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## Adult Actions Supporting Narrative Playworlds in the Classroom

**ABSTRACT:** This study is a part of a more significant Narrative Play and Learning (NEPL) project in daycare centres in Vilnius, Lithuania, lasting for three years. The role of the adult in the narrative playworld is crucial, as their actions determine the nature and continuity of the play activities and the children's motivation, engagement, and opportunities for action. This qualitative study explores the teacher's involvement in the narrative playworld and examines what adult actions contribute to collaborative play development. The results show that the actions contributing to the development of collaborative play activities involve all participants, children, and adults, and create a situation where the adult becomes a partner in the children's play but does not lead the activity. All the cases analysed show that the teacher's participation in narrative play is a creative activity that requires constant improvisation. The children's reactions are always spontaneous and unpredictable; they do not know the teacher's plan, and the narrative playworld is created in the here and now. In conclusion, the NEPL programme, as a cultural tool, helps the adult create and maintain favourable conditions for collaborative play development.

**KEYWORDS:** narrative playworlds, teacher's actions, the in-role position of a teacher, improvisation, individual narrative voice

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## INTRODUCTION

Today's world can be described as intensively changing, full of surprises and challenges. Such a world forces the sphere of education to constantly solve new problems. Each generation of children finds itself in a unique '*social situation of development*', along with adults – parents and teachers. The education community's mission is to educate children so they can cope with present and future challenges. The fundamental question for scientists and educators is, what kind of pedagogy should be utilized today? In early childhood education, teachers have been dealing with a dilemma for a long time: what should prevail when organising the education of young children, didactic teaching, or collaborative play with children? The scientific community is seeking to answer this question as well.

Researchers studying children's early development note that the solution is to delve into the needs of early childhood development. In the last decade, more researchers have emphasised the importance of a child's play at preschool age and teachers' beliefs, perspectives, and experiences with play (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). Meanwhile, formal education of young children is turning towards earlier academic training. This creates a challenge for early childhood professionals. They try to combine these recommendations in their practices: to encourage children's play and, through it, to help children develop academic skills. However, for over a decade now, it has been observed that children spend far more time being instructed than playing and exploring freely, exercising their bodies, and using their imagination (Miller & Almon, 2009; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Many studies have revealed that the academic skills the child acquires while playing are precisely measured. Such an approach denies the very essence of play activity and turns it into a guided instructional activity. The terms schooling, play-based learning, and playful learning prevail in the research. Still, we must acknowledge that these terms' content is not unambiguous and may have different meanings (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

By turning young children's play into an educational activity, we deprive them of the opportunity to develop general abilities early, which are the basis of all human

life and learning. Research has revealed (Shanker 2020; Whitebread et al., 2009a; Whitebread et al., 2009b; Gopnik 2016) that self-regulated behaviour and self-regulated learning are abilities necessary for success in life and are crucially important in the development of academic skills. Development of self-regulation starts early in childhood, and play is the activity most supportive of its development (Whitebread et al., 2009). Young children's ability to independently develop complex forms of play diminishes, and they need the help of adults. Children's play can be encouraged by the appropriate behaviour of teachers and other adults – starting from creating the environment and demonstrating a positive attitude to engaging in children's play.

In this article, we extend the research that analyses the importance of adult participation in children's imaginary play and playworlds (Hakkarainen & Brėdikytė, 2010; Hakkarainen et al., 2013; Fleeer, 2015; Devi, Fleeer & Li, 2018; Fragkiadaki, Fleeer & Rai 2021; Brėdikytė, 2022; Utami, Fleeer & Li, 2022; Sujetaitė-Volungevičienė, 2022). This paper presents the key concepts underlying the research, followed by the study design and results highlighting the teacher's actions – critical turning points, moving the activity towards the development of collaborative play or guided teaching. We build on years of research to implement Narrative Play Pedagogy.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The cultural-historical developmental theory forms the theoretical background for our research. The main theoretical concepts of cultural development in childhood are the social situation of development, *amplification* as “the ‘enrichment’ of child development, the ‘broadening’ of the child's genetic perspective, that is, of the zone of proximal and more distant development through specific ‘child activities.’” (Zaporozhets 2000; Kudryavtsev 2022). Imagination is the basis for the development of abstract thought, and adults are moderators of a child's cultural development.

Early development is essentially a creative process of self-development characterised by spontaneity. A young child develops in the way that is most suitable for him. From the wide cultural field, which Asmolov (2012) called the redundancy of development, the child chooses what is most important to him at that moment, what resonates with his experience and responds to his developmental needs. A dominant adult in an early childhood classroom might often stop and qualitatively change the self-development processes, which can lead to simplification, as Zaporozhets (2000) described. The child's developmental and learning strategies are then affected.

From this point of view, children's creative play based on imagination and exploration is the most appropriate activity for the child's self-development processes. The Narrative Play and Learning programme was created to meet the developmental and educational needs of 3-8-year-old children.

#### *Narrative Play and (Learning) Pedagogy*

The Narrative Play and Learning Pedagogy has been described in detail in several book chapters (Brėdikytė 2011; Hakkarainen & Brėdikytė 2018; van Oers 2018)

and articles (Hakkarainen et al., 2013; Hakkarainen & Bredikyte 2020) also in NEPL guidelines for teachers (Bredikyte 2017). The main defining principles of the approach are (1) adult participation in the construction of a narrative playworld; (2) the playworld is based on a storybook containing moral dilemmas; (3) adults participate in-role position in play; (4) playworld adventures are created in dialogic form between adults and children; (5) children's ideas lead the playworld adventures; (6) the playworld is not a replication/dramatization of the storyline but an improvised recreation and continuation of the story.

Such imaginary play creates new experiences that are linked to children's previous experiences. Playworlds bring together individual children's experiences and expand possibilities to live through new and exciting events, make moral choices and face the consequences of their choices. Vygotsky pointed out that in early childhood (around three years old), the development of imagination begins and later forms the foundation of formal, abstract modes of thought (Vygotsky 1987; 2004).

The primary purpose of narrative play on a collective level is to encourage imaginative, *collaborative play in the classroom*. On the individual level it is to support the development of an authentic *narrative voice* and the building of *personal selves*. Narrative play aims to maximise children's experiences through collaboratively constructed imaginative playworlds.

The goal of an adult stepping into children's play is to develop a collaborative play activity – the playworld – without transforming it into didactic teaching. What does it mean to establish the playworld? To create a chain of exciting events (storyline) with all play participants, relying on their ideas and reactions. Such activity is dialogic and improvisational in its essence. The task of a participating adult is to observe, listen, grasp the most appropriate and productive ideas, and connect them into a thrilling play adventure.

Usually, the central event of each play session is planned, but its realisation is always through improvisation. Thus, a narrative playworld has by no means a fixed plan. Instead, it has a blueprint of the main events. For example, a favourite fairy-tale character sets out on a journey to visit his grandmother, and on the way, they encounter various unexpected events. The fairy-tale and the characters are always those children like and know.

Meanwhile, the play events are born from observations of children's behaviour and living environments and are intended to involve them in solving controversial, ambiguous situations. For example, on the way to his grandmother, the character discovers a seriously ill wolf asking for help: What should the players do? From this moment, improvisation begins, and the most important thing here is the children's voices and ideas. At this point, as much time as possible is needed to satisfy all the players with the found solution. The adult's activity must be minimal; his functions are more organisational: helping to creatively combine children's ideas and implementing them, and moderating children's emotional reactions.

In narrative play, the teacher is usually in a role position, so he can influence the overall play only from the position of his role character without switching to the

position of the teacher. Such a situation limits the teacher's actions and gives the children more freedom and responsibility to create the play. In conclusion, we want to stress that the role of an adult in creating narrative playworlds is of great significance. The teacher's actions determine the character and continuity of the play activity, children's motivation, involvement, and possibility to act. Therefore, the *teacher's actions are chosen as the unit of analysis* for this study.

#### METHODOLOGY

This study is a part of a more significant Narrative Play and Learning (NEPL) project in day-care centres in Vilnius, Lithuania, lasting for three years. The project's goal was to implement the NEPL method in classrooms. Teachers with no previous experience with the NEPL programme were invited to the project. During the project, teachers participated in training sessions every month. They improved their professional competencies in observing and documenting children's play activities, assessing children's play levels and supporting children's play ideas. In addition, they had to implement a Narrative Play project in their practice. During the three years, 113 teachers participated, 75 classrooms were involved, and over 300 narrative play episodes took place.

This qualitative study examines the participation of teachers in the narrative playworld; a criterion in evaluating the quality of the involvement is adult actions supporting the development of collaborative play. The research question is, what are the adult actions in the narrative playworld supporting collaborative play development in the classroom? All narrative playworld episodes were filmed and analysed to answer the research question.

Following research ethics, at the beginning of the project, all participants, including teachers and children's parents/guardians, provided informed consent, in line with the university's ethical committee's requirements. For this study, it was essential to ensure the anonymity of all participants. All clues that allowed the participants or their schools to be identified were eliminated.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the following paragraphs, we present the most representative narrative play situations teachers found themselves in when organising playworlds. From many episodes, the five cases that best reflect teachers' experiences and their choices were selected for the analysis. During the activities described in these episodes, the teachers' actions determined the nature of the activity and the children's opportunities to act. We seek to determine what actions of the teachers determined whether the joint activity developed in the direction of play or teaching.

The first situation illustrates the teacher's actions typical for most teachers and children just starting the project when their playing skills are beginning to develop. The remaining episodes represent teachers' and children's actions that occurred at

any stage of project implementation and are not necessarily related to play skills. The fifth situation demonstrates the actions of experienced players, usually observed at the end of the project.

1. *The Rooster is gone! The importance of the main principles of the Narrative Play.*

In a group of 3-4-year-old children, a narrative playworld is based on the folktale "The Hen and the Rooster". The main characters communicate with children by sending letters, online calls or visiting the playground.

*The first letter from the rooster.* Under the teacher's guidance, the children discover the rooster's letter in the classroom and give it to the teacher. The children gather around the teacher, who holds the rooster's note in her hand. One boy notices the rooster's picture in the letter and tries to say: "chicken..."; but the teacher corrects him: "we are reading the letter now", and continues: "Dear children, I left to the forest." Turning the letter to the children. "Look, forest. Yes? He wrote the phone number here. Shall we call?". One child shyly says, "No". "We should call," – the teacher, without paying attention to the child's response, starts calling the rooster.

*The second letter from the rooster.* A teacher (in a hen's costume) reads a letter from a rooster found in the playground with the children. "Letter! Yes? – says the teacher-hen. "And a hint!" – she takes the rattle from the letter and asks: "what could it mean?" The children look confused and surprised, and the teacher starts rattling the rattle. "Music! Yes?" she prompts. Several children nod their heads. One child takes a rattle with a letter from the teacher's hands, but she takes it back after a second and continues to explain to the children: "Let's open the letter, read it, let's see what the rooster has written to us..." The children surround the teacher. "Let's take the letter and read it. You listen, listen with wide open eyes and ears, yes?" – And she continues reading the letter: "Dear children, I set out to pursue my dream! What could it mean?" – she asks the children and helps them by answering, "Music. Yes?" – the teacher points to a rattle. "I hope to see you soon" – the teacher reads the letter and shows the children a heart drawn in the letter. "A rooster is sending you a heart. Yes? And here is the rooster's signature" she finishes and looks questioningly at the children. The children show no interest and split up to play around the playground.

Such situations are usually observed at the beginning of the project when the teachers start implementing narrative play with the children. The teachers plan all the events in detail, including educational activities and try to enforce them at any cost. The final event of this narrative adventure was integrated with musical training when the children sang together with the music teacher and eventually found the rooster hiding among the musical instruments. Such an idea can work if it is born from collaborative play and is proposed by the children. For example, after searching

all possible places, the children suggest going in and checking the music hall, because they hear some noises from there... In the two episodes with letters, the teacher asked questions, answered them, and performed most of the actions. With such guidance, the children could only agree and follow; they had no other choices.

There was no *mutual dialogue*, which is necessary for narrative play. The teacher did not give the children time to hear, see and respond. Even in the few cases when the children reacted and suggested something, the teacher either did not hear or did not pay attention or, even worse, did the opposite. This happened twice while reading the first letter. Why didn't the teacher stop and listen to the reluctance of several children to call the rooster? Why didn't a few boys want to call? Maybe they were unsure, afraid, or perhaps they had another, better suggestion on how to find the rooster. Our observations confirm that most teachers do not tend to change their plans, and then the teacher's plan does not become a shared plan, which is precisely what happened in the second episode. The teacher's actions did not involve children and did not turn the activity into collaborative play.

Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) introduced the term "sustained shared thinking", meaning that the teacher and the child or children share the same objective for communication and thinking. We can talk about the lack of *sustained shared actions* in the playworld, which means that the teacher and the children do not share the same theme and motive for play.

Reading the second letter, the children were not allowed to discover the hints themselves and, more importantly, to decode them. From the video, it was clear that the children did not understand the tips in the letter and the teacher's comments, so it is not surprising that their faces showed no interest after reading the letter. They walked away to play, leaving the teacher alone and upset. The activity had no continuation and did not become a shared play activity.

Another common problem is that it is not well understood what it means to assume the role of a play character. In the second episode, the teacher has the attributes of a hen costume, but she does not act like a hen. She behaves like a teacher. In other words, she does not follow the rules of the chosen role, which is another necessary condition for narrative play. This signals to the children that the teacher doesn't play, and they just listen to the teacher and follow her instructions.

How different would the situation have been if the teacher had followed the requirements of narrative play? Following the principle of dialogue, the teacher would have done things much more slowly and completed only a tiny part of her plan but would have listened to the children and adjusted the plan based on their reactions and understanding. It would have involved most, if not all, of the children and gotten the children's ideas. Then, the plan made by the teacher would have been transformed into a joint plan for both children and teachers and would likely have encouraged collaborative play.

If the teacher were in-role position, it would have helped her give up the usual adult dominance and transform the guided activity into a shared play activity. The

in-role position limits the adult's ability to guide play activities and allows children to act and find solutions. The teacher becomes a play partner but not a guide.

2. *Who will bring carrots for the bunnies? What to do when there is no plan, but the children continue to play? HELP!*

In a group of 4-5-year-old children, a narrative playworld is based on the story-book "Doctor Dolittle".

The children receive a request for help from the tiny bunnies – they are hungry and freezing and cannot reach Doctor Dolittle. Children take a map and go to the forest with Mother Hare (teacher in role). They find a parcel from Doctor Dolittle (a box of carrots for the rabbits) and must take it to a specified place. After finding the place, Mother Hare calls her bunnies, but no one shows up. "Children," the Rabbit addresses the children, "It seems I have understood. It's very crowded and noisy. My bunnies got scared and ran into the forest." The children look around worriedly. "What to do now?" asks Mother Hare and takes the box with carrots from the boy carrying it. "Then maybe you, Mother Hare, can take the carrots?" – suggests another teacher and turns to the children: "Children, shall we trust the carrots to Mother Hare to bring them to the bunnies?" The boy, who found the parcel and carried it all the way, approaches Mother Hare and wants to take it back, saying: "I'll help you". "Me too," – another child joins him. But Mother Hare does not hand over the package: "I have a bracelet of courage. I am not afraid! I will carry the carrots to my family. OK?" asks Mother Hare. "I can help," says the same boy and tries to take the box from the Hare, but she does not give it. "Wish me luck," – he says to the kids and leaves for the forest. The narrative adventure stops for that day.

This is an end episode of an exhilarating narrative adventure. The two teachers were in role positions; the children were involved, motivated and ready to go on with the play. It was time to return to the kindergarten, and the teachers tried to stop the play. It is always a difficult task to come up with a good ending. In this example, the teachers did not allow the children to complete the task and deliver the carrots to the bunnies. In this case, this was the children's plan. Meeting with the bunnies was not a planned event. This happens in narrative playworlds, and even experienced teachers sometimes don't know what to do. However, this is play, and everyone should use their imagination. It is always best not to hide your confusion and ask the children: "wow, we can't find the bunnies! What should we do now?" Children often have good advice, but the idea of returning to the classroom and asking for help (principal, police, parents, etc.) and extending the search the next day is always a good solution. We observed that experienced players, both children and adults, usually say: "now we need some time to think".



What happened at the end of this episode? We can again talk about the teacher's adherence to the plan. Although this narrative adventure was very successful in all respects, its ending allows us to see how difficult it is to make a spontaneous decision when unexpected and unplanned things happen. The teacher's fear of handing the initiative to the children was often evident. The children came up with the idea of taking the carrots to the bunnies, so why not let them think about how to find them, plan, and discuss, and let the teachers just listen to the children's suggestions? The project's teachers often emphasised (Brédikytė, 2022) that they were surprised by children's ideas and creativity when they were given the opportunity. In this narrative play adventure, the final episode did not destroy the whole playworld. On the contrary, the children were so worried about the little bunnies and Mother Hare that they wrote a letter asking if everything went well. The teachers planned the next play adventure using the children's ideas.

### 3. *Teddy bear's birthday – staying in role saves the play activity!*

A group of 3-4-year-old children develop a narrative playworld based on a Winnie the Pooh storybook.

Winnie the Pooh (teacher in-role) comes to the classroom to celebrate his birthday. The children prepare a present for Winnie the Pooh – a cake. A large wax cake with a honeycomb is placed on the table in the classroom. Winnie the Pooh tries to take the honeycomb from the wax cake: "I want to taste it..." "You need a knife," a boy says, observing what Winnie the Pooh is doing (At that moment, Winnie the Pooh removes the honeycomb from the cake with his hands). The boy is surprised: "Oh, how is it?" Winnie the Pooh picks up the honeycomb with his hands, even though the boy says he needs a knife. "Oh... how delicious it is... and it smells so good!" – Winnie the Pooh, licking, looks at the children surrounding him. The children watch with interest. "What is this? Do you know what is here?" – asks Winnie the Pooh. "Here's honey," the children answer. "Honey? Oh, how delicious... Let's see where that honey is hidden. I can smell it, but how do I get it out? How do you get it out of here?" "With your fingers," suggests one child. "With fingers?" Winnie the Pooh is surprised. "And you eat with your fingers?" "No, we don't," answers one girl. "You don't eat with your fingers?" "And bears can eat with their paws?" The children shyly answer: "yes, no..." One by one, they try to reach the honey from the honeycomb with their fingers. "Can I taste?" – asks Winnie the Pooh hesitantly. "Yes, you need to take a bite!" – one girl exclaims. "Can I take a bite?" Winnie the Pooh asks. "Yes," confirms the girl. "Maybe I won't bite, maybe I'll just lick..." – Winnie the Pooh pretends to lick the honeycomb. "Hmm... very tasty. All the children gather around Winnie the Pooh and try to taste the honey with their fingers.

Reflecting on this episode, the teacher revealed that while she was in the Winnie the Pooh role position, she faced a dilemma: to let the children try the honey with their fingers or stop playing. The teacher admitted that it was challenging for her not to interrupt the play. We all noticed from the video that it was her, in the Winnie the Pooh role, who first took honeycomb with her paws. The teacher admitted that she was unaware and realised this only after watching the video material.

Many teachers participating in the project shared a similar experience. During play, there are often situations where characters behave “inappropriately” from the adult’s point of view. Since those characters are usually played by teachers, they constantly have a question: can a teacher in the play show inappropriate behaviour to children? But, in a play situation, it is not the teacher but the character who misbehaves. And can Winnie the Pooh, being a teddy bear, eat other than with his paws?

The teachers’ experiences revealed that it is not easy for them to understand the function of such episodes. On the one hand, they mirror children’s behaviour in the classroom. Children can observe familiar situations, actions, and conflicts from outside. They immediately become involved in solving those situations because it happens in the play. For young children, this becomes an invaluable experience; they constantly practice solving controversial situations.

Winnie the Pooh’s birthday episode footage revealed that the teacher managed to bring the children into collaborative play. Trying the honey with their fingers together with Winnie the Pooh (teacher in role position) became the most critical moment of togetherness, which helped create the community of players. In-role participation of the teacher was crucial for such young and inexperienced players. The teacher’s in-role actions involved all children in a shared play activity.

4. *The tail of the wolf* – following children’s emotional involvement and ideas helps to grasp the themes and topics children care about most and discover their favourite characters.

In this classroom, the children’s favourite book – Little Red Riding Hood – was chosen as the basis for the narrative playworld.

The teachers planned an introductory session for a group of 4-6-year-old children: they laid out picture books, the story’s main characters, and a basket with buns. They wanted to talk to the children about the fairy-tale and see how quickly they would recognise the objects in the environment. To keep the children interested, they hung a wolf’s tail in the doorway and played a recording of a wolf’s howl. When they came to the classroom, the children immediately paid attention: they began to watch the tail, listening to the sound of the howling. They did not dare to touch the tail, but they began to whisper: “wolf”. After these words, a four-year-old boy ran to the classroom window and excitedly began to shout: “Wolf, wolf, I saw him!” All the children crowded around the window and began to look through it. The teachers joined them and asked about the wolf the boy had seen. “Oh, oh, I can see his hair!” Ev-

everyone was very excited; they didn't stop talking about the wolf. After a while, some children announced that they saw as many as four wolves! When the children overcame their emotions, sat in a circle, and the teachers showed them a basket with buns, most of them were convinced that the wolf had brought buns to the group. From the children's reactions, it became clear that the main character of the next narrative adventure should be the wolf, not Little Red Riding Hood.

During the reflection, the teachers summarised that everything went differently than they had planned. But they were very unsure if this all went right. Did they do the right thing by following the children's ideas and not carrying out their planned activities? It was the right decision. It was just a preparation for the narrative play, and the teachers involved the children within minutes. The idea of the wolf's tail in the doorway was so successful. The decision not to follow the plan, but to listen to the children's ideas and rely on them when planning the play adventures, were the actions that led to collaborative narrative play.

#### *5. Solving moral dilemmas – the highest level of narrative play*

A dramatic event or a clash of opposing viewpoints is at the heart of any fairy-tale. It is precisely such clashes that attract children. Dramatic confrontations happen daily between children in the classroom; this is the reality they experience. Children love stories with events or characters they can identify with. It is not always possible to discover such a tale right away, but when it is found, it is accompanied by success in creating a playworld.

One of the most evident signs that the narrative playworld has enthralled children is when they spontaneously start creating adventures and continue not only in kindergarten but also at home, involving family members.

A three-year-old boy who avoided participating in narrative adventures tells his teacher how he and his father fought a witch, and all the characters from the playworld helped them: "Dad and I fought the witch like that (showing with his hand). We weren't afraid; Elle, the Scarecrow, and Woodcutter helped us!" The teacher noticed that the boy fearlessly participated in all the narrative adventures with other children after this episode.

In kindergarten, they invite the teacher and offer their ideas, and continue the play adventures in small groups with other children, actively participating and solving problems in a shared adventure.

In a group of 5-year-old children, in a narrative playworld, the main characters, two best friends – Hare and Hedgehog (teachers in-role), got into a very tense argument. The children tried to reconcile them. The characters' arguments and strong words continued for quite some time. The children tried

different ways to reconcile the quarrelling friends. Each child had something to say, and in the end, one five-year-old boy's words convinced everyone: "You could lose your lifelong friend FOREVER!" This argument stopped the angry Hare and Hedgehog. All the overexcited children became silent after these words.

Teachers avoid creating such tense situations and allowing children to deal with them. At the end of the project, when teachers and children had mastered narrative play, similar episodes emerged in all classrooms. The children increasingly took the initiative of creating the play adventures into their own hands, and the teachers began to trust the children and themselves more. With more and more play practice, teachers mastered the principle of being in-role. They began to see how their behaviour changes children's behaviour by giving them more opportunities to act and create. The teacher's in-role actions moved the playworlds forward and facilitated children's independent play.

Solving moral dilemmas is an essential requirement of the NEPL program. Only courageous teachers dare to create situations of moral choice, which usually reflect the relationships between the children in the classroom and the conflicts they must solve. El'koninova (2016) pointed out that performing a heroic deed motivates children in play. The playworlds with dramatic events where children must make moral choices to fight evil and defend good and justice are highly motivating and engaging for children. This is especially important for 3-6-year-old children who have already developed the initial skills of self-regulation in play activities. Participation in narrative playworlds requires volitional behaviour from children and contributes to personality growth.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our study aimed to identify the teachers' actions that determine the character of their joint activities with children while implementing the Narrative Play and Learning approach. In summary, we can say that the actions that support the development of collaborative play activity involve all participants, children and adults, and create a situation where the adult becomes a partner in children's play but does not guide the activity. Our research has revealed that following the basic principles of NEPL helps to choose such actions. If these principles are not followed, the teacher's activity becomes a didactic activity.

Of particular importance are:

- » Actions that help adults engage in shared play and support collaborative play development.
- » Actions that support a constant dialogue with children. It is essential to hear children and accept their suggestions without prioritising the adult's own plans.
- » Actions that help create the assumed play role. The role limits the adult's actions, forcing them to suppress their activity and not allowing them to lead the play.

- » Actions of improvisational character. The teachers should not be afraid to improvise; play actions must be spontaneous.

One more general conclusion from all the analysed cases is that the teacher's participation in the narrative play is a creative activity requiring constant improvisation. Children's reactions are always spontaneous and unpredictable; they do not know the teacher's plan, and play is created in the here and now.

We could discuss the NEPL programme as a *cultural tool* that helps an adult create and maintain favourable conditions for collaborative play to develop. Without following the principles of the programme, the play gradually transforms into adult-guided activity.

The narrative playworld is created by limiting the adult's leading role. The teachers observe, listen, and hear children's voices, notice their intentions, learn from children's improvisation, and follow the principles of a narrative playworld based on an inspiring and demanding heroic storybook. The playworld inspired by such a book can motivate children to perform heroic deeds. Any motivated action requires deliberate effort and helps in the formation of self-regulation. Children learn to achieve a set goal, although it is only a goal in play. Still, constantly playing, the child practices volitional behaviour and self-regulation, which will be necessary for him to cope with the challenges of the real world.

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#### DZIAŁANIA DOROSŁYCH WSPIERAJĄCE ŚWIAT ZABAW NARRACYJNYCH W KLASIE

**ABSTRAKT:** Niniejsze badanie jest częścią większego projektu Narrative Play and Learning (NEPL) realizowanego w ciągu trzech lat w przedszkolach w Wilnie na Litwie. Rola dorosłych w świecie zabaw narracyjnych jest kluczowa, ponieważ to ich działania determinują charakter i ciągłość aktywności zabawowych oraz motywację, zaangażowanie i możliwości działania dzieci. Niniejsze badanie jakościowe zgłębia zaangażowanie nauczyciela w świat zabaw narracyjnych i sprawdza, jakie czynności dorosłych przyczyniają się do rozwoju wspólnej zabawy. Wyniki pokazują, że działania przyczyniające się do rozwoju wspólnych zabaw angażują wszystkich uczestników - dzieci i dorosłych - i tworzą sytuację, w której dorosły staje się partnerem w zabawie dzieci, ale jej nie prowadzi. Wszystkie analizowane przypadki pokazują, że udział nauczyciela w zabawie narracyjnej jest działaniem twórczym i wymagają-

cym ciągłej improwizacji. Reakcje dzieci są zawsze spontaniczne i nieprzewidywalne; nie znają one planu nauczyciela, a narracyjny świat zabawy powstaje tu i teraz. Podsumowując, program NEPL, jako narzędzie kulturowe, pomaga dorosłym stworzyć i utrzymać sprzyjające warunki do rozwoju wspólnej zabawy.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** zabawy narracyjne, działania nauczyciela, pozycja w roli nauczyciela, improwizacja, indywidualny głos narracyjny