

# The pedagogue's participation in play is vital for children in vulnerable positions

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*Every child needs the experience of being a meaningful participant in communities of play. This is a crucial element in the Danish Strengthened Pedagogical Curriculum in from 2018. According to research, it is of crucial importance, particularly for children in vulnerable positions, that the pedagogic personnel participate in children's play. However, there are a variety of ways to participate. This article focuses on how pedagogues, through their choice of position in communities of play, can create good opportunities for the participation of children in vulnerable positions.*

This article is based on the Danish Strengthened Pedagogical Curriculum and the research project "Play in day care" (Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019). It presents a play model for choice of position in communities of play<sup>2</sup>. This model is introduced in relation to cases from everyday life in day care. The article concludes with questions for reflection concerning the development of the pedagogue's participation in play and inclusive playing environments.

## Focus on children in vulnerable positions in the Strengthened Pedagogical Curriculum

The Strengthened Pedagogical Curriculum focuses on the general development of pedagogical learning environments for all children and specifically for children in vulnerable positions. These children are defined as a complex group of children that can, for example, come from a lower socioeconomic background, have a physical or mental disability or be at risk for social exclusion etc. (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2018, p. 26).

One of the primary purposes of day care is to promote play and the children's perspectives as being fundamental to pedagogic learning environments (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2018, p. 7). The pedagogical foundation for Danish day care emphasises that relationships and friendships are crucial to children's wellbeing and development and that every child should have the experience of being a meaningful participant in the community of children.

It is highlighted that establishing a pedagogical environment for children in vulnerable positions is not about removing a single child from the general community of children. It is about supporting and challenging the children so that they achieve mastery in both child-initiated and adult-initiated play and activities (Ministry of Children and Education, 2018, p. 26).

At the same time, some children can find it "difficult to access communities of play, despite wishing to participate. Therefore, the pedagogical staff must continually switch between leading the child and supporting and shadowing the child with

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<sup>2</sup> A matrix developed in relation to a case study in a day care with many children in vulnerable positions.

the aim of supporting the child's participation in play communities" (Ministry of Children and Education, 2018, p. 28).

This quote is in line with the main point of the article: that the personnel's involvement in and choice of different positions in communities of play has considerable influence on children in vulnerable positions. The following research perspectives will further highlight this point.

### **What does research say about the pedagogue's involvement in children's play?**

Ditte Winther-Lindqvist and Lone Svinth from the Danish School of Education have developed a research overview, "Play in day care facilities", which gives insight into existing international research on the subject. This article draws on perspectives from the research overview.

In Nordic research, it is generally accepted that adults can enrich children's play when they actively participate in the play (Hakkarainen in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 31). Studies within the research overview reveal that adult participation in children's play is of great importance for children in vulnerable positions:

- It is essential that pedagogues support children in the important processes in communities of play in relation to power, hierarchies and positioning (Karrebæk in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 27-28).
- When pedagogues undertake different roles in the children's play, they support the children's common play and communication (Van Oers & Duijkers in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 32).

- The involvement of adults in children's play can strengthen the group of children and their relationships with each other – and this includes children in vulnerable positions (Reunamo et al. in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 31).
- The involvement of adults in play contributes to the children's sense of security, both for children in vulnerable positions and the other children in the group (Ruud in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 32).
- Adult-organised play in larger groups across genders can help prevent mechanisms of exclusion and promote mechanisms of inclusion in the group of children (Andrews et al. in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 32).

According to research, the pedagogic personnel overlook some of the opportunities that exist for beneficial involvement in children's play (Fleer in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth 2019, p. 33). At the same time, the adults' participation in children's play is complex, and when adults get involved in the play, there can be positive and negative consequences (Aras in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 32). Several studies point out some of the challenges that can arise when pedagogues get involved in children's play:

- Pedagogues do not engage themselves enough in the children's play and perspectives (Hedges & Cooper in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 29-39).
- The pedagogues have difficulty supporting the development of the children's common intentions within the play (Anderson in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 32).

- The adult's insistence on the involvement of other children in the play can lead to a loss of immersion and engagement in the play (Anderson in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 32).
- A framework for play that is heavily controlled by the adults restricts the children's participation in play (Singer et al. in Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 32).

Furthermore, several studies suggest a concern that the adults' involvement in children's play can result in the instrumentalization of the play so that it primarily becomes a tool for learning, (Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 33). There can be "major consequences when an agenda for learning is imposed too strongly on children's play. The essence of play is happiness and freedom, and both factors risk getting lost if the play becomes a means of achieving specific skills" (Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2019, p. 33).

In an article based on the above-mentioned research overview, Lone Svinth finds it problematic that the pedagogical staff do not involve themselves enough in children's play due to a fear of controlling or destroying their play. This is challenging as "research shows that there are in fact many children with a need for the adults to get involved in play if these children are to gain fruitful experiences of playing" (Svinth in Henriksen, 2019, p. 2). She suggests that the pedagogues focus on how they as adults can get involved in children's play, rather than on whether or not they should get involved at all. This is a significant argument for the importance of a conscious professionalism and reflection as to how pedagogues participate in communities of play, which is the keynote for the following section of the article.

### **The pedagogue's choice of position in play communities**

As discussed above, research has shown that there are pedagogic opportunities in communities of play to create participation for children in vulnerable positions. The research also suggests that it can be challenging for pedagogic personnel to involve themselves in children's play in constructive ways. The following model of play has been developed as a concrete tool for navigating the magical universe of play while respecting both the essence of play and the children's perspectives. The development of the model is based on a case study that involved the analysis of video recordings of communities of play in a day care facility that had a large number of children in vulnerable positions. The model can be used to support the personnel in their continuous choice of position in play communities in everyday life as well as to analyse and reflect on the development of pedagogic play and learning environments in day care.

The horizontal axis indicates to what extent it is either the children's or the personnel's initiatives that are at the foreground of the play community. The vertical axis indicates to what degree the pedagogic personnel are positioned inside or outside the context of play. The model contains four different fields and four different positions where the pedagogic personnel can choose to position themselves in the community of play. Each of the four positions has value in relation to creating varied participation and learning opportunities for the children. The key is the variation, the interaction, the dynamics, and the continuous change between the different positions, along with the co-operation between colleagues in different positions. The arrows in the matrix, which connect the four fields, illustrate this (Bork, 2015, p. 90).

### Play model for choice of positions in communities of play



(Bork, 2015, p. 59)

Next, the four positions and their essential characteristics are described in more detail through cases<sup>3</sup>, where a pedagogue chooses the position in question and creates opportunities for children in vulnerable positions to participate.

In these cases, concepts are also used to describe the personnel's positioning such as, "adult of immersion", "adult with an overview" and the "practical adult"<sup>4</sup>. These terms describe how the personnel organise themselves and have different tasks and responsibilities throughout a typical day (Iversholt, L. & Toft, C., 2012, p. 62.) This organising influences the personnel's opportunities to participate in the children's communities of play.

<sup>3</sup> The cases, which are fictive, have been constructed on the basis of pedagogues' narratives from practical experiences,

#### Instructor of the play

This position is regarded as an **instructor of the play**, much like a football coach who is positioned off the football field and is instructing the players. The personnel are on the sidelines of the actual play and are framing, guiding and supporting the playing children.

The personnel's initiatives are in the **foreground** so that the pedagogue chooses the framing, themes and content of the play and attempts to connect the children to these initiatives.

The personnel are **positioned outside the context of the play** so that the pedagogue is not participating in the play but communicates rather in "the real world" as a staff member.

The following is a case where a pedagogue chooses a position as an *instructor of the play* and creates opportunities for participation for William, a boy who is in a vulnerable position. This is an open community of play in the playground, where all children can participate, with circus being the play theme.

#### Circus case: The pedagogue as instructor

*"Come and join the circus," calls the pedagogue from the big green area. The pedagogue is "the adult of immersion" in the playground.*

*A group of children come running and want to join in. The pedagogue guides them to sit in "the stand" first. The pedagogue then asks who would like to be*

video recordings and my experience as a consultant in the area of day care.

<sup>4</sup> The terms have been developed by educator Lene Iversholt, University College Lillebælt.

*the circus director, to which a boy and a girl both volunteer. "Super," says the pedagogue, "then we have two circus directors."*

*She asks the other children what they would like to be in the circus, and there are dogs, sea lions, line dancers, clowns and magicians. "We will start by practicing our show, and then we can ask if there is anyone who wants to come and see it," says the pedagogue. She helps the directors introduce the circus, which they do with a little help as to who will say what and when.*

*The colleague who has the role as "the adult with overview", comes along with a boy and says: "William needs someone to play with. Can he be in your circus?" Yes, William can join, and the colleague walks away again. The pedagogue asks if William would like to be a circus dog, along with Adam and Sofia. William would like to be a dog.*

*The pedagogue is guiding the circus directors to introduce the performers to the stage. First, they introduce the dogs, which are running about on the stage. William is standing and watching. The pedagogue asks if the dogs can do other tricks, such as give a paw, and then all the dogs give a paw to the directors and get "dog biscuits" in return. The pedagogue guides the directors in getting everybody to clap for the dogs. Everyone applauds, and the next act on the stage is the line dancers.*

*When everyone has been on the stage, the pedagogue says that the children can go and ask who would like to see their next performance, which starts in 10 minutes. William runs off with Adam.*

### **Reflections on the circus case**

In this example, the pedagogue's involvement in the circus play, the staff's choice of positions and their cooperation as an "adult of immersion" and

an "adult with an overview" was imperative to William's participation in the play community.

The colleague who had the role as "adult with an overview" had seen that William was wandering alone in the playground for some time. The same colleague had also noticed that the "adult of immersion" had initiated a circus play. She then asks William if he would like to come and watch the circus, and he agrees. During the circus play, the pedagogue invites William to join, offering him a role as a dog along with Adam and the others. She is aware that William enjoys playing with Adam and that he himself has a dog at home he is very fond of.

When the dogs are on stage, William is standing watching, and the pedagogue asks if the dogs can give a paw. William has in fact talked about how he is training his dog to give a paw at home.

In the position as *instructor of the play*, it is primarily the pedagogue who initiates, frames and chooses the theme and the content of the play. The pedagogue does not participate in the play itself but facilitates the communication and supports the children in choosing and negotiating the roles in the play, as well as continuously guiding and inspiring the circus directors, artists and animals as to what is now happening during the circus performance.

The pedagogic personnel can continuously choose different positions based on the needs within the play itself and the needs of the children. The pedagogue in the circus play could have chosen, for example, to be a playing coach as the circus director from the start, or she could have played the role of a circus dog, along with William, Adam and Sofia. We will now take a closer look at the position of a *playing coach in the play*.

### **Playing coach in the play**

This position is described as a **playing coach**, who, like a football trainer, plays on the football field and at the same time has a special role in guiding, supporting and instructing the other players.

**The personnel's initiatives are in the foreground** so that the pedagogue chooses the framing, themes and content of the play and attempts to connect the children to these initiatives.

The pedagogue is **positioned inside the play context** and participates in the community of play and communicates within the playing universe based on the pedagogue's own role in the play.

An example that demonstrates the position of a *playing coach in the play* can be seen in this playgroup, where a pedagogue initiates a project "Vet –play" with her group of children. In this group, there is Peter, a boy who is often in a vulnerable position, but this morning he becomes a meaningful participant in the play community.

### **The Vet case: Pedagogue as playing coach**

*A pedagogue and a group of children are eating fruit in their group room. "When we are finished eating fruit, the veterinary clinic will open, so if there are any animals that are sick or feeling unwell, they can come to the vet in a little while. And today it is Peter and I that are the vets." Shortly thereafter Peter and the pedagogue begin setting up the veterinary clinic in the middle of the room, lining up the chairs in a square formation to mark the counter all the way around the clinic. Peter and the pedagogue stand behind the counter.*

*Peter announces loudly: "So the vet is open." Soon a girl appears with a teddy bear. The pedagogue says: "Hello, what can I do for you?" The girl explains that the teddy has a stomach ache. Peter examines the teddy and gives it some medicine, and the teddy is well again. Then a boy comes crawling along and says, "Meow, meow." The cat has been in a fight and has a lot of scratches, so it gets its wounds cleaned and gets some plasters. There are now many sick animals in the queue and conflicts arise among the children, who are standing very close together.*

*The pedagogue says in her role as the vet: "Look, you can take a number here so you know whose turn is next." She finds a little block of post-its, writes numbers on them and goes around the children offering them to take a number. Now, both Peter and the pedagogue are examining and treating the pets and writing prescriptions for medicine.*

*At one point, Peter sits down at a table and begins drawing and cutting. The pedagogue assumes it is because he needs a break and she continues playing in the veterinary clinic.*

*After a while, Peter calls the pedagogue and asks her to help him put rubber bands on the operation mask, which he has drawn and cut out. He is then ready to operate on the animals, and the play continues for a long time.*

### **Reflections on the veterinary case**

In this example, the pedagogue is involved in the playing community by having a role as a vet, along with Peter. This central role as a vet creates unique opportunities to frame and support Peter's participation as well as the interactions among the children.

Peter has quite a lot of conflicts with the other children, often because they do not do as he wishes and the play does not turn out as he had imagined it should. As a result, many of the children are afraid of Peter and do not wish to play with him.

The pedagogue is focused on creating communities of play in his/her group of children, where Peter's resources come into play, and this allows new patterns to develop in the interactions among the children. Therefore, she has chosen animals and a veterinary practice as a theme for their project, as Peter is very knowledgeable about animals and can draw all sorts of animals. The pedagogue has clearly outlined the area for the project, using chairs as the counter, as Peter needs clear boundaries. As a result, it is clear to Peter and the other children that in the area behind the chairs the vets are in charge and on the other side of the chairs, the other children are in charge.

The pedagogue has a plan that Peter can be the vet again tomorrow, along with Elena, with whom he sometimes sits and draws. The pedagogue will continue to be the *playing coach in the play*, but this time as a customer at the veterinary clinic. She remains close to the play, giving her the opportunity to support the children both inside and outside the veterinary clinic. In this way, the pedagogue as *playing coach in the play* can continuously choose how central a role she wishes to take in the play. Different roles provide different opportunities to influence the play and the interactions amongst the children.

The pedagogue can also choose to change position to be *co-player in the play*, where she continues as part of the play, but where the children's initiatives are in the foreground. We will now explore the position as *co-player in the play*.

### Co-player in the play

The personnel are now co-players, like a football player who participates equally with the other players on the field.

The personnel are **positioned within the play context**, so the pedagogue participates in the play community and communicates within the playing universe based on the pedagogue's own role in the play.

**The children's initiatives are in the foreground** so the pedagogue follows, explores and supports the children's initiatives and perspectives and tries to connect with the children's communication and themes in the play. community.

The following section describes a case, where the pedagogue chooses a position as *co-player in the play*. It describes a pretend play of family, which takes place in the doll corner, where a pedagogue visits as a guest along with a girl, Sara, who is often in a vulnerable position.

### Playing Family case: Pedagogue as co-player

*It is the afternoon at the day care. In the doll corner, four girls and two boys are playing a pretend play of family, with a mother, a father, a dog, a baby, a big sister, and a big brother. Sara comes over and asks if she can join in. "No," says the girl who is the mother in the family. Sara sometimes plays with the boy, who is the dog, so she asks him if she can be the dog. The mother says: "Get out." Sara stands in the doorway and looks around before going out and walking around the hallway for a while.*

*A pedagogue notices that Sara looks sad and asks if she is upset about something. Sara begins to cry and says: "Nobody wants to play with me." The pedagogue sits for a while with Sara talking about*

*what has happened and reflects that Sara wants so much to join the family play in the doll corner. The pedagogue asks Sara if she has any ideas as to what they can do about it. Sara asks the pedagogue if he will go with her to the doll corner. "I would love to," he says. "I would like to be the granddad. What do you want to be?" Sara would like to be a big sister.*

*They go together to the doll corner. The pedagogue asks: "May granddad and big sister come and visit you today?" The mother says that it today is not suitable. "What do you have to do today?" asks the pedagogue. The mother says that they must go on a trip. "May granddad and big sister come with you on your trip?" asks the pedagogue. The mother says that they already have a big sister. "Yes, you already have a big sister in your family, so Sara is actually the cousin to your big sister. Can granddad and cousin Sara go with you on your trip?" asks the pedagogue. "Okay," says the mom.*

*They all go on a trip together, where they have a nice packed lunch. Sara is allowed to go on a walk with the dog, and then it is time to fish. When they come home from the trip, granddad asks if cousin Sara can stay the night, until he can come and pick her up again at 12 o'clock the next day. She is welcome to stay. Granddad leaves and when he comes back again a while later, Sara is still part of the play community.*

### **Reflections on the Playing Family Case**

In this example, the pedagogue has the role of "adult of immersion" this afternoon and has the opportunity to participate in the playing community and create good participation options for Sara, who is often in a vulnerable position. Sara lives with a foster family and has had many experiences of being rejected in the past. She often gets upset and begins to cry while at day care, saying that nobody likes her or that nobody wants to play with her.

The pedagogue chooses the position as *co-player in the play* when he participates in the role as grandfather. This means that the children's initiatives and perspectives are in the foreground, and the pedagogue respects both the story and the framework of the play that the children have created together in the doll corner. Furthermore, the pedagogue attempts to find openings in the play and to be explorative in relation to finding chances for participation for him and Sara, but it is ultimately the children in the doll corner who agree to their joining the play.

The involvement of the pedagogue, his communication through his role within the universe of the roleplay, and his position of a *co-player in the play* offer particularly good opportunities to help the children to negotiate the roles and to frame and set the boundaries for the play among themselves. There are also good opportunities to facilitate the participation of children in vulnerable positions and simultaneously support the interactions among all the children.

Finally, the pedagogue chooses to retreat from the play, but he does this while continuing as a *co-player in the play*, as the granddad goes home and returns again the next day at 12 o'clock to collect Sara, which all the children accept. This decision is based on a wish to create new chances and to strengthen Sara's participation in the children's own play communities so that she herself can experience a feeling of achievement.

The pedagogue could also have chosen to completely withdraw from the play by choosing a position as *observer of the play*, with the chance to observe from the side lines and see how it goes with the play community and with Sara's participation. We will now examine the position of *observer of the play*.



### **Observer of the play**

Personnel act as **observers** on the side lines and are observant of the children's own play communities.

The personnel are **positioned outside the context of the play**, as the pedagogue does not participate or have a role in the play itself.

**The children's initiatives are in the foreground**, and the children themselves determine the themes, participants, framing etc. in the play community. When the personnel communicate with the children from this position, they are exploring the children's own initiatives, perspectives, and the themes the children have chosen in the play community.

The following is a case from the playground, where a pedagogue chooses the position as *observer of the play*, paying close attention to the children who are in vulnerable positions and their participation in the play communities.

### **The Playground case: Pedagogue as observer**

*A pedagogue is an "adult with an overview" and is walking around the playground at lunchtime. Some children are playing on the pirate ship. One of them tells the pedagogue that they have to find the treasure. The pedagogue asks where the treasure is. They do not know because they have to find the treasure map first. The pedagogue wishes them luck and continues walking around the playground.*

*"Will you swing me?" shouts Patricia from the swings. The pedagogue says that he will give her three big pushes on the swing, and then he has to go down to the campfire hut. They count together: "one, two, three," and then the pedagogue walks*

*away again. Patricia comes running after him and takes his hand.*

*The pedagogue and Patricia walk together down to the campfire hut, where some children are loudly arguing: "We were here first." "No, it was us." The pedagogue asks what they are playing. One group of children are a family that are on a trip and are sleeping in the campfire hut. The other group are pretending to be Indians who live in a hut, but they have just been away hunting. The pedagogue asks what they can do, and the Indians say that the family can live with them in the hut until the next day. The family accept the offer, and the pedagogue and the girl continue their walk around the playground.*

*The pedagogue asks Patricia what she would like to play. "I don't know," she says. They go over to the sandpit where a pedagogic assistant, who has the role of "adult of immersion", is sitting and digging in the sand along with some children. "Hi, Patricia. Would you like to join in building some houses and a whole town here in the sandpit?" asks the pedagogic assistant. "Okay," says Patricia and she sits down next to the adult.*

*The pedagogue continues towards the forest. He can see that there is a boy who has wet his pants, so the pedagogue brings him to the other pedagogue, who has the role of "the practical adult". She takes the boy to the bathroom. Another boy comes running and says that Amina is teasing him. The pedagogue goes with the boy into the forest where a group of children are climbing the trees. Ali is sitting up in a tree with one shoe missing and is crying. Amina has run off. The pedagogue helps Ali down from the tree and asks what has happened. Ali tells him that Amina pulled off one of his shoes and that he almost fell down. Ali calms down again, puts on his shoe and is ready to climb the trees with the others again. The pedagogue says that he will talk to Amina when he sees her.*

*The pedagogue continues around the playground. Now he is at the pirate ship again, where the children have found the treasure map and are now in the process of finding the treasure. He finds Amina, who is on the swing with another girl. He asks her what happened in the forest. Amina tells him that Ali was about to destroy the hideout she was building and that she had told him to stop, but he just kept going. The pedagogue says that he will tell Ali that when he sees him. Amina continues to swing with the other girl.*

*The pedagogue continues walking around the playground. When he comes back to the forest, he tells Ali what Amina had said. "It was just because I had to get down from the tree," says Ali.*

### **Reflections on the Playground case**

In this position as an *observer of the play*, the pedagogue observes the children, the communities of play and the children's interactions with each other. When he gets involved with the children and the communities of play, he is positioned outside the context of the play. He is inquisitive and supportive concerning the children's own initiatives, which are in the foreground.

As an "adult with an overview", he has a particular focus and task regarding the children who are in vulnerable positions. Patricia is often in a vulnerable position when she plays alone or in the periphery of the community of children. The pedagogue is aware that the pedagogical assistant is playing in the sandpit and brings Patricia there. Patricia is invited into the community of play and now has the comfort of an adult who is immersed in the play and supports the children's interactions.

Amina and Ali are often in vulnerable positions, as they both tend to drop out of communities of play because of conflicts with the other children. Ali has a pattern where he begins to cry and stops playing. Amina often hits others when there is a conflict and then runs away from the community of play.

The pedagogue chooses to connect with Ali so that he calms down and begins to play again. When he finds Amina on the swing with another girl, he listens to her perspectives. He chooses to speak to them individually, as he evaluates that having peace and companionship while on the swing are more important for Amina here and now, and Ali is climbing the trees again with the other children.

Perhaps the pedagogue will continue the conversation with Amina about Ali not intending to destroy her hideout but just wanting to get down from the tree. At some point, the pedagogue may speak to them both – perhaps from the position as *instructor of the play*, where his initiatives and perspectives are in the foreground, and he introduces his values and wishes regarding what they can do when conflicts arise in the communities of play.

The position as *observer of the play* gives the pedagogue a chance to observe and get insight into what the children are interested in and their interactions with each other: What are the children preoccupied with at this time? What are they playing? Who are they playing with? Who has difficulty being a part of the communities of play? How do they negotiate and solve conflicts?

Seen from this angle, the children's own communities of play can be regarded as a pedagogic laboratory, where the personnel can get relevant feedback about their pedagogic efforts and also be enlightened about the following:

Which processes of exclusion and inclusion can be seen in the interactions between the children?

Can any traces of adult-organised communities of play be identified, such as the games with rules that the adults are in the process of teaching the children or the play pirate workshop that was set up in morning?

Do the pedagogic efforts in the communities of play create better opportunities for children in vulnerable positions to participate in the children's own communities of play?

This feedback can be used as a starting point for reflection in the personnel group and for the further development of the pedagogic efforts and the personnel's participation in play.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have suggested how pedagogues can be exploratory regarding their own and their colleagues' practices concerning children's play. I have focused on how the model for choice of positions in communities of play can be used in reflecting on one's own participation in play and how to support the opportunities for participation in play for children in vulnerable positions.

Pedagogues make many decisions in everyday life in day care about how they will involve themselves in communities of play. These decisions are of particular relevance for children in vulnerable positions and for their chance to be meaningful participants in communities of play.

Children in vulnerable positions may need to be supported in many different ways in communities of play. There is a need for adults who are *instructors of the play* and *playing coaches in the play* in adult-initiated communities of play, e.g. play workshops with smaller groups, or

communities of play that are open to all children. There is also a need for adults who participate as *co-players in the play* staying close to the children and offering flexible support in both the play and interactions among the children. There is a need for adults who act as *observers of the play* in the children's own play communities, focusing on what is needed here and now and in the future development of the pedagogic efforts in relation to children in vulnerable positions.

As a consultant and an educator in day care, I use the play model alongside the personnel's narratives from practice and/or video recordings. This creates a nuanced basis for reflections and the development of pedagogic play and learning environments.

Many personnel groups experience a particular need to strengthen the position of *co-player in the play* in order to become more involved in the play while respecting the children's perspectives. At the same time, many personnel find it challenging to enter the context of the play itself. The video recordings of the personnel's participation can be particularly useful for further exploration and reflection and serve as a basis for strengthening their repertoire of involvement in children's play.

The play model for choice of positions in communities of play presented here can serve as a dynamic tool for reflection and development and contribute to:

- Strengthening the personnel's professional consciousness when choosing positions in communities of play.
- Qualifying the pedagogic personnel's ability to navigate and involve themselves in the magical universe of play together with the children while also respecting the essence of play and the children's perspectives.

- Creating variation and quality in playing environments in day care so that all children have good opportunities to participate in different types of communities of play.

### Questions for reflection and dialogue

The following questions can be used for reflection in the personnel group or for educational purposes for students of pedagogy based on the play model that has been presented. On the next page, an enlarged version of the play model is presented, which can be used with these questions:

- Using a concrete example, explain how your participation in play has made a difference to a child in a vulnerable position. To what extent were you *instructor, playing coach, co-player* or *observer*?
- Are there any children in your day care who do not experience being meaningful participants in communities of play? If so, how can you create new opportunities for the participation of these children through your choice of positions in the communities of play?
- Which position does your day care need to strengthen the most to ensure that all children have good opportunities for play?

### Literature

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## Play model for choice of positions in communities of play



(Bork, 2015, p. 59)