more courage when they have to communicate with doctors.

Three-year-old kids: will take part in the play, keep the attention; will have courage to communicate with the characters.

Four and five-year-old kids: will be interested, will express their ideas courageously, will offer ideas, will solve problems, will pay/keep attention.

ADULTS

(Experience of being in the role; observation of kids, implementation of the goals)

- The goal for the adults was to fulfil the role, to play together with kids, be flexible.
- To create a convincing character and the story, observe children's emotional engagement, to endorse it.

ADULTS' DIVISION OF WORK

Main roles:

- teachers from another group as doctor and her assistant,
- teacher of the group observes and helps the older kids,
- the assistant of the teacher of the group observes and helps younger kids.
- Teacher from other group takes pictures and films.

EXPERIENCES

INVOLVEMENT AND EMOTIONS

(Experiences and emotions of kids and adults; whether the kids were involved in the plot of the play; whether they liked it; which moments were the most attractive)

- It was quite hard for the kids and adults to move into the roles, to believe in the play, but step-by-step everyone got involved.
- Children at first did not believe that this is really a doctor.
- One three-year-old was afraid of the doctors, he did not have courage to come and have the health check, he actively observed the play.
- A five-year-old boy was afraid, but overcame his fear and later came to check his health.
- Everyone was amazed by the doctor: she revealed kids' inner abilities, moral values while checking their health.

HOW ADULTS SUPPORTED CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT? (GOAL SETTING)

(Does your role helped to reach the goals for the kids? Which goals? What other goals can be set?)

- Children were emotionally engaged in the play, they took the roles, they kept the attention (the play lasted for one hour and 15 min.).
- Our further goals – to achieve the stronger involvement/engagement of the children into the problem solving, encourage them to propose ideas.

MY OBSERVATIONS

(Commentaries and observations for each member of the team)

Classroom teacher observes and helps older kids.

Teacher assistant observes and helps younger kids to involve in the play.

Characters:

Doctor Šmyšě: observes the general play flow, acts actively (health check), makes questions which involve kids into play actions.

Doctor assistant: observes the general play flow, helps to keep doctor and children relations, asks questions, help to engage, react expressively to play events.

WHAT I SAW?

(Observations which will help to plan the following/future play activities)

Agnè (works in another group) was the doctor Šmyšě:

1. It would be good to know the children better before the play, it would be easier to involve them.

Rasa (the main teacher of the group):

1. Most of the kids kept their attention to the end of the play.

2. The play revealed some unexpected personality qualities/trades of some kids.

3. The big finding of the play: the interest of the kids does not depend on the kids' age and it is not the final factor for success of the play.

Gitana (doctor assistant):

1. The play helps to be at the same level of communication, everyone was in the "journey" with a lot of space for unknown and fearful things. Is a way to learn together.

2. The play helped children to reveal and to find their strong sides. Teachers had the opportunity to see the undiscovered sides of the kids, their character features.

3. For the future: to involve the kids into the creation of the story plot, to think for the problematic, dilemma situations.

Details to observe

- How does the activity start?
 - Does the child initiate it? The adult (student, teacher, mother?) Another child?
 - Does the child join the ongoing play of another child or group of children? What means does the child use or how he joins the activity?
- Where does the activity take place? (block corner, creative drama centre, art centre or etc.?)
- What is the course of action, or sequence of events?
- Does the child speak during the activity, what does he talk about?
- What are the child's comments and verbal interactions *about* the activity?
- What does the child say in role if it is dramatic play?
- What does the child do?
- What do the other participants in the play say and do? Do they interact between themselves, with adults?
- What materials, toys or objects does the child use?
- How does the activity or game ends?
 - Does the child leave for some other activity?
 - If playing with others, does the other child (or children) leave first?
 - Does the teacher interrupt the play? How does the child respond to interruption?
 - Does it develop into some other kind of play?
 - How long did the child's participation last?
 - What or who seems responsible for the ending?
 - How does the child feel about the ending of the play or game?

*When describing child's activities, especially art and handcraft, describe the tools and materials he/she uses and what he/she produces

NARRATIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR PLAY AND LEARNING (NEPL) GUIDELINES for kindergarten and school teachers working with 3-8 years-old-children / Edited by Milda Bredikyte.

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These Guidelines presents the educational method of narrative play pedagogy. Primarily, the theoretical and practical origins, as well as the concept of narrative play are discussed. Afterwards, the reader will find concrete steps of this method for working with children (age 3 to 8) in pre-school or school environments. The publication is based on the work carried out for the project “Narrative Environments for Play and Learning” (No. 2015-1-LT01-KA201-013443) under Erasmus+ programme (KA2 - Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices, Strategic Partnerships for school education) funded by the European Commission. The project was held in four countries (Lithuania, Finland, England, Poland) from 2015 until 2017.

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