Playing practices in school-age childcare: An action research project in Sweden and England

Eva Kane
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To

Ingrid, Billy, Ziggy, Jupp, Theo, Paul and Lilo
for playing with me!

and to

“Axel”, “Helena” and “Rosie”, “Vicky”,
“Natasha”, “Tanya”, “Bill” and “David”
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To play fully and imaginatively is to step sideways into another reality, between the cracks of ordinary life. Although that ordinary world, so full of cumbersome routines and responsibilities, is still visible to us, its images, strangely, are robbed of their powers. Selectively, players take the objects and ideas of routine life and hold them aloft. Like wilful children, they unscrew reality or rub it on their bodies or toss it across the room. Things are dismantled and built anew. (Henricks, 2006, p. 1)

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Contents – Part one: Playing practices among school-age childcare staff

1. **Introduction**........................................................................................................................................... 13
   - The aim of the research............................................................................................................................... 16
   - Overview of dissertation.............................................................................................................................. 17

2. **Practice traditions in school-age childcare**...................................................................................... 19
   - Terminology................................................................................................................................................ 19
   - National contexts of the practice traditions............................................................................................. 20
   - Play as an outcome of school-age childcare............................................................................................ 23
   - Summary of practice traditions.................................................................................................................. 25

3. **Perspectives on play**.......................................................................................................................... 27
   - The being of play....................................................................................................................................... 27
   - The why, how and what of play................................................................................................................... 28
   - From the being of play to the play of being.............................................................................................. 30
   - Summary of perspectives on play.............................................................................................................. 32

4. **Previous research on practice and play in school-age childcare**....................................................... 35
   - Research on practice in leisure-time centres.......................................................................................... 35
   - Practice in a field of tension.................................................................................................................... 36
   - Child-centred practice.............................................................................................................................. 37
   - Research on playwork practice............................................................................................................... 37
   - Tracing play practices in school-age childcare research....................................................................... 38
   - Practice facilitating play as social competence....................................................................................... 39
   - Practice facilitating play as freely chosen behaviour............................................................................. 40
   - Practice facilitating play as participation............................................................................................... 41
   - Practice facilitating play as exploration of agency.................................................................................. 42
   - Practice facilitating play as emergence and becoming......................................................................... 42
   - Summary of practice and play in school-age childcare........................................................................ 43

5. **Theoretical frame of reference**.......................................................................................................... 45
   - Practice architectures............................................................................................................................... 45
   - Action research as practice-changing practice....................................................................................... 47
   - Socially shared knowledge....................................................................................................................... 49
   - Becoming and territorialisation............................................................................................................... 50
   - Summary of the theoretical framework.................................................................................................. 52
6. Research design and methods ........................................ 55
   Action research design and collaborators ................................ 55
   Data ............................................................................. 61
   Methods of analysis ..................................................... 64
      Analysis of socially shared knowledge ................................ 64
      Analysis using concepts from Deleuze and Guattari .......... 66
   Values and ethics ........................................................ 69
      Opening up safe space ............................................... 70
      Working together (and apart) ...................................... 72

7. Summary of the articles ............................................... 75
   Article 1. Making Magic Soup – the facilitation of play in school-age childcare ......... 75
   Article 2. Becoming-player in school-age childcare ................................................. 77
   Article 3. ‘What If? As If’, an approach to action research practice: Becoming-different in school-age childcare ......................................................... 79

8. Discussion and concluding remarks ................................ 83
   Play facilitation ............................................................ 83
   Play practice architectures ........................................... 85
   Playing can disturb play practice architectures ...................... 87
   Playing cannot be facilitated ........................................... 88
   Mapping playing practices in school-age childcare – concluding remarks ... 89
   Limitations and future research ...................................... 90

9. Swedish summary ......................................................... 93
   Introduktion ................................................................ 93
   Teoretisk inramning ...................................................... 94
   Frågeställningar ........................................................ 95
   Metod och data .......................................................... 95
   Fynd och sammanfattande diskussion ................................ 96

10. References ..................................................................... 99

11. Appendix 1 ................................................................. 111
Part two: Articles

This dissertation is based on the following articles:


Reprints have been made with the permission of the respective publishers http://www.tandfonline.com and https://journals.hioa.no/index.php/rerm. The articles will be referred to in the text as ‘Making Magic Soup’, ‘Becoming-player’ and ‘What If? As If’.
1. Introduction

An increasing proportion of children in Sweden and England attend school-age childcare. This means that schoolchildren’s leisure time is becoming increasingly regulated by the settings which provide this service (Cohen, Moss, Petrie & Wallace, 2004, p. 6). Playing is a common part of children's leisure time (Haglund & Anderson, 2009, p. 123), and with leisure time being spent in school-age childcare settings, time and space for play could now also be part of what school-age childcare attempts to provide. This, in turn, means that staff will have the responsibility to provide for, supervise and facilitate play. School-age childcare’s overall aim is to support children and their families and in Sweden also to complement school by stimulating pupils’ overall development (The Swedish National Agency for Education [SNAE], 2014a). Whatever the aim of the service, it will probably influence school-age childcare staff’s understanding of what facilitating play may mean. In English school-age childcare settings (out-of-school clubs) with a playwork ethos (see below), this influence seems explicit and pronounced (SkillsActive, 2014), while in Swedish school-age childcare (leisure-time centres), play seems to be a taken-for-granted activity and not very much talked about (SNAE, 2007). In both countries, school-age childcare is a service that is increasingly becoming part of what schools offer.

If play is understood as activities players themselves initiate and control (Garvey, 1977; Henricks, 2008; Huizinga, 1949), which other research also suggests is how children themselves define play (Einarsdottir, 2014, p. 326), then to facilitate these types of activities may not be an easy task. In a setting that is part of an institutional environment with clearly identified learning targets children should be working towards, it may be even harder. One of the barriers to play identified by the consultation that eventually led to a general comment on Article 31 in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which enshrines the right to play, was the “excessive pressure for educational achievement” (IPA, 2010, p. 10). In this climate of academic pressure in society at large and specifically in schools, there are signs that time and space for play are becoming restricted (Lester & Russell, 2008, 2010). UK research suggests that children as well as staff in school-age childcare settings in schools struggle to resist a school culture which imposes limitations on playing, whether by teacher surveillance or through the implicit culture of the space (Smith, 2010; Smith & Barker, 2000a). The term “schoolification” used mainly about preschool is also being used about school-age childcare
Schoolification in this case suggests that the settings which are part of school become colonised by a discourse about pupils and learning in contrast to the previous understanding of services designed to care for children. Henricks (2008, p. 167) stated that already Huizinga (1949) had argued that “too much regulation – by schools . . . destroys the play spirit”. Øksnes, Knutas, Ludvigsson, Falkner and Kjær (2014, p. 120) point to the emphasis on democracy and participation in the governing documents for school-age childcare in Norway, Sweden and Denmark as a way for staff to question the academic pressure and instead offer children rich play experiences and allow children to play just for fun.

Having experience both of playwork and leisure-time centres, my research aimed to explore, in collaboration with staff, how to think about and do play facilitation in school-age childcare practice. Exploring would include disturbing taken-for-granted practices and change not only what was said and done in terms of play facilitation but also how, since what is said and done and how one relates hang together in practices (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 31). This suggested an action research design where the development of knowledge and the change of social systems are simultaneous (Drummond and Themessl-Huber, 2007, p. 432).

The general picture of research on school-age childcare as well as playwork is that it is limited (Petrie, Egharevba, Oliver & Poland, 2000; Persson, 2008; Russell, 2013; Saar, Löfdahl & Hjalmarsson, 2012; Smith & Barker, 2000b; SNAE, 2012). There is even less research with play or the facilitation of play in school-age childcare as its focal point. Instead, the focus has been on education, care and leisure (Haglund & Andersson, 2009; Højlund, 2002; Palsdottir, 2012; Rohlin, 2012) rather than play. Persson (2008) argues that early years education has claimed play as one of its focus areas, and this is also evident in research. Since the focus of the early years curricula has shifted from play to learning (Broadhead & Burt, 2012, p. 18; Öhman, 2011, p. 16), researchers and staff have tried to find ways to understand and work with the learning–playing relationship. It seems that most of the early years research identifies play and learning as simultaneous even within diverse theoretical frameworks (Grieshaber & Mc Ardle, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2014; Moyles, 2010; Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2007), and this may have been the reason for the relatively large amount of research on different “play pedagogies”. The way play can be conceptualised outside formal classroom time in school-based school-age childcare in both Sweden and England does not always have to be connected to learning. This has been the reason for only including early years play research that provides alternative conceptions of play.

The school-age childcare settings collaborated with in the action research project were all school based in both Sweden and England. The fears that schoolification would reduce time for play in school-age childcare, in
combination with the lack of a professional language (Elofsson, 2008) on play in Swedish school-age childcare, were interesting aspects when considering play facilitation. In the English schools, staff were employed part-time exclusively to work in school-age childcare, yet the settings shared school premises and this seemed to lead to tensions relating to children’s play behaviour (Smith & Barker, 2000a). This opened up other issues when trying to think about and do play facilitation.

There are, on the other hand, also signs that play is recognised as a valuable part of school-age childcare in both countries. The 2010 national report by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (SSI, 2010) recognises play as a basic component of school-age childcare. The report, however, identifies that children are often left to their own devices, thus playing without, what the report considers, appropriate adult support, and when a member of staff intervenes, they often disturb the playing children with instructions or reprimands. Facilitating play in school-age childcare in Sweden is not only understood as a way of ensuring that children experience their leisure time as meaningful but is also considered a way to develop and practice social competence (SNAE, 2014a, p. 34). My involvement, prior to this research, with school-age childcare in the United Kingdom made me aware of school-age childcare settings that have a playwork ethos and employ only playwork-trained staff rather than those with a childcare or youth work qualification. According to the sector skills council for the profession in the United Kingdom:

Playwork is a highly skilled profession that enriches and enhances provision for children’s play. It takes place where adults support children’s play but is not driven by prescribed education or care outcomes. (SkillsActive, 2014)

These two examples of staff’s practice requirements both talk about supporting children’s play yet may be based on very different conceptions of play and lead to different ways of facilitating children’s play. Henricks (2008, p. 170) argues that “play can be viewed in different lights, can be organised in different ways, and can be applied to different purposes”. The different ways of facilitating play or providing space (time as well as social, physical, cultural and emotional environments [Lester & Russell, 2010]) for play as part of school-age childcare practice are in this dissertation called play practices. This will be explored in chapters 4, 5 and 8.

Some researchers consider thinking and doing “intertwined” (Gale, 2014, p. 667). This is a belief that theory and practice, investigation and action, are simultaneous, neither more valued than the other. Play facilitation (play practices) may be deemed such an intertwined project of school-age childcare staff’s practice. How staff think and talk about play, how they do it (or facilitate it) and how they relate to people and forces that are playing or being played with all hang together in “cultural-discursive, material-economic and
social-political arrangements” that Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 31) call practice architectures. This concept will be further elaborated in chapter 5.

Practices enable the schooling of would-be practitioners and their introduction into communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). “Schooling”, Kemmis (2006, p. 465) argues, is when we conform to “existing social, economic and discursive orders”. Conformity in this way may be explicit, as suggested in playwork, where there is a well-articulated discourse (sayings), defined ideas about the role of materials and resources (doings) and clear expectations about how to behave (relating) in the practice. Conformity may also be implicit in situations when staff are expected to know what to do after having been asked to observe “how we do things”. Whether conformity is explicit or implicit, the practice is likely to become socially shared knowledge, “knowledge that we take more or less for granted and accept without questioning in everyday activities and talk” (Marková, Linell, Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2007, p. 19). Exploring the practices of facilitating play involved questioning the taken for granted, to disturb its sayings, doings and relating. Disturbance here means a change in arrangements or orders (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015). Whether the disturbance is initiated by exploring either concepts (cultural-discursive) or new ways of doing things (material or social), it would involve change. The idea that the social world can only be understood by trying to change it is fundamental to action research (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003, p. 15), and this is the research design chosen. Action research will be further elaborated in chapter 5.

What emerged during the action research was not only that taken-for-granted understandings of play were disturbed but also that my attempts and those of my participating school-age childcare staff to categorise play and play practices did not adequately represent the intensities of the experiences of playing. Playing as an event challenged us also to explore the continuous transformation of the forces at play in school-age childcare, the continuous becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004) we all seemed to experience. This provided us with yet another way of conceptualising play; it seemed as if play was playing with us!

The aim of the research

The main point of departure of this research was to explore play facilitation together with staff in school-age childcare settings. This exploration led to further questions that aimed to identify as well as disturb taken-for-granted socially shared knowledge of play and playing in school-age childcare practice in school settings. What emerged was an interest in retaining the multiplicity of, and maybe even with Henricks (2008, p. 157) “celebrate the diversity” of, understandings of play and playing both in theory and practice. Play practices are enabled and constrained by arrangements in the schools’ practice
architectures, with which they are intertwined. For this reason, play practices intertwined with schools’ practice architectures are here called *play practice architectures*. How, or even if, it is possible to facilitate play may depend on how the play practice architectures staff are part of enable and constrain their practices. The following questions are explored:

- How do staff in school-age childcare settings talk about play and are there taken-for-granted conceptions of play in school-age childcare settings?
- What school-age childcare staff practices facilitate play?
- How do concepts of play contribute to different play practices?
- How can play practice architectures be transformed?

Overview of dissertation

This dissertation on play facilitation in school-age childcare consists of two parts, the second of which contains the three published articles. Part one is an exploration of the articles mainly using the concept of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014). Part one starts in chapter 2 with an introduction to the practice traditions of school-age childcare settings in Sweden (leisure-time centres) and England (out-of-school clubs with a playwork ethos). Chapter 3 provides a background to how it is possible to think about play and what is to be facilitated. Chapter 4 focuses on the site where play is to be facilitated and reviews previous research on practice in leisure-time centres in Sweden and out-of-school clubs with a playwork ethos in England. It also traces the inherent approach to play facilitation in those practices as they appear in the research. The dissertation’s theoretical frame of reference will be introduced in chapter 5, with sections on practice architecture theory, action research, socially shared knowledge and finally a section on some of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts (1980/2004) that I have put to work. The following chapter (6) will explain the design and methods used in the collaboration with the school-age childcare settings and the analysis of the data. It will also explore the values, mainly linked to action research, that informed the work and their ethical consequences in practice. Then follows, in chapter 7, a summary of the articles (presented in full in part two) used to explore what the dissertation calls *play practice architectures* in the school-age childcare settings studied. Chapter 8 discusses the research and provides some concluding remarks.
Every practice has its own history; it has evolved and continues to evolve over time. It has a language, specific ways of talking about things; it exists in specific spaces at particular times and relates to people and things in certain ways. Both leisure-time centres and playwork settings have their own particular practice traditions, which have evolved over time (Cranwell, 2003; Rohlin, 2001). This chapter will provide an introduction to the particular arrangements (cultural-discursive, material-economic and socio-political [Kemmis et al., 2014]) in the participating school-age childcare settings: their national context, the terms used, the governing documents and the basic organisation. It will also highlight how play is described in the governing documents for the settings. In chapter 4, I will return to a research review of these practice traditions and trace their conceptions of play. This chapter is intended as background information.

**Terminology**

There is a need to introduce some of the terms used in both the Swedish and English context so as to explain why different terms may be used when talking about the same or similar services and settings. The service referred to is a childcare provision for children from the ages of 4 (in England) or 6 (in Sweden) up to the age of 12 outside formal school hours but mostly on school premises, often when parents are at work or studying.

Early on in the research, a pragmatic decision was taken to refer to the service as school-age childcare. The intention was that as many practitioners and academics as possible would get at least a basic idea of the kind of service referred to. The term is not precise and may even be considered incorrect by the governing bodies of the service and the practitioners in the settings. The decision was due to the proliferation of slightly different terms being used in national and local sites (Saar, 2014).

In Sweden, the research focuses on fritidshem, literally translated as free-time homes and often called leisure-time homes or centres. In Sweden, even government agencies use different English translations for the service. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate website uses the term leisure-time centre (SSI, 2011). In its translation of the latest national curriculum, the SNAE uses the term recreation centre (SNAE, 2011). Lately the term school-age educare has been used in research, which emphasises that “both education and care are
given in this activity directed towards children …in so called leisure-time centres” (Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014, p. 45).

In England, there are many different terms used depending on the service provider. School-age childcare can be provided by statutory, voluntary and private providers, and no generic term is used even among one type of provider. The report *Employment Developments in Childcare Services for School-age Children, United Kingdom* (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006), uses the terms “out-of-school activities”, “before- and after-school clubs” and “holiday clubs/play schemes”. The UK government’s “extended schools” initiative promotes schools that offer before- and after-school clubs, care, breakfast clubs and other after-school activities on a regular basis (e.g., chess sessions) (Family and Childcare Trust, 2014). The term school-age childcare has been used in research (Cohen et al., 2004), while kids’ clubs, wrap-around childcare and play projects are terms that it is possible to come across in practice.

In this dissertation, the term school-age childcare is used as a generic term for the services in both Sweden and England. For the participating Swedish settings, the term leisure-time centre is used, and for the participating English settings, out-of-school clubs with a playwork ethos.

**National contexts of the practice traditions**

In both England and Sweden, school-age childcare practice has its roots in the late nineteenth century, when concerns about children’s welfare increased (for more on the history of the services, see Cranwell, 2003; Pihlgren & Rohlin, 2013; Rohlin, 2001). Playwork was introduced in the United Kingdom when the adventure playground movement arrived from Denmark just after the Second World War (Russell, 2013, p. 67). The Swedish and UK government policy agendas for school-age childcare have become somewhat aligned since responsibility for the service was transferred from the Department of Health in England in 1997 (Cohen et al., 2004) and the Ministry of Social Services in Sweden in 1998 (Pihlgren & Rohlin, 2013, p. 458) to the Department for Education (England) and the Ministry of Education (Sweden) respectively.

In Sweden, all school-age childcare service is universal: 83.2% of children aged 6 to 9 and 20.7% of 10- to 12-year-olds use the service. The average staff/child ratio nationally is one staff member per thirteen children (SNAE, 2014b). School-age childcare in Sweden is available during term time and holidays from 06.30–18.30 but is responsive to need within these hours. The school with which I collaborated the most during the action research in 2011–
opened at 07.30 and closed at 17.00 daily and only closed for two weeks during the industrial holidays in the summer.

According to the 2014 UK Childcare cost survey (Rutter & Stocker), 36% of families with children under 15 years of age use after-school clubs. In the English school that I collaborated with during the action research in 2012, approximately 17% of children aged 4 to 12 years old attended the service and the staff/child ratio was roughly one staff member per eight children. Most of the school-age childcare services only operate during term time with breakfast/before-school and after-school provision usually as separate services. In addition, there are holiday clubs and play schemes that provide part- or whole-day services during the school holidays. The participating school offered separate breakfast (run by other staff), after-school and holiday clubs.

School-age childcare has in Sweden become an integral part of the school, with staff employed by the school management, and with a national curriculum governing both school and childcare. The curriculum documents (SNAE, 2011) consider school-age childcare a fundamental part of school. The outcome-driven management by objectives model is the prevalent planning and quality tool in Swedish schools, and this includes school-age childcare. This has generated prescribed processes for quality development work. To complement the curriculum, new general guidelines for leisure-time centres (SNAE, 2014a) replaced those written in 2007, which were in effect during most of the research. These new guidelines are recommendations to support local authorities, school management and staff to meet the legislative requirements (SNAE, 2014a, p. 6). The aim of school-age childcare, according to the guidelines, is to complement primary school education, stimulate the development and learning of pupils and provide meaningful leisure and recreation (p. 10). The third chapter of the guidelines, the first one specifically for staff, entitled ‘Learning in leisure-time centres’, suggests that the starting point for staff must be the interests and needs of the children in the group. They can explore this by observing children as well as talking with them, formally or informally. Only after this inventory is done, should they consider what approach or activities they should offer to provide opportunities for the children to progress towards the learning outcomes.

In England, there is no “integrative framework covering both schools and childcare services . . .” for the over fives (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 69). Since school and therefore school-age childcare start when children have turned four, school-age childcare had up to September 2014 to comply with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which set out six areas of learning and development that “must be delivered through planned, purposeful play, with a balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities” (DCSF, 2008, p. 11). The EYFS 2014 includes considerable changes to before-/after-school care and holiday provision. The minimum staffing level is now set at 30 pupils per staff member, but providers have to “ensure the safety and welfare of children,
bearing in mind the type(s) of activity and the age and needs of the children” (DfE, 2014a, p. 24). The provider decides whether the staff have to hold any qualifications, and there is no longer a need to comply with the EYFS learning and development requirements.

With these different organisations, it thus follows that materials, equipment and activities budgets are dealt with very differently. In England, staff collect fees directly from parents and manage their own budget. Since the fees are kept to a minimum and mainly cover salaries, staff usually attempt to find as much material and equipment for free or as cheaply as possible as well as apply for extra funding when possible. In Sweden, the cost of school-age childcare is part of the school’s overall budget and the activities budget staff have at their disposal varies greatly from school to school (SSI, 2010).

In terms of staff qualifications, the picture is very different in the two countries. In Sweden, a teaching qualification with specialisation in school-age childcare entails a three-year teacher training programme. In all, 35% of school-age childcare staff have this or a similar qualification (SSI, 2010, p. 16). The majority of qualified staff are employed as leisure-time pedagogues. When starting the research (2010), a licensing system for teachers was being discussed and was later implemented, but this initially excluded the leisure-time pedagogues. In England, no single qualification is stipulated as appropriate for working in school-age childcare, and there is no sign of integrating childcare and teaching into one workforce. There are different relevant competency-based and academic qualifications for working in school-age childcare, and some staff may be unqualified (Cohen et al., 2004). More recently, a peer-driven initiative has developed playwork principles (Playwork principles scrutiny group, 2005), which in turn have informed the playwork qualifications (SkillsActive, 2007), which are both competency based and academic. The term “staff” will be used when referring to those who work in the settings irrespective of their qualifications.

When it comes to facilities used, there are more similarities between the two countries. Since the focus is on school-age childcare as part of school, the majority of settings in this research are housed in school buildings, with very few having primary use of their facility and even fewer their own premises on the school site. This often caused tension or conflict, with staff feeling like intruders, similar to that which Palsdottir identifies in Reykjavik: “the majority of boundary objects, such as facility and furniture, originated in the school community, as did its source of meaning and agency” (2012, p. 207, 213). Similar issues have been identified by Cartmel (2007, p. 206) in Australia, Smith (2010, p. 292) in England and Hansen (1999, p. 281) in Sweden.
Play as an outcome of school-age childcare

Play has been taken for granted as part of school-age childcare ever since the early juvenile workhouses (Sweden) and the “playrooms” and the Children’s Happy Evenings Association (England) in the 1890s (Cranwell, 2003, pp. 34–36; Rohlin, 2012, p. 67; Söderlund, 2000, p. 21, 23). The growth of this type of childcare was a reaction to what children were up to on city streets. The adults were concerned about children’s behaviour, which sometimes prevented them from attending school and which the adults perceived as anti-social and criminal. Street play was considered as having negative outcomes, while adult-supervised play could prove positive. The present-day discourses about children on the streets, at least in England, often see children either as the victims or the perpetrators of crime (Petrie et al., 2000), and this may still be a contributing factor to the need for supervised play to be constructed as positive. Russell (2013) argues that the most common present construction of childhood as a period which adults need to take responsibility for, either by caring for or disciplining children, leads to a rationalization of play as well as play becoming a social obligation.

In Sweden, schools and school-age childcare are explicitly required to facilitate play according to both the Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the preschool class and the recreation centre (Lgr11) and the guidelines for school-age childcare:

Creative activities and play are essential components of active learning. Particularly in the early years of schooling, play is very important in helping pupils to acquire knowledge. (SNAE, 2011, p. 6)

According to the Education Act, the leisure-time centre should offer children meaningful recreation (SFS, 2010, Chapter 14, §2). The 2007 guidelines for leisure-time centres (which were in effect during the research and only revised in 2014) said that

[t]he prerequisites for children to consider their recreation time to be meaningful are that the activities are secure, fun and stimulating, with much time being spent on play and creative activity . . . (SNAE, 2007, p. 23)

In the 2010 review of Swedish leisure-time centres (SSI, 2010, p. 13), play is identified as a pedagogical cornerstone. Observations have shown that there are big differences between settings regarding the type and level of staff interventions in children’s play. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (SSI, 2010, pp. 23–24) suggests that staff should support all children to become involved in play with other children as well as to minimise the types of intervention that stop children’s play.

The latest revision of guidelines for leisure-time centres (SNAE, 2014a) has given more attention to play. While it is clear that the aim of the service is
to facilitate children’s learning in line with the curriculum outcomes, play is recognised as an important activity that can contribute to this (p. 14). Some of the inspectorate’s previous criticism (SSI, 2010) seems to have influenced the writing of the new guidelines. Play is described as providing experiences and access to skills development, especially in regard to social competence. Play is considered to develop co-operation and communication skills as well as opportunities to practice turn-taking and to develop consensus (SNAE, 2014a, p. 34). The guidelines emphasise the need for a balance between children’s own play and staff-initiated play. When children play on their own, staff should observe the group process and minimise interruptions. They should also help pupils to become involved in play as well as consider how they could contribute something new to extend the playing (SNAE, 2014a, p. 34).

In England, the inspection authority’s guidelines for out-of-school care seem ambiguous when advising staff to “[c]onsider providing learning and play opportunities for children through a wide range of planned and free play activities” (Ofsted, 2001, p. 15). Since a school-age childcare setting (employing only playwork-trained staff) with a playwork ethos was chosen to collaborate with, it is necessary to introduce some of the thinking that informs this profession. The occupational standards for playwork specify “the knowledge, understanding, skills and principles needed to be a competent playworker”, and the playwork principles “establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork” (SkillsActive, 2007). These principles open up for another conception of play than the one in leisure-time centres. Playwork principle number two defines play in the following way:

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons. (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005)

Playwork principle number five also provides an understanding of how playworkers may facilitate play:

The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play. (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005)

From this principle, we can deduce that the children are expected to primarily create their own play space and that staff can be supportive in this process. One of the available units in a playwork qualification is called “Work within the playwork curriculum” (SKAPW43, UK National Occupational Standards). This is not a national curriculum but was developed to describe experiences a playwork setting makes accessible (Play Wales, 2001). It includes fire and water, loose parts, tools, risks, choices, etc.
Playwork is probably not the most common approach of school-age childcare staff in England. According to research, only 14% of managers of out-of-school provision held a playwork qualification (Munton et al., 2002, p. 63), and it is included here because it offers another perspective on what it may mean to facilitate play.

Summary of practice traditions

The practice traditions of leisure-time centres and playwork provide resources for everyday practice in the settings collaborated with in the research; these are specific arrangements that have evolved over time. This chapter has introduced some of the arrangements that enable and limit school-age childcare practices.

In summary (see Table 1), it can be said that leisure-time centres describe and justify their service (cultural-discursive) by defining it as universal (for all children), providing meaningful leisure time and a complement to school. Play is considered important as a way for children to experience their leisure time as meaningful as well as a way for children to learn and develop social competence. The main physical space–time resources available for activities (material-economic) are rooms in the school buildings that most often will be shared with other primary users and the playgrounds. The activities budget is negotiated with the school management, and materials and equipment are bought through the schools’ procurement contract. The service is available to children all day, all-year round except for a couple of weeks in the summer. The rules and roles of the service (socio-political) are ultimately the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and they are described in Lgr11 (National curriculum for primary schools) which includes leisure-time centres, and in the national guidelines. The appropriate qualification for staff, the majority of whom are employed full-time at the school, is a teaching qualification with specialisation in school-age childcare.

Playwork in a school-age childcare setting can be summarised as staffed provision of children’s out-of-school play for families who choose to use the service. The justification for the service is that families need their children supervised since it is no longer safe for them to play out on their own. Play is defined as a freely chosen process, and staff support children to create their own play space (cultural-discursive). The service is housed in rooms in the school building otherwise used for formal school and with use of the playground. The activities budget is taken from the income from parents’ fees after staff have been paid, and most material and equipment are either free or bought as cheaply as possible. The service is available in the afternoons when children go to school as well as for some days/weeks during the holidays (material-economic). The Department for Education has overall responsibility for the service. The minimum requirement for staff, who are mainly employed
part-time at the setting, is a competency-based level two qualification (socio-political).

The practice traditions of the leisure-time centres and playwork settings in this research seem different yet what both traditions have in common is that they now both operate within the school context. This makes a study of the variety of practices that may facilitate play in these different school settings interesting.

Table 1. Summary of practice traditions in the participating Swedish and English school-age childcare settings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Culturally-discursive arrangements</th>
<th>Material-economic arrangements</th>
<th>Socio-political arrangements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SWEDEN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure-time centres</td>
<td>Complement school by providing meaningful leisure with a focus on play as social competence.</td>
<td>Service provided all day, almost all-year round. Unusual to have primary use of space, budget can be negotiated with the school management.</td>
<td>Ministry of Education is responsible through Lgr11. Staff employed primarily full-time as pedagogues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENGLAND</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-school clubs with playwork ethos</td>
<td>Support families and focus on play as freely chosen behaviour. Playwork compensates for lack of time and space for play in society.</td>
<td>Services provided in the afternoons and during part of the holiday periods. No primary use of space. Own budget, although limited.</td>
<td>Department for Education is responsible. Staff employed primarily part-time as playworkers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Perspectives on play

To explore how staff can think and do play facilitation, and to examine possible and potential play practices, first what is to be facilitated needs to be understood. There is a wide range of perspectives on play depending on the researcher’s scientific discipline. Below is an attempt at painting a broad picture of this range of perspectives and at identifying some of the starting points for this research. The different ways play can be conceptualised are important since they may represent specific sayings about play in a specific play practice. This will be further discussed in the next chapter.

The being of play

The most frequently used perspectives in play research “have been influenced by traditions of philosophic idealism, humanitarianism, and positivism” (Henricks, 2001, p. 51). Henricks (2006, p. 3) argues that play studies suffer from a lack of interdisciplinary interest and from no research discipline making play central to its interests. On the other hand, biology, psychology and sociology all “have something to say about play” (Russell & Ryall, 2015, p. 135). One way to conceptualise play is like the old East Indian fable (Backstein, 1992) where blind men were to describe an elephant. It was so big that they could only “see” a bit of it, the trunk, the tail, the ears or the legs, but never the whole animal. Play is here understood as a behaviour with a multifaceted essence.

Firstly, it has to be said that some researchers only focus on children’s play, while others see playing as ageless (Huizinga, 1949; Sutton-Smith, 1997); still, others study animal as well as human behaviour (Beckoff, 1998). Researchers from many different disciplines study play, for example anthropology (Chick, 2015; Goldman, 1998; Schwartzman, 1978), neuropsychology (Axline, 1947; Bergström, 1997; Pellis & Pellis, 2009), ethology and evolutionary biology (Bateson, 2011; Burghardt, 2015), sociology (Corsaro, 2003; Henricks, 2006), geography (Harker, 2005; Holloway & Valentine, 2004), psychology (Bergen, 2015; Pellegrini & Smith, 2005) and educational science (Broadhead, Howard & Wood, 2010; Lindqvist, 1996; Moyles, 2010; Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006). There are also a number of literature reviews of children’s play studies (for example Lester & Russell, 2008, 2010; Meire, 2007; Schwartzman, 1978; Welén, 2003).
Broadly speaking, the majority of play research in the above-mentioned disciplines focuses on one or more of the following: (i) criteria about what could be understood as play; (ii) the function of play or why play? (iii) how or what humans and/or animals play; and (iv) children’s perspectives on play.

The why, how and what of play

Many researchers have attempted to define play by identifying the criteria which would suggest that behaviour is play rather than something else (Burghardt, 2005; Garvey, 1977). Huizinga in his seminal text ‘Homo ludens’ argues “[f]irst and foremost, then, all play is a voluntary activity” (1949, p. 7); playing cannot be imposed, players play because they enjoy it, he contends. Anthony Pellegrini (2009) describes some of the lists of criteria commonly referred to. He summarises, for example, Burghardt’s list (2005) in the following way:

- Performance of the behavior is not functional in its form or context.
- Play is voluntary and done for its own sake.
- Play differs from serious behavior in terms of sequence, completeness, or exaggeration.
- Performed repeatedly.
- Performed when the individual is adequately provisioned, healthy, and safe.

(Burghardt, 2005, in Pellegrini, 2009, p. 14)

These kinds of lists are being challenged by researchers writing from postmodern perspectives. Russell (2013, p. 52) suggests that the criteria, often presented as lists supposed to be taken as a whole, nevertheless, contain contradictory items. She identifies the underlying contradictions as a basic dialectic between play being either useful/useless or irrational/rational. It is noticeable that caught up in the dialectic is the idea play is something that can be defined, captured and categorised. A modernist approach to research requires an understanding of the function of play to ensure that we can maximise benefit for children to develop to their maximum potential. Russell (2013, p. 55) describes play from within this approach “as an individual’s attempt to move from disorder to order”, which, in turn, leads to the promotion of more rational forms of play. One of the most commonly used criteria for a behaviour to be considered play is that the behaviour is voluntary, spontaneous or freely chosen (Burghardt, 2005; Caillois, 1961/2001; Garvey, 1977; Huizinga, 1949). For example, Wood (2014b, p. 16) calls for a “deeper engagement with the socio-political dimensions of children’s play cultures and practices” to explore “whose freedom . . . can be exercised”. Henricks following Huizinga suggests that “in play, people envision and enact the possibilities of living in their societies” (2014, p. 194). On the other hand, in the case of research on children’s own perceptions and conceptions of play, it seems that most children understand play to take place when they can decide
what to do themselves, especially in institutional settings (Ceglowski, 1997; Einarsdottir, 2014; Factor, 2009; Glenn et al., 2013; Øksnes, 2008; Sandberg & Tammemä-Orr, 2008).

Brian Sutton-Smith (1924–2015) may be recognised as the “modern authority” on play (Henricks, 2006, p. vii). In his seminal work *The Ambiguity of Play* (Sutton-Smith, 1997), he identified seven “rhetorics” of play as part of his attempt to find out what the play theories had in common, what the scientists possibly could agree on regarding the function of play or why we play. His conclusion was that play serves as a way to nourish and nurture flexibility and variability in all players (whether human or animal of any age) to ensure adaptation to an ever-changing world. One of his hypotheses was that “play as a potential behaviour may actualize what are otherwise only potential brain and behaviour connections” (1997, p. 229, emphasis in original). He also recognised that this conclusion added to the “progress rhetoric” of play. Though an increasing number of scholars argue that play has immediate, rather than deferred, functions (for example Pellegrini, 2009), many of the cited benefits of play as an adaptive process may fall under both categories. Singer (2006), for instance, listed self-regulation, awareness of reality–fantasy distinction, greater delay of gratification, reduced aggression, effective language use, increased creative ability, all of which could prove useful when playing as well as in other contexts and times.

Pellegrini (2009) argued that children normally play in a stress-free context, while globally it has now been noted that children’s play may be restricted by a number of environmental stressors (Lester & Russell, 2010). This led to the UN adopting the general comment on Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to support nations to work on fulfilling children’s rights under this article (United Nations, 2013). The researchers who prepared the review on play that underpinned the work which resulted in the general comment argued that play is important to children’s survival, well-being and development. Upholding Article 31, they contended, means

> avoiding the temptation to dismiss play as frivolous, restrict it through fear for and of children, or control and appropriate it for more instrumental purposes (Lester & Russell, 2010, p. xi)

“Play is not trivial endeavor”, Henricks argues; “[i]t is necessary for comprehending what we can be and what we can do” (2014, p. 211). As pointed out above, there are also researchers who believe that the reason for our playing is that it makes us feel good in the here and now and not for any other reason hidden in the future (Pellegrini, 2009; Singer, 2006).

Another field of interest is to explore *how* we play. In the “progress rhetoric”, not only do we learn *through* play but we may also have to learn *to* play. The ability to play is here often seen as innate but requires adult ‘scaffolding’ in early years, where interventions can enhance playfulness
(Singer, 2006). To maximise the individual’s potential, adults need to support
the young to become good players. Questions to explore are, for example:
What competences are involved in playing? Or how does a player know that
behaviour is play rather than non-play? Bateson (1976) identified meta-
communication; play cues that frame play which indicates to players that “this
is play”. When playing together with others, it seems that players follow
certain social play rules. Firstly, an agreement that they are playing (see
Bateson’s meta-communication above) as well as what they are playing;
secondly, reciprocity in that, for example, the participant’s age and strength
should not matter; and, thirdly, turn-taking (Bruner & Sherwood, 1976;
Garvey, 1977). Research into, for instance, rough-and-tumble play (where the
social play rules have to be followed) suggests that it may be instrumental in
developing “the social brain” (Pellis & Pellis, 2007). The behaviour and skills
involved in playing are what Jensen (2013, p. 21, 23) calls the micro and
macro structures of play.

There has also been an interest in studying what children play. Some
research focused on play types that occurred at different stages of children’s
development (for example Hall, 1904; Piaget, 1951) or more generally as part
of children’s play. Hughes’s literature review (2006) identified sixteen play
types that children engaged in. Mastery, social, creative, deep and rough-and-
tumble play are some examples. Other research has focused on children
engaging in what adults perceive as, for instance, gendered play (Ånggård,
2011), war play (Holland, 2003) or play fighting/rough-and-tumble play
(Smith, 1989).

The above themes, how to play and what children play, have, together with
the importance that children play, been recognised by Tullgren (2004) as
themes which develop into norms governing children’s play in preschool.
Playing that disrupts a peaceful atmosphere is governed towards what this
usually female-dominated culture sees as healthy or ‘nice’ play (Tullgren,
2004, p. 26, 67). It is possible here to recognise some consonance with
Russell’s description (2013) of the promotion of rational play. Wood (2014a,
p. 147) describes the “technicist version of play”, which is constructed when
learning outcomes are the focus and play is “tamed”. Play can, on the other
hand, also be understood as children’s way of resisting, contesting and
disturbing adult attempts to control and define time-space (Lester & Russell,
2014a; Smith & Barker, 2000a, 2000b; Wood, 2014b; Øksnes, 2013) and a
means of participation, “a form of minor political activity” (Lester, 2013b, p.
38).

From the being of play to the play of being

It could be argued that the descriptions and discussions in the above sections
try to define the essence of play. The definitions point to the role of play in
individual development and the development of the human species. These
definitions answer the questions why and for what purpose one plays but do not deal with play as disposition or “what play is in itself” (Huizinga, 1949, p. 2). Øksnes, influenced by Gadamer and Bakhtin, argued that “asking for the use of play is to lose sight of it” (2011, p. 30, author’s own translation). Russell (2013, p. 62) contended “that theories of play are merely adult rational representations and not ‘the real thing’, paradoxically of course” or in Harker’s words “definitions of playing cannot be reduced to processes of development which are effects of certain forms of playing (and not playing itself)” (2005, p. 49, emphasis in original). I need therefore to add a comment on the long philosophical tradition of exploring play and playfulness as an underlying force of life itself, the play of being.

Spariosu (1989, p. 3) suggests that “all these supposedly value-free or neutral descriptions may turn out to be historical products of our culture” and traces the rational and the pre-rational philosophical view of play back, in the first instance, to Aristotle and Plato and in the other to Homer. The rational view argues that play socialises us into members of society by being rule-governed, while the pre-rational view of chaotic forces at play explores creativity and free will. The current philosophical play discourse is, Spariosu contends, pre-rational, while the scientific is still predominantly rational. Spariosu (1989, p. 119) points to Heidegger as the philosopher who takes a “leap” when he “defines Being itself as play” and thereby returns to the pre-rational idea of “a violent, arbitrary, and ecstatic play of forces in which man is both player and playing thing”. He goes on to argue that Gadamer, in turn, tries to bridge rational and pre-rational concepts of play when referring to play as that which manifests itself through the participants, not for them (p. 135).

Spariosu suggests that Deleuze’s thinking aligns with the pre-rational view of play as a play of forces and the ‘good’ player as someone who knows “how to affirm and ramify chance instead of dividing it in order to dominate it” (Deleuze, 1969, in Spariosu, 1989, p. 152, emphasis in original). Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) often use the concept of forces being brought into play. In their philosophical writing, machines, bodies, senses, substances, attitudes, positions, masses, agencies, terms, intensities and events, among others, are all playing forces. Their philosophy is sometimes called immanent ontology (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 15), which could be understood as if everything is part of the continuous play of forces and that we as humans are no more or no less than other forces. We are in a constant state of becoming in relation to the play of forces, in this sense everything is provisional since it is continuously changing.

Conceptualizations of playing as immanent to living or a “force or desire of life itself” (Lester & Russell, 2014b, p. 255), as a way of being (ontologically) or, rather, continuously becoming, in all life’s events are discussed, for example, by Barron and Jones (2014), Harker (2005) and Lester (2013b).
Such play is not something we use, it is rather a relation we enter into, where the activity is an end unto itself . . . it is not something adults can plan for children; it is something children must give themselves. (Øksnes, 2013, p. 150)

Øksnes (2013) suggests that playing may be conceptualised as relational, which resonates with what Lenz Taguchi (2010) terms the ontology of immanence and playing as becoming. Using Deleuzian concepts, Lester argues for playing as “a movement away from order, stability and predictability” in which players are “becoming-different” (2013a, p. 136). He describes this disturbance of equilibrium as a liminal time/space of experimenting with “collectively being in control of being out of control”, which will always return to difference, not the same. Players may well use past events when playing, but the focus seems to be on “unfolding possibilities” (Henricks, 2011, p. 222); there seems to be less interest in how things are and more exploration of how things could be. When playing is conceptualised as becoming, playing may be a force of potentiality (Massumi, 2002, p. 9), which points towards what might be, rather than that which already is.

It is interesting to note Henricks’s earlier criticisms of postmodernist views of play. “The postmodern world is thus a world at play, spinning top-like without a purpose or conclusion. . . . Postmodern players cast up visions of what the world can be, but they have not the resources to transform it” (2001, p. 53, 69). More recently, Henricks (2011) notes that the modernist tradition, which many play scholars embrace, focuses on play as separate from ordinary life with private outcomes for individuals; he then conceptualises play instead as deconstruction, arguing that when people play, they do not do so to “find out what will happen . . . rather to find out what can happen” (2011, p. 223, emphasis in original).

Deleuze and Guattari’s idea (1980/2004) of playing forces attracted me and my collaborators in the action research project to play with concepts, rather than to define play, to exceed possibilities and open up to potentialities, to put ourselves “in play” (Henricks, 2011, p. 212). Possibilities stem from what is and what could be, based on what we already know, while potentialities are that which point towards what we do not yet know (Massumi, 2002, p. 9). When playing “. . . who knows what concepts are yet to be formed and what universes await discovery?” (Lester, 2013a, p. 131).

Summary of perspectives on play

In this research, play was initially understood as a behaviour children themselves, rather than adults, initiate and control. What developed was a much broader understanding of play as behaviour as well as a subject in itself (Sellers & Chancellor, 2013, p. 298). Play and playing in school-based school-age childcare practice can be understood in a variety of ways since any
understanding of play depends on which theoretical or philosophical concepts are put to work. As stated earlier, the practice traditions of the leisure-time centres and playwork settings in this research seem different; therefore, how play is talked about (sayings in their practice) may also be different.
4. Previous research on practice and play in school-age childcare

This chapter builds on the previous chapter about perspectives on play by looking at research on the site where play is to be facilitated, namely school-age childcare settings. It explores research from Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland, and the United Kingdom since approximately 2000. The reason for staying in this decade is due to the major changes that took place at the end of the 1990s in both Sweden and parts of the United Kingdom, with school-age childcare becoming the responsibility of national education departments (Cohen et al., 2004). After exploring research on practice in leisure-time centres and in out-of-school clubs with a playwork ethos, the chapter then examines what this dissertation calls play practices, which are here seen as different ways staff facilitate play as part of overall school-age childcare practice. Taken together, the research suggests that different play practices facilitate different aspects of play.

The absence of research on school-age childcare practice in Swedish leisure-time centres and in English playwork settings (Persson, 2008; Russell, 2013; SNAE, 2012) is compounded by the lack of common terms for the service as discussed above. The intention is not to explore the history of the practices (for more on this, see, for example, Cranwell, 2003; Dyson & Kerr, 2013; Pihlgren & Rohlin, 2013; Rohlin, 2001) but to focus instead on the services in their present context as practices that are in varying degrees part of the education system.

Research on practice in leisure-time centres

The Nordic countries share similarities in the provision of school-age childcare even if there are also considerable differences (Palsdottir, 2012, p. 27). Research from all these countries can contribute to our understanding of school-age childcare practice in schools. The literature review has identified two themes, both discussed below, in relation to such practice. First, practice takes place in a field of tension and, second, it is considered a child centred practice.
Practice in a field of tension

Several studies claim that school-age childcare staff’s practice is formed in a field of tension between traditional ways of working in school-age childcare (which predates integration with education) and new forms of educational governance (new public management) (Andersson, 2013; Haglund, 2004; Hansen Orwehag, 2015; Hjalmarssson, 2013).

As early as 2001, Munkhammar’s study of different types of school staff working as a team discussed how discourses, as spaces of possibilities and limitations, affect practice and what ‘can’ or ‘cannot’ be done. She described school-age childcare staff’s continuous struggle with ‘school discourse’, concluding that the school discourse, about the individual child achieving the outcomes described in governing documents, easily dominated the discussions.

Some Swedish scholars (Andersson, 2013; Haglund, 2004; Hansen Orwehag, 2015) describe a tension or continuum between foregrounding school-age childcare and relational competencies and/or school and subject competencies in school-age childcare staff’s practice. It is possible to understand “foregrounding school-age childcare and relational competencies” as a practice that focuses on children’s interests as a point of departure for learning in all kinds of situations, and “foregrounding school and subject competencies” as a practice based on the learning outcomes as defined in the curricula. This tension is then analysed to construct different types of positions and practices presented as a continuum or in a grid.

Danish researchers have described the complexity of the work and the many dilemmas that have to be continuously negotiated. Just like the Swedish researchers, they also point to difficulties in merging the leisure-time practices of school-age childcare and school. They describe, for example, a tension inherent in supervision, with staff decrying that children today are constantly under surveillance, and yet one of their main tasks is to “keep an eye” on the children (Højlund, 2002). Activities are to take place in children’s “free time” (leisure time is called free time in the Nordic languages), but staff are expected to organise activities (Kjær, 2005).

Allowing children’s perspectives and adult’s discourses to intra-act, Saar, Löfdahl and Hjalmarsson (2012), again with regard to Swedish leisure-time-centre practice, studied what happened when staff’s intentions met children’s doings in school-age childcare. In line with management expectations of systematic quality development work, staff related children’s activities to governing documents. They defined “what this (the activity) is”. Children when engaging in the activities instead explored them and extended them in a “what-might-this-become?” approach. The researchers focused on the knowledge potentialities inherent in staff and children exploring together and launched the concept “potential didactics”. This approach affirms collective exploration and inquiry to challenge dichotomous understandings (for
example of adults as competent and of children as not yet competent) instead of evaluating predetermined outcomes. Saar, Löfdahl and Hjalmarsson’s approach (2012) could be considered an attempt to transcend the tensions seen as inherent in the field.

Child-centred practice
It is recognised that the leisure-time-centre practice of staff in Sweden is “characterized by a child centred perspective” rather than a perspective focusing on learning outcomes, especially in relation to work during out-of-school hours (Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014, p. 49). In most Nordic countries, the role of the service focuses on ideas of care, leisure and learning. The main emphasis of staff practice seems to be on leisure (Palsdottir, 2012, p. 50), where the children’s interests and wishes are the point of departure. Staff report seeing happy, growing children rather than pupils, and this perspective focuses on children’s culture as opposed to individual children’s normality or ability to comply with society’s rules (Højlund, 2002, p. 186).

A number of Nordic studies have attempted to describe school-age childcare from children’s perspectives (for example Ackesjö, 2011; Kjær, 2005; Øksnes, 2008), which could be argued is in line with the aim of the service. Some researchers (for example Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004; Palsdottir, 2012; Øksnes, 2008) describe school-age childcare as a place children appreciate because that is where they spend time with their friends. Children seem to find ways to avoid staff (Øksnes, 2008) and sometimes get more support from their peers (Palsdottir, 2012, p. 219). Kjær (2005, p. 211) identifies the adults as “material” children use when “generating institutionalised childhood”. She demonstrates how children use satire to respond to the pedagogical and disturb the normal distribution of power.

Research on playwork practice
Russell (2013) describes playwork practice, historically as well as currently, as a compensatory practice. She has written extensively on play and playwork and her 2013 study is of an open-access play setting in England. Playwork, she argues, is said to compensate for the lack of both time and space for children’s play in society at large. This leaves practitioners with a dilemma since they are to provide space for freely chosen, self-directed play, and yet they are sometimes required to intervene in this playing to “maintain the integrity of the play space” or to “prevent harm” (pp. 75–76). Smith’s study (2010) of two local authority–run after-school projects (one housed in a school building) discusses the staff’s practice mainly in relation to the balancing act between providing for play and regulating children’s behaviour. Her conclusion is that the “dynamic tensions of facilitation and control” (p. 290) are due to the situated nature of the settings as well as the conflicting
government agendas and contextual understandings of children and childhood.

Russell (2013) describes three main influencers on playwork practice. *Evolutionary playwork* (Hughes, 2001) argues that the aim of playwork is to meet evolutionary (both ontogenetic and phylogenetic) play needs by providing a space where children can engage in all of the identified play types equally (Hughes, 2006). The second influence, *therapeutic playwork*, contends that play and playwork have “curative potential”. Psychotherapy suggests that many childhood difficulties may be avoided by allowing children to play their way through traumas (Axline, 1947). The playworker may risk getting drawn into the playing due to their own experiences that are not yet played through, which would risk “adulterating” children’s playing, but there are strategies for avoiding this (Sturrock & Else, 1998, 2005). The third influence, *compound flexibility* (Brown, 2003), argues that there is a direct link between the environment children can play in and levels of “flexibility/adaptability in the child” (p. 53). A flexible and adaptable environment allows a child the opportunity for experimentation that links to positive emotions. The sense of control that this engenders is linked to the development of, for example, self-confidence (p. 56). The roles of playworkers are to respond to children’s requests as well as enrich the play environment (p. 60).

**Tracing play practices in school-age childcare research**

As stated earlier, the different ways of facilitating play as part of school-age childcare practice are in this dissertation called play practices. How school-age childcare staff today, both in England and Sweden, perceive their role in relation to play, which children seem to want to pursue without adult interference (Ceglowski, 1997; Einarsdottir, 2014; Factor, 2009), is a developing area of study (Lester, 2012; Øksnes, 2013; Øksnes et al., 2014; Russell, 2013). Reviewing the limited research on school-age childcare has identified even fewer studies with a focus on facilitating children’s play. In response to this, research has been included from both the school-age childcare and the early years field, which have other main interests but include some material and analysis of children’s play and how staff relate to it. This section attempts to trace how different school-age childcare practices may facilitate different aspects of play. This is done by exploring inherent approaches to play facilitation in staff’s practice as described in research.

As shown above, school-age childcare staff are required to facilitate play, but this is not the primary focus of the governing documents or in research. The focus has instead been on education, care and leisure (Haglund & Andersson, 2009; Højlund, 2002; Palsdottir, 2012; Rohlin, 2001) rather than on play. In relation to play, the Nordic governing documents can be considered ambiguous and open to different interpretations (Øksnes et al., 2014). In the
light of the general comment on Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (2013), which warns against the increasing demands for learning that marginalise children’s own playing, it is possible to argue for the value of play for its own sake rather than for instrumental purposes such as, for example, learning (Øksnes et al., 2014).

Play research very often starts with a statement about the difficulty of defining play. Yet, as we have seen above, researchers must always conceptualise play in order to analyse it. “To characterize play, one must first be clear what aspect of the behavior is being considered” (Henricks, 2015, p. 283). It may also be the case that research focusing on school-age childcare does not necessarily include a discussion about the definition of play since play is not the main focus, and yet it may be possible to identify underpinning definitions. The subsequent sections will outline a number of different school-age-childcare-related play practices that can be discerned in the research.

Practice facilitating play as social competence
Research reveals that when children play on their own initiative in a leisure-time centre, they “show and develop” social competences (Evaldsson & Aarsand, 2011, p. 152). School-age childcare at least in its Swedish version aims to complement formal schooling, which primarily focuses on the individual child’s learning, by foregrounding the group and seeing children’s social life as an enabler of learning (Dahl, 2014). “The leisure-time centres’ pedagogy is built upon a group-focused approach” (SNAE, 2014a, p. 14, author’s own translation). Dahl (2014) identifies school-age childcare practice as caught right between two expectations, that school should be “knowledge effective” as well as oriented towards social development. Staff seem to recognise the latter as their specific area of responsibility and expertise (Johansson & Moss, 2012).

The children’s views of staff practices (Ackesjö, 2011) and of the observed action repertoires of staff (Dahl, 2014) seem to overlap in these two studies, even if staff intentions do not always seem obvious to the children. The staff stay close to the children; they are “at hand” and support the children as well as act as coaches or even as co-players. The staff expect the children to conform to their (staff) norms and values, for example everyone should be allowed to play (Dahl, 2014, p. 115). The intention is to support the children to develop positive and productive relationships, specifically so that they have access to play and that playing flows without conflict (p. 133). Dahl (2014, p. 16) finds evidence in previous research that teaching children social competence included teaching children to play.

Some research on practice in leisure-time centres seems to suggest an understanding of play as primarily a social behaviour. This may be due to the complementary role of school-age childcare to focus on the group rather than the individual child.
Practice facilitating play as freely chosen behaviour

The term “free play” is often used in Nordic school-age childcare; it suggests that it is “play organized by pupils, governed by their interests and supported by the staff” (Haglund, 2015, p. 7). Whether play can be considered ‘free’ is debatable, but it is clear that children believe that ‘free play’ is what happens in leisure-time centres (Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004). In England, children also seem to think that, compared to the home and the school playground, there are higher levels of choice in school-age childcare (King & Howard, 2012). As described earlier, children’s perspective on play is that play is what happens when they themselves decide what they do (Evaldsson & Aarsand, 2011, p. 139). Højlund (2002, p. 103) points to children saying that when they play, they decide themselves what to do; they do not say I decide, which suggests that play is free from adult initiatives but not from other children’s influence. Children in school-age childcare may even actively exclude adults from the content of their play, for example by creating or claiming adult-free space (Dahl, 2014; Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004; Smith & Barker, 2000a). “[T]he restructuring of the ‘real’ world through play can”, Lester and Russell argue, “create as well as subvert order” (2010, p. 11), and in this way, play is free from adult orderings.

A number of Swedish studies, most often from children’s perspectives, have identified that staff members do not seem to respect children’s play. In a study of how children thought teachers relate to play, Sandberg (2002, p. 20) states that “children said that teachers often interrupt their play . . .”. In Saar’s ethnographic study (2014) of children in school-age childcare in Sweden, the majority of empirical examples end with staff intervening and stopping play on the grounds of health and safety and disorderliness. On a few occasions, Saar argues, this may be relevant to prevent injury, but the examples are mostly not of this kind. Saar struggles to present examples (only one) of staff entering into a “collective world-making” (2014, p. 267) in play with the children. Ultimately the adults create the framework within which children’s “free” play can take place. The social space and the norms as well as the physical space and materials available are conditioned by the staff (Evaldsson and Aarsand, 2011, p. 152; Højlund, 2002, p. 223; Johansson, Lindgren & Hellman, 2013, p. 51; Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004). What is considered to constitute a good school-age childcare setting will contribute to boundaries and condition what kind of play is possible for whom, argue Hjalmarsson and Löfdahl (2013, p. 84).

Traditional playwork, as discussed above, seems influenced by a view of play as an evolutionary drive and may therefore be conceptualised as “free” from contextual influences, while research mainly seems to identify the ways in which children’s play is not free. When discussing the future practice of school-age childcare staff, Ankerstjerne (2010, p. 172) argues that free play may be central to this practice since it offers the child basic premises to
become “a competent and active participant in postmodern society”. This brings us to the next practice.

Practice facilitating play as participation

Øksnes et al. (2014, p. 120) point to the governing documents’ emphasis on democracy and participation as a way for staff to question the academic pressure and instead offer children rich play experiences and allow them to play just for fun. In early childhood research, a more common approach to participation is the discussion about inclusion and exclusion during play. Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) question all the habitual, taken-for-granted assumptions about play, arguing that play is not always “nice” and accessible, at least not for those children who feel bullied or excluded. Helgesen (2012) stresses the importance of staff identifying play that excludes some of the children in the setting. This requires staff to recognise the taken-for-granted play discourses that prevent staff from seeing some children as excluded. If play is constructed as innocent and not real by staff, then behaviour that may otherwise have been considered as a child using exclusion techniques is within the playframe not constructed as such (Tullgren, 2004).

Just as children exclude each other from playing, staff also at times prevent children in school-age childcare playing with their friends. This may be to keep order in groups of ‘rowdy’ children (Dahl, 2014; Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004), or to protect a small group already playing well together, or to prevent a child from losing face by being denied access to a group (Dahl, 2014). In the last-mentioned case, the staff themselves often engage with the child or find alternative activities to introduce the child to. The right to protect a well-functioning small group or the obligation to ensure all children are included in a group is one of the dilemmas Dahl (2014) identifies as issues that staff had to deal with in their practice.

Instead of the practices described above, Lester’s focus on “play as event” suggests a possibility for adults to be sensitive to “the ‘voiceless politics’ that are present in the micro-events of playing” (2013b, p. 39), and opens up for reimaging different ways of being together and apart for children and adults. Playing can, Lester suggests, be conceived of as participation and “playing, as a practice of resistance and resilience, creates moments of hope by imaginatively reworking constraints on children’s daily lives” (2013b, p. 33).

Some research suggests that participation can be understood as children’s right to participate in social play, with staff responsible for upholding this right; other research seems to conceptualise play, even when socially “inappropriate”, as participation in itself. The latter would suggest the possibility for staff’s play practice to include interpretation of the political messages children are enacting.
Practice facilitating play as exploration of agency

Due to “schoolification” (Broström, 2010), which could be understood as possibly limiting or controlling play in school, it has also been possible to conceptualise play as a particular way for children to exercise their agency within the school-age childcare setting (Smith & Barker, 2000a, 2000b).

Studies from children’s perspectives identify school-age childcare as a time and space for children’s own initiatives and activities, often identified as play (Evaldsson & Aarsand, 2011; Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004; Højlund, 2002; Kousholt, 2012; Øksnes, 2013). Child-initiated playing can be understood as an exploration of agency, which sometimes includes exploring inclusions and exclusions, of both other children and adults (Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004; Dahl, 2014). Status and power in play seem to be related to how competent a player you are: whether it is fun to play with you, how old you are (Højlund, 2002; Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004) and if you have any status-bearing artefacts, for example toys (Johansson, Lindgren & Hellman, 2013, p. 65).

Øksnes (2008; 2013) is primarily interested in play in school-age childcare from the children’s perspective and questions the taken-for-granted developmental perspectives on children’s play in teacher training as well as in practice. In describing playing in the “space in-between” or the cracks of institutional life, she identifies children’s ability to play, whether allowed to or not, and playing as a possible escape from adult orderings. Smith and Barker (2000a) focus specifically on the contested space of the settings (school-age childcare sharing space with formal schooling), arguing that staff “police” boundaries as they themselves are under teacher surveillance in the school. They see children as active agents “challenging adult notions of appropriate behaviour and the use of space” (2000a, p. 254) as part of their playing.

Practice facilitating play as emergence and becoming

As shown in the previous chapter (3), it is possible to discuss not only play but also playing. In the research presented in the section above, there is a similar move away from play as a phenomenon whose essence can be defined “as special activities in a world of non-play” (Øksnes, 2011, p. 164), and towards playing as a force that escapes categorisation, as continuously becoming.

Saar (2014, p. 257) identifies a “holistic discourse of children and development” he wants to challenge. By using theories that suggest continuous change and fluidity, Saar articulates informal learning as a multi-sensuous becoming and world-making that children engage in when they manage their own play. He identifies four ways children manage and act in the world when playing. They are becoming through: (i) choreographing, when using bodies, voices, sounds, objects and rhythms; (ii) cartographing, when exploring potentialities of time and space, they produce their own
territories where place and speed are not fixed entities; (iii) *creating increased difficulties* “to go beyond what *is* to what *could be*” (2014, p. 264, emphasis in original); and lastly (iv) *embedding*, they stop, fixate or find seclusion.

In terms of reconceptualising the adult–child relationship in spaces aiming to provide for play, Lester (2012, p. 6) suggests a focus on “conditions that support playfulness”; this may mean “paying attention to the affects, forces, flows and intensities that contribute in an affirmative manner to create play spaces” (Lester, Fitzpatrick & Russell, 2014, p. 25). Noting, in their study, where things and people were at different times as well as staff telling stories about the space and what happened in it, all contributed to staff mapping the space, which, in turn, allowed scrutiny of the taken for granted that sometimes limited playfulness.

Russell (2013) suggests an understanding of playing as disturbing orderings and, as such, it may well be resistance to “regimes of truths” (Foucault, 1977). Based on Lefebvre’s conception of conceived, perceived and lived space, she paints a vivid picture of playwork as a fluid assemblage, a situated practice of happenings with a sensitive balance between compliance with regulations to achieve instrumental outcomes and playful encounters in moments of “just playing” (Russell, 2013, p. 163).

Although the dominant discourse is embedded in conceived and perceived space, the practice also leaves space open for moments in lived space, and although this is harder to articulate and impossible to plan (although it is possible to plan for), any instrumental value stems from this openness . . . (Russell, 2013, p. 230)

Russell’s conclusion is that playwork practice is not to abstain from planning, but rather to plan and be open to what emerges from the plan; in this way, playwork has maybe greater potential than any other practice to work on children’s terms (2013, p. 233).

**Summary of practice and play in school-age childcare**

Nordic research identifies a variety of discourses that explain or justify the role of school-age childcare services and the role of their staff in different ways, mainly focusing on leisure and learning. This seems to contribute to making coherent practice, coherence in *sayings, doings* and *relatings*, difficult. On the other hand, research suggests that children and staff seem to share the idea that school-age childcare is a space where children’s interests drive the activities. The aim of English playwork seems to be to compensate for society’s diminishing respect for children’s play. According to research into playwork, recently introduced into English schools, the practice seems to rather easily find itself in a field of tension between practice traditions and new contexts similar to that identified in leisure-time centres. Yet these tensions may in this dissertation be due to different perspectives on play.
Previous research seems underpinned by a number of perspectives on play. This review identified school-age childcare practice that facilitated play conceptualised as social competence, freely chosen behaviour, participation, exploring agency, and emergence and becoming. These perspectives vary from understanding play’s function as instrumental (having deferred benefits), as beneficial for its own sake, or as forces of becoming.

It seems that very limited research focuses on how staff facilitate play in school-age childcare. This dissertation could contribute to knowledge of how conceptualizations of play affect practice since ideas about play, or sayings about play, hang together with doings and relatings in school-age childcare practices. It may therefore be fruitful to retain the multiplicity of conceptions of play in order to be able to explore an understanding of school-age childcare practice, not only as practice in a field of tension but also as practice of potentiality, pointing towards what might be and what can become (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 177).
5. Theoretical frame of reference

Theories – whether in the form of academic, political or professional ideas, or offered in the guise of ‘common sense’ – shape our understandings and govern our actions, whether we recognise it or not, through the concepts and explanations they provide us with to make sense of the world and our experience. (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 17)

An interest in disturbing the taken-for-granted, or in the words of Moss and Petrie (2002) “common sense”, sayings, doings and relatings of play practices in school-age childcare led to questions not only about how to understand play (see chapter 3) but also about how to understand practice. This chapter will therefore explore the concept of *practice* and the arrangements that enable and constrain it in so-called *practice architectures* (Kemmis et al., 2014). It will also introduce the idea of action research as a practice-changing practice (Kemmis, 2009) and a way of exploring taken-for-granted, common-sense or socially shared knowledge (Marková et al., 2007). Since some of the play research included philosophical contributions, especially from Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004), and this came to be important in the analysis, this chapter will also explore some concepts from their philosophy of immanence (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 15).

**Practice architectures**

The idea of practice as sayings, doings and relatings has been touched upon above, and this section attempts to put the concept of practice into a theoretical context. Examples will be provided from school-age childcare research that uses practice theory, and then the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) will be introduced.

Research on school-age childcare includes studies that employ practice theory. Haglund (2004) studied the practices of school-age childcare staff when they take responsibility for circle time during formal school hours. Haglund refers to Giddens’s practice theory and defines practice as the way staff, in interactions with children, reproduce the social system through their use of rules and resources (2004, p. 228). Others in the field (for example Dahl, 2014; Klerfelt, 1999; Palsdottir, 2012) refer to Wenger’s concept of “communities of practice” (1998, p. 73), a community with mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire, when discussing how children and staff get on in school-age childcare. They also use Lave and
Wenger’s concept of “legitimate peripheral participation” (1991/2005), which explores how situated learning takes place in any community, when discussing how children and staff move from being “apprentices” to “masters” in school-age childcare practice.

Both Giddens’s and Lave and Wenger’s theories may be called practice theories. The social theorist and philosopher Schatzki (2002, p. xii) makes a distinction between “practice theories” and “theories of arrangements” when discussing the constitution of social life and change. While practice theories consider practice as interactions between individuals, theories of arrangements regard practice to be “a ‘bundle’ of activities . . . an organized nexus of actions” (Schatzki, 2002, p. 71). Schatzki refers to, among others, Deleuze and Guattari and their concept of assemblage when explaining theories of arrangements as

> [s]ocial things organized in configurations, where they hang together, determine one another via their connections, as combined both exert effects on other configurations, and therewith constitute the setting and medium of human action, interaction, and coexistence. (Schatzki, 2002, p. xiii)

What is said and done and how one relates are intertwined in practices. Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 3) argue that their theory of practice architecture both builds on and disrupts Lave and Wenger’s “communities of practice” (1991/2005) since their theory challenges the idea that “human beings encounter each other in unmediated ways” (p. 4) and sees practices as “inherently interactional, involving communities as well as individuals” (p. 3). Practice architecture theory suggests that practice encounters take place in intersubjective spaces: semantic, physical space–time and social spaces. The theory of Kemmis et al. (2014) draws more on what Schatzki (2002) calls “theories of arrangements”. Practice architectures

> include sayings, doings and relatings in our conceptualization of practices, and understand practices as enabled and constrained by three kinds of arrangements that occur at sites, namely, cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements (respectively). (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 30)

The idea of the intersubjective spaces, or arrangements, relates to the concept of assemblage in the relational ontology of Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004).

> An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004, p. 25)

Therefore, how school-age childcare staff talk about play, what they do to facilitate play and how they relate to playing children are both enabled and constrained by arrangements, or assemblages, in school-age childcare settings. Practices continuously change in a “dance between reproduction and
transformation” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 3). As integration between leisure-time centres as well as out-of-school clubs and schools evolves, this “dance” continues to be performed. In the research presented here, the theory of practice architectures has been useful in illuminating the link between sayings, doings and relatings in the practices of facilitating play in school-age childcare and the way these practices are enabled and constrained by arrangements in the settings and the schools.

Action research as practice-changing practice

This section will introduce action research and specifically: second-person, critical, participatory and appreciative inquiry.

Action research involves a family of approaches founded by the social psychologist Kurt Lewin. These, it could be argued, have come about in different disciplines or contexts, such as industry, social work, community development and education (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p. 564) suggest that, in action research, planning, acting/observing and reflecting interact in a continuous spiral. The aim of this type of research is considered to be the development of knowledge and the change of social systems (Drummond and Themessl-Huber, 2007, p. 432). According to Reason and Bradbury (2001, p. 2), any action research has five dimensions: practical outcomes, participation, human flourishing, many ways of knowing and emergence (here understood as the unfolding or evolving nature of the project). These dimensions are interconnected and involve issues of validity and quality. This will be discussed further in chapter 6.

Reason and McArdle (2004) explain three different ways of carrying out action research. First-person action research involves practitioners inquiring into their own practice and/or life. Second-person action research is a co-operative inquiry where people work together on an issue of common concern. Third-person action research attempts to bring together views of larger groups of people who may not otherwise inquire together, for example all the different stakeholders in school-age childcare may be considered to include children, local authority staff, parents, school-age childcare staff, school managers, etc. Since the chosen design of the research was to explore together with staff how to facilitate play in school-age childcare, this suggested second-person action research with its co-operative inquiry.

Kemmis (2009, p. 464) calls action research a practice-changing practice and suggests that there are three types (pp. 469–470): (i) technical, where outcomes are improved measured against pre-set standards; (ii) practical, where both the outcomes and the methods of practice can change based on the researcher’s decision; and (iii) critical, where what and how to change are a collective decision with the aim of sustainable transformation. In this light, the research design aligned with a critical approach.
The action research that contributes to this dissertation could be said to be an entanglement of action research practices. First, it may be seen in terms of a participatory and emancipatory practice because in part it addresses issues of power over knowledge creation and/or empowering those without a voice. This critical approach to action research has roots in social theory with strong connections to Habermas (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 581). The research was designed to be a collaborative project with school-age childcare staff where their theoretical and practical questions about and knowledge of play in school-age childcare would be as important as the researchers. It could therefore be argued that this was participatory action research.

We see participatory action research as a process of sustained collective deliberation coupled with sustained collective investigation of a topic, a problem, an issue, a concern, or a theme that allows people to explore possibilities in action, judging them by their consequences in history and moving with a measure of tentativeness and prudence . . . but also with the support that comes with solidarity. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 612, emphasis in original)

As the research evolved, attention came to be paid to the language used by the researcher, the collaborators and the school management, as well as to issues of organisation and power (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 561) in school-based school-age childcare. This approach, it could be argued, corresponds to that of critical action research. Since in Sweden the school-age childcare service has been referred to as a “blind spot” in both national and local governance as well as in research (SSI, 2010, p. 10), and in the United Kingdom, out-of-school services have been deprioritised during the financial crisis, the idea of supporting the staff to find ways of becoming more visible seemed important.

Another approach to be found in the design was that of appreciative action research, which questions the problem-oriented focus of classical action research. Instead, it is based on what already works well and tries to put into action ‘what could be’, which is the possibilities envisaged by the participants (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2001, p. 189). Since the action research was initiated at a time when the unlicensed status of school-age childcare pedagogues in Sweden was under debate (see chapter 2), it became important to find a way to recognise staff professionalism as part of the research design. The design for this action research, therefore, started with a cycle of appreciative inquiry and then moved on to a more critical problem-focused approach as evident in the article ‘What If? As If’ (Kane, 2015).

While it could be argued that critical action research in its inception was a somewhat normative practice with “a belief in progress, based on the modernist perception of education” (Katsarou, 2014, p. 193), its connections with Habermas and his rejection of positivism (St. Pierre, 2012, p. 494) have allowed it to be constructed to “embrace the postmodern perspective of
viewing taken-for-granted assumptions as problematic” (Katsarou, 2014, p. 194). In this light, action research became a tool for exploring taken-for-granted understandings of play in school-age-childcare practice traditions.

Socially shared knowledge

Taken-for-granted understandings can also be called common-sense knowledge and this is a form of socially shared knowledge. This type of knowledge “is usually immersed in daily activities which people habitually perform without consciously engaging their minds” (Marková et al., 2007, p. 17). It is knowledge about “social realities, objects, relationships, anticipated experiences” (2007, p. 19) and can, in the case of school-age childcare practice, be picked up by observing other members of staff and be generated by doing things together or acquired through training.

Common-sense knowledge when verbalised may provide statements that make it possible to recognise habitual practices through the various sayings people use. Language is a social practice, a co-construction of meaning making in a situated context (Linell, 2009). In a specific group of staff, there will be dominant discourses, ways they are “supposed” to talk about play in the particular setting as well as norms and values they believe they are expected to uphold as part of the work (for example if children are not allowed to play war, members of staff will be expected to have arguments for why this is the case). Everyone participating in the conversation brings their past with them (personal experiences of play as a child, as an adult as well as a staff member), their present (how I believe that I relate to children at play and facilitate playing as well as how that fits in to what we do here in our setting) and their future (my hopes and expectations about how we could facilitate play). All these pasts, presents and futures continuously interact in the evolving conversations and are determined (enabled and constrained) by the existing practice architecture.

As the Swedish staff started talking about play, which had previously not been a focus of their practice, they started to explore the coherence in their sayings, doings and relatings. In England, staff had long since focused on facilitating playing, as was apparent from their discussions, and yet they were struggling with how to provide a space for play in the school context, mainly in their relatings with the school staff. As the staff teams engaged in dialogue about facilitating play, their socially shared knowledge changed, as did their practice. Schatzki (2002, p. 255) argues that sayings and doings, whether maintaining or altering practices, contribute to the continual becoming of the social.
Becoming and territorialisation

The earlier referred-to *becoming* is a key concept from Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical writings (1980/2004). This section will look closer at becoming and some other concepts in their philosophy of immanence.

*Becoming* has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination . . . (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004, p. 323)

*Becoming* is not used to describe a state of not yet; instead, it is employed to suggest that everything and everyone are in continuous transformation relationally and interdependently with everything and everyone else (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 172). This means that it is no longer possible to, for example, define play because its meaning is not seen as fixed. Instead, material, affective, physical and other forces are considered to be at play, that is, be playing.

Searching for definitions of play could be an example of what Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004, p. 6) call an arborescent or root logic, an either/or binary logic where schooling (as in conforming to orders [Kemmis, 2006, p. 462]) and playing are opposites. Yet both schooling and playing were evident in the data and in our collaborative research, and it became important to find ways to understand the complexity and multiplicity of ‘play’ and ‘playing’. This meant finding ways to also go beyond the binaries and tensions to be found in research on leisure-time-centre and playwork practice (Andersson, 2013; Russell, 2013, p. 92).

It is not that the name or the classification, the binary or the dualism is done away with; rather, it is that it becomes other within the active and fluid and transmutating life force of the assemblage. (Gale, Turner & McKenzie, 2013, p. 560)

Going beyond binaries and tensions did not mean, therefore, that the definitions of play, described earlier, no longer existed or were of no value, but play also became “other” than as popularly used and as it appeared in much of the research literature. Some of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts (1980/2004) were helpful when exploring what this “other” might mean. They see concepts “as a vehicle for expressing an event, or becoming” (Semetsky, 2008, p. viii), a way to think differently, rather than as a way of defining something (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 89).

The image of the *rhizome* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004, chapter 1) connected with the feelings of constant flow and change, both of our collaborative research and of playing. For instance, the ginger root is a rhizome that grows in unforeseen directions, and when broken, new shoots grow. One of the rhizome’s principles is that it is multiplicity, “neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot
increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004, p. 9). Rhizomatic thinking as well as playing could be conceived of as “an approach to life itself that is affirmative and constantly disturbing” (Lester, 2013a, p. 131). In the school, each thought, action, upturned chair, child, even the smell of coffee changed the school-play-research-playwork-staff-children assemblage, which was continuously becoming. The assemblages, or arrangements, in the practice architectures in school-age childcare “prefigure practices without pre-determining them” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 212) since practices are transformed, intentionally reorganised or unintentionally recomposed (Schatzki, 2002, p. 241) as they unfold. In the school-age childcare staff’s playing practices and in our collaborative research, enabled and constrained by practice architectures, nothing seemed the same. Each meeting, each situation, each day, each child, all in fluid relationships with each other, brought something new, new possibilities. The doing disturbed the thinking and the thinking disturbed the doing.

When moving from categorizations of play and play practices towards understanding playing as forces, the concepts of striation and smooth spaces were also helpful.

[T]he difference between a smooth (vectorial, projective, or topological) space and a striated (metric) space; in the first case ‘space is occupied without being counted,’ and in the second case ‘space is counted in order to be occupied.’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004, p. 399, emphasis in original)

The way we conform to the normative practices of planning so as to achieve measurable outcomes in school, or in research, could be conceived of as striation. Playing on the other hand could be conceived of as occupying a smooth space. Yet, here, planning and playing also offer a binary. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004, chapter 14) challenge us to go beyond the binary by showing “how forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces” (1980/2004, p. 551). When trying to define play together with my collaborators, the forces of striation closed down smooth space, and yet it may have been this very process that opened up for what Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) refer to as the line of flight from the strata to the smooth space of playing.

Opening up lines of flight is a process Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) suggest can lead to deterritorialisation. This became a way of thinking about the action research. Amongst all the striation, the best-intended plans, informed by strategic documents and play theories, lines of flight became apparent, opening up new smooth spaces. Unexpected events made both my and my collaborators’ plans seem no longer wise or important, and experiences disturbed our thinking. As we later tried to make sense of the
events we reterritorialised, this is possibly the becoming Schatzki calls “the incessant rearranging that occurs in the social site” (2002, p. 240).

Action research became a way for all the collaborators to explore the practice traditions, the strata that had captured us and that we were conforming to and took for granted.

Educational practice and educational research either serve to reproduce the practices, practice architectures, practice landscapes and practice traditions of a site or, alternatively, they assist in the interrogation and transformation of these things. (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 215)

As the action research projects developed, it became clear that the cycles of planning, acting/observing and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 564) action research is famous for did not take place in that order. I became aware that “every participatory action research project is a living phenomenon . . . it answers back”, and I found with Drummond and Themessl-Huber (2007, pp. 445–446) that what the cycles consisted of was “less a series of stages . . . but rather a qualitative flow of duration into which the stages are subsumed”. The multiplicities of practices, of sayings, doings and relatings (Kemmis et al., 2014), were not easily captured and represented, and I went from categorization to “differenciation”, the continuous return of difference (Davies, 2010, p. 59), as a way to understand “individuals experimenting with themselves as well as with the project” (Drummond and Themessl-Huber, 2007, p. 443) in a collective becoming-different. As much as we, the collaborating researchers, were playing with play, the research was playing with us.

Summary of the theoretical framework

Make a rhizome. But you don’t know what you can make a rhizome with, you don’t know which subterranean stem is effectively going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, people your desert. So experiment. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004, p. 277)

In some research traditions, it may be important to emphasise separation and rational order, while in others it may be more important to try and retain the messiness of the experienced world (St. Pierre, 2012). Play practices in school-age childcare are complex, fluid and unpredictable and at the same time often common sense. An attempt at understanding these practices may benefit from retaining the mess (Law, 2004, p. 2). This dissertation has, like the rhizome, multiple entries, and, as such, it also offers the opportunity to abandon the given and disrupt or deterritorialise (Masny, 2013, p. 339, 345) play facilitation in school-age childcare.

Practice is in this dissertation understood as sayings, doings and relatings enabled and constrained by discursive, material and social arrangements in
what can be seen as practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014). Taken-for-granted or common-sense understandings of play practices in school-age childcare can when verbalised by the staff make it possible to recognise practice architectures through their discourse. Yet putting some of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts (1980/2004) to work allowed an understanding also of common-sense, socially shared knowledge, in the sayings, doings and relatings of staff, as emergent and immanent, continuously becoming. This is reinforced by the idea of practice architectures as arrangements in “a dance between reproduction and transformation” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 3), or, in Schatzki’s words, in “constant reordering” (2002, p. 237).

The research attempted to explore, together with staff, and using action research, the practices they saw as facilitating play. Action research is considered a practice-changing practice (Kemmis, 2009) which recognises that sayings, doings and relatings “hang together” (Schatzki, 2002, p. xiii). This relational view is also evident in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy (1980/2004); some of their concepts were used in an attempt to go beyond linear and binary logic when exploring play and playing in school-age childcare practices. This was not to do away with the previously discussed definitions and categorizations of play and play practices (above) but rather to find alternative ways to explore them.
6. Research design and methods

The main point of departure of this research was to explore play facilitation together with school-age childcare staff. In the light of this, it was necessary to find a research design that would provide a vehicle for exploring possibilities in action, or, in the words of Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p. 599), “to play with the relationship between the actual and the possible”. The choice was second-person action research, a co-operative inquiry together with staff (Reason & McArdle, 2004). Since play seemed to be conceptualised differently in the practice traditions in school-age childcare in Sweden and England, and this influenced staff’s play practices, settings in both countries were included. The action research started with a long lead-in period of relationship building when producing data, then an active intervention/action phase when collaborating with school-age childcare staff, which saw all of us producing data in many different forms and then analysing it together. My research concluded with a period of reflection on and analysis of the process, often still in dialogue with the collaborators. This design, described in greater detail below, is indicative of the evolving nature of action research.

Action research design and collaborators

The research was conducted in collaboration with school-based school-age childcare staff in Sweden and England. The settings were chosen in partnership with local training agencies or local authority staff and were settings where play was already recognised as important. The goal was to find school-age childcare staff in out-of-school clubs in England that used a playwork approach, and in Sweden to find staff interested in exploring play facilitation and how it could be developed.

My search for staff groups to collaborate with began during the summer of 2010 by contacting key local authority staff, one in Sweden and one in England. They, in turn, used their local knowledge to contact school-based school-age childcare settings on my behalf. On the advice of these key staff, the invitation process took slightly different forms. In Sweden, I wrote a letter (Appendix 1) that the local authority staff member, using their own network, sent to school managers, while in England the key staff member contacted settings directly to arrange meetings for me. After this broad invitation, I visited three schools in England, and after an initial meeting with five schools in Sweden, I visited the two schools that were interested. In one of the Swedish
schools, two separate school-age childcare settings wanted to take part (School 2, setting 2A & 2B, in Table 2 below). Two of the English schools did not have a sufficient playwork focus, which had been deemed important to ensure an alternative perspective on what it may mean to facilitate play. Thus, the decision was taken to only include one English setting in the action research.

The search for collaborators focused on settings that had a specific interest in developing their work in relation to play and did not therefore consider the type of area the children came from. All settings collaborated with provided services for children from urban, upper- and lower-middle-class families, though this social dimension was not explicitly explored.

Out of the possible six schools, focus groups were held in three, one in English and two in Swedish, during the autumn of 2010 and the spring of 2011. After the focus groups, 3 to 4 afternoons were spent in each setting; the purpose of this was to get to know the settings and their practice, but also to develop a relationship with the staff, allowing them to be better informed about the ideas behind the research before making a decision about collaborating. They all decided they wanted to do so.

During the initial phase of the action research, partnerships were formed with those staff and management members interested in taking part. This phase simultaneously provided some material through the focus groups as well as framed the action research. This meant that the initial phase of the action research was an informative inquiry, and the latter phase a transformative (Heron & Reason, 2007, p. 183).

The specific focus of the action research was decided upon together with the staff in the participating settings. The staff were active participants, and the researcher’s role was to facilitate the process. Very often, the action research process starts with a question about a problem or at least an issue about which one feels there could be improvements. Working for the first time with staff in Sweden who may, because of the national context at that specific time (see chapter 2), have felt that their professionalism was questioned might not have been the most effective way to work towards change. Instead, the design used was inspired by appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), and the process focused on the strengths and examples of facilitating play that staff identified, the idea being that discovering what one is already doing well is motivating for change. The discussions in the focus groups suggested that it may be easier for school-age childcare staff to talk about why they cannot do what they would like to do. This created a fear that we could very easily end up discussing the limitations to play facilitation rather than exploring how to increase space for play in practice. Appreciative inquiry argues that action research may be more effective in generating theory and sustaining organizational change if it were based on the positive aspects of what was working well and appreciating “the best of what is” (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2001, p. 192).
Since this approach, on the other hand, may avoid staff dealing with some of the more difficult systematic issues, appreciative inquiry was only used in a first cycle, and in a second cycle, a process more informed by critical theory. The five dimensions of action research (mentioned in chapter 5), practical outcomes, participation, human flourishing, many ways of knowing and emergence (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 2), were incorporated into the process:

- Contact was established and relationships developed
- An agreement reached with the staff about how to work together
- The school management agreed to a timetable and allocated time for the staff to take part (freed them up from other tasks)
- Discussions were held with the staff about play, together with some work on narrowing the general focus of the research
- Specific questions/issues the staff wanted to study were chosen based on what they had identified as already working well
- The staff were introduced to data production methods and some were chosen based on their specific questions

Then followed a reiterative process:

- The staff produced data on the issue
- The staff presented data and we analysed and reflected together
- Research from relevant fields were identified to be read and discussed in order to provide some further analytical tools
- Suggestions for actions were developed
- An implementation plan was developed
- Implementation with simultaneous empirical data production by the staff
- The staff presented the results and analysed together, and new questions and issues were identified based on their experience of events that had “disturbed” their thinking

The process then continued as above.

The work was not always successful. One of the Swedish schools had difficulty getting going, partly due to the research design (see just below) and partly due to members of the small participating group of staff falling ill. Looking back, I recognise that staff in the other settings had had more or less the opportunity to study play theory together and had therefore access to vocabulary and theoretical concepts that were helpful when identifying issues and questions. The lack of such a common language in this particular setting led to confusion that could have been avoided. Instead, I remained an outsider and sensed a lack of trust in me and the process. After a couple of sessions where we did not seem to move forward, we agreed to end the project.
This left one Swedish school that had two school-age childcare settings willing to collaborate. The work started in setting 2A (see Table 2 below). Here all the three members of staff had committed to the research, and although I had not planned this, two of the staff members were also attending play theory classes at the university. This provided the staff group with an interest in, and questions about, play. The school management supported the project, so time during working hours was freed up to allow for both meetings and writing. After a successful four-month period in the autumn of 2011, the school decided to ‘go large’ by asking two of the staff members involved in the action research to facilitate all four school-age childcare settings in the school (including setting 2B) in a process similar to their own. They reached an agreement with all staff members (approximately 25) to use action research–inspired methods when focusing on play. Thus, a decision was taken by all involved that my work with setting 2B would not proceed since they would be involved together with all school-age childcare staff in the whole school development. During this phase, which lasted for about a term (Jan–May 2012), my role was to mentor/coach the facilitators as well as to document the process. The whole staff team used their weekly meetings to work through the process. All settings had their own play-related issue that they explored. Even though there were different levels of engagement with the project, it was successful enough for all of them to decide to continue working together in a similar way. This resulted in a common project about school break time for all the four settings, which started in the autumn of 2012 (this time without my support).

The context for the English setting was somewhat different. The initial agreement was made when the setting was privately run on school premises. Over the period of my contact with them, they became managed by the school as a separate project but as part of the school offer. This meant that, apart from the manager, all staff were on part-time contracts, with very limited planning and reflection time. Due to lack of resources, it was not possible to provide extra time for staff to engage with the project. This led to the manager and one more member of staff eventually engaging with me outside the regular afternoon sessions with the children. The initial staff focus group was held in the autumn of 2010, and I then visited the setting for four days in the spring of 2011. Due to changes in the setting’s management as well as other unforeseen circumstances, I did not visit them again until the early autumn of 2012. It was not possible to work over an extended period of time with the English setting due to financial limitations. Instead, it was eventually decided to work together intensely for one week. All the staff employed in the setting had been there since the first time I visited; so despite difficulties finding time to make the project happen, the relationships built up over time ensured that we did not have to spend more time getting to know each other. Two of the staff members committed to working with me, and the others were happy to be involved in the project during their part-time working hours. Of the two,
one staff member (the manager) was allowed to do this during working hours and the other volunteered her own time. We had morning meetings to plan, debrief and reflect, and during the afternoons, we documented the play sessions taking place, and the two staff members then used these as a basis for reflection and planning during the morning meetings. It was interesting to see that one of the outcomes from this week was a commitment by management to review the use and allocation of premises for school-age childcare. This was not the immediate focus of the work, and yet it happened. There are definite limitations in attempting a change process in four days; all we could hope for was that, in the end, we had asked each other enough questions to have disturbed taken-for-granted practices.

Both the English and the Swedish school were aware of each other. Financed by the school, two staff members from the English setting visited Sweden in the spring of 2013 and another two in the spring of 2014. The Swedish school has tried to find external resources for a return visit but without success. The staff from the Swedish school have presented their work at national conferences on school-age childcare, and one staff member has contributed a chapter on their work to a training and development book about school-age childcare.
Table 2. My collaborators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School 1 (English)</th>
<th>School 2 (Swedish)</th>
<th>School 2 (Swedish)</th>
<th>School 3 (Swedish)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Setting 2A</strong></td>
<td><strong>Setting 2B</strong></td>
<td><strong>Setting 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male/Female (Pseudonyms)</strong></td>
<td>“Bill, David, Natasha, Vicky and Tanya”</td>
<td>“Axel, Helena and Rosie” (“Nils”, colleague in another setting)</td>
<td>6 female</td>
<td>1 male 2 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>Mixed: from unqualified to university educated</td>
<td>All university educated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>qualifications</td>
<td>qualifications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age of children in setting</strong></td>
<td>4–12</td>
<td>10–12 (and in later work with all settings, 6–12)</td>
<td>6–9</td>
<td>6–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. of children in daily attendance</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data

[I]f data represent the given, then those instances that truly surprise us, and cause a breakdown in our understanding, are in fact much more “given” than the “data” that we “take” as part of an inductive process, or “construct” based upon theoretical conjectures in more deductive designs. (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 724)

This research initially intended that documentation, and thus data production, would be a collaborative process involving everybody. Everything was documented: what the staff saw the children do, what the staff perceived they did when with the children, what the staff said in meetings, what we were all thinking about the process we were part of, and as the project developed and transcriptions lagged behind, a reassessment was necessary. The “vacuum cleaner approach” (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p. 75) had been in use, and the situation challenged my understanding of what could be considered appropriate data. Following this, the digital recorder was still used for recording conversations during meetings; the log book for field notes was used, and the collaborators also wrote log books but not everything was transcribed. Instead, I started listening back to the conversations and rereading notes and looking for “stumbles” (Brinkman, 2014, p. 723), instances of “astonishment, mystery and breakdowns” in understandings (2014, p. 722). Listening back, it was possible to hear when someone got excited and if and when we were drawn into this intensity. A summary of the data I have drawn on in the analysis is provided in Table 3.

Since the focus of the research was on a change process among staff, most of the data consists of recordings of conversations between staff and me in the school-age childcare settings. Their own data production of their practices during the projects formed the basis of many of these conversations. My own field notes followed the same format I had asked staff to adhere to in their log books. We tried to write our notes as soon as we could after the events (whether with children or with each other), and we concentrated on what we had felt, what we had been thinking and what we had been doing. This involved writing about anticipations or expectations as well as ideas about what could be done differently or changes we would like to implement. These writings could be considered an entanglement of “methodological, reflective and empirical notes” (Pripp & Öhlander, 2011, p. 134). The collaborators documented all the actions during the projects, and I documented the conversations we had when planning and when data was presented, analysed and discussed. The data staff produced formed the basis of their practice development, report writing and presentations, and most of this was available for me to use when writing articles.

In total, the data consists of 53.25 hours of audio and 9 hours of video recordings from meetings with staff. In addition, I have field notes from the
very first attempt at finding settings to engage with, as well as log books my collaborators have shared with me. I also documented the materials produced for, and during, meetings, such as flip-chart notes and drawings. In England (setting 1), we used video recordings of the sessions with the children for reflections (I have not used these recordings; see below under Values and ethics). In the Swedish setting 2A, the staff decided at the very beginning that they would carry a microphone for a day to record themselves. These recordings were not available to me but were written about in their log books and used in the meeting for reflections on their own practice. Staff also wrote reports for the management, which were made available to me. When the staff in school 2 in Sweden engaged with the rest of the school-age childcare staff in the school, we audio-recorded the meetings we had to plan for their action research. The meetings with all staff were video-recorded (with all participants giving their permission).

Throughout the research, the transcriptions were done in the language spoken, and when Swedish quotes were used, they were translated into English. The transcriptions were done mainly in accordance with conventions described by Linell (2009, p. 465), which are a simplified version of those generally adopted in conversation analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHEN</th>
<th>WHERE</th>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>AMOUNT</th>
<th>USED IN ARTICLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep 2010</td>
<td>England Setting 1</td>
<td>1 focus group</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1.5 hrs</td>
<td>‘Making Magic Soup’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2011</td>
<td>Sweden Setting 2A, 2B &amp; 3</td>
<td>3 focus groups</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>3.5 hrs</td>
<td>‘Making Magic Soup’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 2011, ended prematurely Nov 2012</td>
<td>Sweden setting 3</td>
<td>6 meetings</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>5.75 hrs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 2012</td>
<td>Sweden setting 2A</td>
<td>Follow-up focus group</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>‘What If? As If’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan–May 2012</td>
<td>Sweden setting 2A</td>
<td>9 meetings to plan for staff meetings</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>15 hrs</td>
<td>‘What If? As If’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan–May 2012</td>
<td>Sweden setting 2A + 2B and colleagues from the other settings in the school</td>
<td>14 staff meetings</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>9 hrs</td>
<td>‘What If? As If’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 2012</td>
<td>England Setting 1</td>
<td>4 meetings before and 2 debriefs after the sessions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>7.5 hrs</td>
<td>‘Becoming-player’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methods of analysis

The analysis was initially informed by dialogism and socially shared knowledge (see below) as a way to explore how staff talked about play in their settings. I identified topics, episodes and themes (Linell, 2001) in the transcripts, and at the same time I tested theory (Brinkmann, 2014) about the intentions of school-age childcare staff (Pihlgren, 2011). Even though this was interesting, and the conclusions seemed useful as a reflective tool in school-age childcare practice, I felt that I had not written about the complexities of the fluid and ever-changing everyday life staff seemed to have suggested that they continuously had to negotiate. In the action research part of the project, I searched for another analysis approach that would allow for unstable meanings (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p. 76) and the play of forces I experienced as the assemblage of school-age childcare. I ended up using concepts from Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) to inform this latter part of the analysis, which instead explored how play and playing in school-age childcare staff’s practice worked.

Analysis of socially shared knowledge

At the start of the action research project, it was important to find groups of staff that wanted to collaborate in action research, and this would require a period of conversations and getting to know one another. These conversations were referred to as focus groups on play in school-age childcare, whose purpose was to explore how staff talked about play and if there was some shared understanding of how to facilitate play in the setting. The focus group design was informed by dialogical theory and the idea of socially shared knowledge (Marková et al., 2007). Dialogism is interested in human sense-making and “highlights the role of interaction and contexts” (Linell, 2009, p. 7). Marková et al. (2007) argue that there are multifaceted forms of social knowledge, some explicit and some implicit (for example common sense), and a focus group could be one way of exploring what in a specific setting may constitute shared knowledge (p.19).

As evident above, the focus group provided me with possibilities as well as difficulties and complexities. To allow for an analysis of the conversations that kept the socially shared knowledge in focus, the decision was taken to only analyse local communicative projects that included at least three consecutive actions (A speaks, B responds, A reacts to response) (Linell, 2001, p. 45). Here is an example from an excerpt used in article 1, ‘Making Magic Soup’ (Kane, Ljusberg & Larsson, 2013, p. 16).

1 M1: and I’m good at cooking
2 (laughter and comments)
3 F3: again it’s that invisible
4 F1: magic soup
5 F3: magic soup
6 F1: and it’s nice, it’s nice, very good
(English school 1, setting 1, 9 Sep 2010)

The conversation follows after the researcher had asked what the staff felt that they were good at when it came to facilitating play. When M1 says cooking, he makes the others laugh since they were talking about creating a continuous-play environment. F3’s turn (3) about the invisibility is a response to what has been said before, yet this seems to feed F1’s imagination, and she brings the two ideas together by suggesting the concept magic soup. When F1 takes this new verbal initiative in turn 4, F3 repeats the words (magic soup), and F1 as the initiator recognises the response by expanding the statement, saying that it is “nice and good”. These are three consecutive communicative actions. When staff members responded to, and became engaged in, each other’s topics in this overt way (Linell, 2009, p. 183), then the communicative project was included in the analysis. Below is another example from the same excerpt. F3 and M1 continue:

7 F3: and () it () makes you good at setting up the space as well before the children are there because it’s, that is pre-emptive, often I’ll be able to do it when the children are there and playing and see it from what they are actually doing beforehand, seeing oh yeah what can I, you know, what would get them
8 M1: yes
9 F3: or what’s this space, what’s today about [you know]
10 M1: [Absolutely] and it can be about seeing a playframe coming to an end
11 F3: [yes]
12 M1: [and] then immediately seeing ok they need something to do now
13 F3: [yes]
14 M1: [and] then set something up and they are immediately on to what you’ve done
15 F3: yes
16 M1: and you are immediately doing nothing again, so the better you are at what you do in terms of the containment; the less you’ve got to do actually.
(English school 1, setting 1, 9 Sep 2010)

In turns 9 to 14, M1 and F3 have continuous overlapping statements, which suggests that they are intensely involved in each other’s topics. They seem also to be engaged in sense-making that aligns with their socially shared knowledge, their practice tradition or their territory since M1’s turns 10, 12 and 14 can be understood as just another way of saying what F3 said in turn 7.
In ‘Making Magic Soup’ (Kane, Ljusberg & Larsson, 2013), topics and episodes were identified. Linell (2001, p. 181) defines episodes as “a discourse event with a beginning and an end . . .”. Then themes were identified; these were reoccurring topics during the conversation. These identifications were the basis for categorization.

Choosing communicative projects that included three steps (A–B–A) continued throughout the action research project to be an important factor in selecting which data to analyse since it was a sign of intensity and affect. From an action research perspective, each research project can be considered “a chain of dialogue moments” that “affect the moments of action” (Katsarou, 2014, p. 195). This connection between dialogue, affect and action motivated me to continue to look for these types of communicative projects in all the documented conversations from the action research projects since these events were a sign of the intensities I was trying to “plug into” (St. Pierre, 2008, p. 183).

**Analysis using concepts from Deleuze and Guattari**

When transcribing the conversations from the action research project, I gradually became uneasy with the way in which the experiences of staff appeared when written down; it seemed as if the excitement was lost. The intentions we had identified as possible when facilitating play may well be one way to make sense of staff’s play practices, yet the feeling grew that this was not enough. Returning to the fable of the elephant (see chapter 3 [Backstein, 1992]), this was maybe one way to represent play practice. Still, there was an urge to challenge this essentialist view of play and play practice and instead explore how it worked. The challenge was to go beyond categorisations that seemed to fix and capture play practice in school-age childcare in an arboretic logic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004, p. 6) when it was a lived experience of a constant play of forces, of *becoming*. The search started for a method of analysis that produced something other than positions and dualisms, that disrupted (Masny, 2013, p. 339) and in line with action research pointed forward and imagined what could be instead of what already was.

Deleuze and Guattari’s *immanent philosophy* (1980/2004), put to work as methodology, suggests a variety of non-linear methods of analysis, privileging synthesis over analysis (Clarke & Parsons, 2013, p. 40). Some methods are based on the concepts they themselves use, and others have been developed based on their ontology. Most methods involve putting concepts to work to affirm complexities and messiness, rather than to categorise and “find themes” (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p. 76). In the second article, ‘Becoming-player’ (Kane & Petrie, 2014), the inspiration was what McNaughton (2004) calls rhizomatic logic, and in the third article, ‘What If? As If’ (Kane, 2015), it was Jackson and Mazzei’s treatment (2013) of the concept of folding.
Rhizomatic logic (McNaughton, 2004, p. 99) recognises the complexity of social situations and tries to map them. It may be considered a form of research that is a site for transformation with “multiple truths” (2004, p. 92).

The Deleuzian concepts assemblage and rhizome are particularly helpful in thinking connections rather than oppositions, movement rather than categorization, and becoming rather than being. (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 653, emphasis in original)

Becoming suggests indeterminacy (Masny & Waterhouse, 2011, p. 291), and when staff described the children’s and their own playing, there was a sense that every moment lay open to the unexpected, sometimes quietly and sometimes boldly, unexpected affirmations (getting hugged after affirming a brave act) or getting drenched (in a water fight), as described in the article ‘Becoming-player’ (Kane & Petrie, 2014, p. 23, 28).

Yet becoming must also be understood in relation to the context of the school and the governing documents they relate to in the assemblage of forces that is school-age childcare: an assemblage of people, space, time and artefacts in continuous becoming. As staff talk about children who come and go and the space being turned upside down (Kane, 2015), there are continuous disturbances that require experimentation: “The becoming is the something else, the newness that is created” (Jackson, 2013, p. 115, emphasis in original). When analysing data, it is hard to avoid interpretation and representation, which are so near at hand (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 655). This is the type of analysis we set out to do in ‘Making Magic Soup’ (Kane, Ljusberg & Larsson, 2013), identifying topics, episodes and themes as a basis for categorisation. In the other two articles, it became important to retain messiness (St. Pierre, 2012; Law, 2004, p. 2) and avoid representation.

Sometimes it became obvious when socially shared knowledge had been disturbed and newness seeped in. In ‘Becoming-player’ (Kane & Petrie, 2014, p. 27), we described how staff initially had believed that the children using the computers were not playing, and yet when they observed the events at the computers, they saw something they had not noticed before.

1 Axel: They can sit at a computer and appear to play a computer game, but then the two sit, stop and look, they play with each other really and the computer is just there, kind of; in some way, it can be about roles, status, or pretend that you are in a certain way . . .

2 Rosie: the computer is the . . . , basis [for it].

3 Axel: [it’s not] the computer game that is in focus really, it’s kind of background wallpaper, a little noise. (Swedish school 2, setting 2A, 18 Jan 2011)
The staff’s socially shared, common-sense knowledge was that there was no playing at the computers, and yet that way of conceiving play was disturbed and deterritorialised. What they previously had considered to be and not to be play had been challenged and the territory of play and playing in their setting had to be reconceptualised and reterritorialised.

When attempting to analyse the process of the action research project and the playing we all had experienced, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of folding proved helpful.

[A] folding — not just of data into theory and vice versa—but also of ourselves as researchers into the texts and into the theoretical threshold. (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 266)

It opened up a line of flight from what was already known, since folding “disallows a repetition that results in the production of the new, a production of different knowledge” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 267). The multiplicity of the research assemblage, play–children–staff–researchers–plans–disturbances–theory, could all be folded into each other, all equally important. The threshold Jackson and Mazzei (2013) conceptualise opens up for an understanding of the messiness as well as connectedness. A threshold connects spaces to one another, both as entry and as exit simultaneously. The concept of a threshold also points to the something new that will happen when you pass it. Playfulness seemed to be our threshold, and when in excess, new things happened. Playfulness seemed to be the engine of the assemblage (Kane & Petrie, 2014, p. 27).

Playfulness folds realities into one another, into the smallest, most expansive spaces of possibility – ludic spaces – that exist through their inflections of lineal reality . . . (Handelman, 2001, p. 146)

This folding opened up ludic spaces of possibility (Kane, 2015). Ludic spaces seem to have a “what if”? continuously available, a stretching into the potentialities we do not know anything about, and so folding led to the idea of following the “what if”? line of flight and to explore the associated “as if”, which embodies the potentialities hidden in the continuous question “what if”?

When exploring the transcribed conversations from the action research, I looked for intensities, as explained above: when staff got excited and carried away, speaking at the same time (overlapping speech as in the example above) or finishing each other’s sentences when someone had an idea taken up and developed by the others, or when someone remembered something that was said much earlier and picked it up again or when a metaphor was used and reused or reconceptualised. Listening back to the conversations also provided access to the speaker’s tone of voice, thus making it possible to hear when any or all of us were affected. These are all examples of the kinds of intensities
chosen for analysis; they were the entry points for a rhizomatic reading and an attempt at mapping the play practices of staff.

Values and ethics

The action research design uses a democratic and participatory process (Piper & Simons, 2011, p. 25) to develop both practical and theoretical knowledge. This brings with it some binaries (for example the practice/theory binary) that need to be understood and managed. Some of the binaries are directly related to how a researcher is viewed, as an insider or an outsider, and this may be connected to whether the research can be perceived to be a response to practical or theoretical questions. These issues are difficult, not only in relation to recognising power issues but also due to feeling that the answer often was, in the case of this action research, both. Since I had been a school-age childcare practitioner, I was an insider, and yet I was not studying a setting where I myself worked, so I was an outsider. The research questions had developed based on my school-age childcare practice, first in the United Kingdom and later in Sweden, and yet it was in response to engaging with theories about play that they were constructed in this way. When I met with staff to talk about the events of playing that took place in their setting, I was an outsider, but when they talked about managers who did not understand school-age childcare, I became an insider, someone with insider knowledge of “how it is”.

As mentioned above, there are five dimensions of action research, according to Reason and Bradbury (2001, p. 2), which all need to be accounted for in any research design: practical outcomes, participation, human flourishing, many ways of knowing and emergence. They all have ethical implications. All these dimensions could be explored extensively, but only some examples are given below. It may also be important in relation to more specific research ethics to make the distinction between “engaging in action and reporting on that action” (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006, p. 126). The practice development staff engaged in during the research complied with their own settings, rules and regulations, and my way of handling the data and reporting on the process of development was in accordance with the Swedish Research Council’s ethical guidelines (2011, p. 67). In Sweden, I only worked with the staff, and I did not spend time in the setting when the children attended, and when the staff talked about specific children, this was transcribed without names. In England, I did attend when the children were present, and they had a routine of obtaining permission to observe (including video observations) for training and education purposes when children registered for the setting. None of the staff’s original observation records have been included in the data, only their conversations about the events.

In the light of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, ethics seems to be conceptualised as affirming constant change and rejecting the desire to
conclude definite results. It offers us an opportunity to explore potentialities, to “look for what might be possible, what emerges, and what can become” (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 177, emphasis in original). Equally, who I was becoming as a researcher would continuously become. It would do so in the assemblage of histories, meetings and seating arrangements, contexts, ideas, devices, methods, expectations and words used or not used. In this continuous becoming, what was valued was not constant or fixed.

Opening up safe space

Action research is a form of research conducted with people, not on them (Heron & Reason, 2007), and this was a challenge. The initial period of getting access and moving towards commitment and engagement is crucial to many of the dimensions mentioned above but maybe especially to participation and practical outcomes (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 2). How could I gain access to groups of staff that both had management support to take time to engage in research that would take them away from face-to-face work with children and were themselves enthusiastic about the play-oriented research? I was faced with choosing whether to ask staff first and then management or the other way around, recognising that either way would have consequences for how the research would progress. At this “inclusion phase” of the action research, I had to develop “critical awareness of and attention to the obstacles that get in the way of dialogue” (Gayá Wicks & Reason, 2009, p. 246). In the end, I decided to go “top down” rather than “bottom up” since I hoped it would ensure that management valued the research enough to free up time for staff to engage in the project. This would be helpful in ensuring that staff would not feel pressured into fitting the project into an already-full schedule, what Gayá Wicks and Reason (2009, p. 249) call the organisational issues of the “inclusion oriented activities” of opening up “communicative space”. In both countries, at the very first meetings with the school leaders/managers, I presented some loosely planned steps of cyclical action to make them aware of the time commitment needed. I also informed them that a timetable would be worked out in more detail once staff had had a chance to meet me and choose whether they wanted to commit to the project. Since some managers came with their school-age childcare staff and some did not, I made it very clear that I would spend time visiting their setting over some months and talking to the staff before asking them to commit to the project. The school-age childcare staff would make the final decision. This commitment included permission for me to use the material that would emerge through our conversations as well as the data they would produce about their practice.

In the inclusion phase, emotional issues also needed to be managed (Gayá Wicks & Reason, 2009, p. 249), for example for collaborators to feel free to contribute. For the research to achieve participation as well as practical outcomes, the staff as well as the researcher probably needed to feel both
relaxed and challenged. I was hoping that we would find ways to open up spaces to “play” together. As mentioned in chapter 2, the start of the research coincided with the low status of school-age childcare staff being discussed, at least in Sweden, and this led to a conscious decision to start the process by recognising what staff were already doing well regarding the issue of play, rather than by identifying problems. Having worked myself in school-age childcare reinforced a sense of us all being colleagues exploring something collectively. I then knew more than them about play theory and research methods, while they knew about playing in their setting, which I did not. Once the staff had decided to commit to the project, I consciously asked them to document their own practice, rather than doing it myself. It was also up to them to choose where to meet; for the staff in Sweden, it was in their planning spaces in the school, while the two members of staff in the English setting decided on meeting in someone’s home.

The final area Gayá Wicks and Reason (2009, p. 249) identify as important to attend to in the inclusion phase is what they call task issues. Finding a balance between the clarity of purpose of the task at the outset and the participants being able to influence it and make it their own is an example of such an issue. As previously mentioned in this chapter, the three settings I actually started working with had very different starting points in relation to understanding the focus or the “frame” of the research. Staff in the English setting all had playwork qualifications and brought with them a language about play and playing, based theoretically mainly on evolutionary and psychotherapeutic perspectives (Russel, 2013, pp. 72–74), which I was familiar with. Two of the three members of the Swedish setting 2A happened to go to lectures on play at the university, which coincided with the start of the action research in their setting. The play theories covered there were inspired more by a psychological perspective and involved some of the concepts to do with play behaviour and skills (Jensen, 2013, p. 21, 23). Setting 3 seemed to have no language in common to explore play even though they all had a higher education qualification to work in school-age childcare. I believe my not attending to this before they started observing their own practice was one factor in their dwindling commitment to the project in this setting. Another contributing factor in the eventual decision to end work prematurely was staff sickness. Looking back, I would have needed to provide greater clarity of purpose and take more of a lead in setting 3. They did not seem comfortable with the idea of contributing in the way I had hoped, possibly due to my having provided a weak frame that did not open up “communicative space” (Gayá Wicks & Reason, 2009, p. 258). It can also be understood as being about unresolved control issues. When staff members started questioning the process as well as challenging each other’s ideas about play, the commitment died and it became more and more difficult to find a time when all staff members could attend. The staff in this setting never reached “interactive
participation, in which the group takes control over decision making” (2009, p. 253).

Working together (and apart)

Early on in the action research, it was stated that the knowledge developed in the project would be owned by all those involved and that staff were encouraged to share this in their own professional contexts. The purpose was for us all to flourish and draw on the many collaboratively produced ways of knowing (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 2). As the initial focus groups on play generated data on how staff talked about play and how they perceived they facilitated it in their practice, it became evident that there was already much interesting data available. No group of staff had yet committed to the action element of the research; but as a researcher, I had had by this time many interesting conversations about play that I had already started to analyse. One difficulty stemmed from the lack of participant influence over the analysis since it would not be possible for me to return to all the settings to do this work. In the end, the hope was that the article would contribute to discussions about practice and in this sense be a practical outcome even for those not part of the action research project.

Once the action research project started, a question that arose was when it may be appropriate to share transcriptions of conversations? It transpired that the staff were not very interested in accessing the sometimes hard-to-read transcripts. I decided to offer them access rather than automatically sending transcripts once the action research started. The staff were much more interested in being part of collectively analysing the material they themselves had produced when observing their own practice. The transcripts of conversations about this formed the basis of my analysis, together with the material the staff produced and shared with me. Drafts of the articles were shared. The participating staff used their material to write and present the school management with reports, proposals and plans at different stages of their engagement with me. Eventually, staff were also asked to share their experience and knowledge at conferences for school-age childcare practitioners, managers and trainers, sometimes this was together with me and at other times on their own.

Focusing on outcomes may not allow you to be fully present in the events here and now. When attempting to move towards practical outcomes through cycles of actions, it was sometimes difficult to be sensitive to the intensities of events in the setting. Becoming open to the unexpected and trusting my collaborators were not always easy. The purpose had been to provide a flexible process that would allow the participants to identify issues within the framework designed. I had not been prepared for the framework to be challenged. Gayá Wicks and Reason (2009, p. 258) suggest that “communicative spaces offer possibilities of new forms of living relationship”
by being places of continuous change. My plans for ending my four-month relationship with the Swedish setting 2A in order to move on to working with setting 2B in the same school were disrupted by my collaborators. In response to a request from the management to work with all the school-age childcare settings in the school, some staff in setting 2A went on to develop the action research project in a different way than I had planned. My collaborators had identified new issues, and I had to let go of my need to follow the plan. This came to be an important development for us all, and the emergence Reason and Bradbury (2001, p. 2) talk about became even more evident.
7. Summary of the articles

Article 1. Making Magic Soup – the facilitation of play in school-age childcare


The article explores socially shared knowledge of facilitating play in school-based school-age childcare settings. Previous research highlights that the area of play facilitation needs further exploration. It points to a tension between children’s agency in play and the constraints of the setting (Cartmel, 2010, p. 17; Smith, 2010, p. 19; Persson, 2008, p. 65).

We used the pedagogical traditions of Froebel and Dewey to investigate the options for action in this field of tension. Both these traditions emphasise the adult as an observer and a facilitator of children’s experimentations and experiences. Pihlgren (2011, 2013) constructs a model based on these traditions that discusses the intentions of the pedagogue concerning process and/or product of activities and conceptualises four different approaches. The didactic position is when both product and process intentions are high, the pedagogue decides what should be done and how. The mature position is more focused on product rather than process, and here the pedagogue decides the specific outcome, but the children themselves can find different ways to achieve it. The process position, on the other hand, focuses on process rather than product; how children engage with an activity is more important than the outcome. The last position is the chaotic; so called only due to the pedagogue’s lack of control. Here the children themselves decide what to do and how.

This model was explored in relation to facilitating play in school-age childcare. Staff from four school-age childcare settings – three Swedish and one English – took part in focus groups during the autumn of 2010 and the spring of 2011 discussing play and how they facilitated it in their setting. This was part of an invitation to collaborate in an action research project. The analysis of the transcriptions was inspired by dialogism (Linell, 2009) and focused on “islands of shared understanding” (Linell, 2001, p. 184). This was done by choosing to analyse only local communicative projects with at least three consecutive actions. The majority of analysed “islands of shared
understanding” were communicative projects about interventions into child-
rather than adult-initiated activities.

Since the article focused on discussing how the staff managed the tension
between children exploring their agency in play and the constraints of the
setting, those themes that related specifically to this were dealt with more
fully. If a child’s actions were understood as play, then the adult’s
interventions were different than if they were understood as not play, which
led to conversations about where you draw the line regarding disruptive
behaviour. The disruption could be understood in relation to staff, other
children as well as equipment. Another theme covered conversations about
where and when children could play. When focusing on the process of play,
staff tried to provide an environment that constantly made new material
available to entice new playframes, but sometimes too many children in
relation to the number of adults or inappropriate space did not allow this focus.

When using the four different approaches described above as a way to
understand the judgements staff made when balancing children exploring their
agency in play with the constraints of the setting, the following conclusions
were drawn: the didactic position does not facilitate play but may provide
activities that later can become incorporated into playing. When staff
intervened in children’s play with this approach, they tended to reinforce rules
and regulations by explaining why children’s actions were unacceptable. In
the mature position, staff attempted to provide a playful environment without
disruptions to play. When intervening in play, they may have stopped its flow
just to remind children of collective decisions about the playing. The process
position led to an approach that attempted to support children’s own initiatives
and was responsive to children’s requests when they played. Interventions in
this approach were mainly playful so as to avoid disruptions. We did not find
any contributions we could relate to the chaotic position. This suggested to us
that this position and approach may not be valid in a school-based setting.

Even when the adults’ intentions did not include play, it may be possible
for children to play anyway. This was not discussed but raises the question
what staff may do then? Which position and approach would they turn to?
These are continuous judgements negotiated daily, and the developed model
can be used to reflect on the intentions and approaches of a service that partly
facilitates play. The conclusion is that the ability of staff to interpret children’s
play as children exploring their agency is crucial when facilitating play in a
learning institution. When the intention is to allow children their agency in
play, and staff have to balance this with the constraints of the setting, then the
approaches that follow from the process position may be most helpful.
Article 2. Becoming-player in school-age childcare

Eva Kane and Pat Petrie (2014).
Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methods.
doi:org/10.7577/erm.947

The article explores how some of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts (1980/2004) can contribute to the understanding of practice in school-age childcare, particularly among the staff required by governing documents to facilitate play in a school-based setting. Transcripts from conversations with staff during action research projects in a Swedish leisure-time centre and in an out-of-school club with a playwork ethos in England during 2011–12 were analysed.

Using concepts from Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004) allowed us to understand that words applied to the practice in policy documents, words like facilitation and support, are terms that reactivate dichotomies such as child/adult, enabler/unable, provider/recipient, which suggests that playing may not happen without staff support and facilitation. Yet in our reading of the transcripts, both children and staff were playing.

Schools measure and regulate not only children but also staff, which leads to schooling, this is “domestication to existing social, economic and discursive orders” (Kemmis, 2006, p. 465, emphasis added). In this kind of striated space, staff are produced as facilitators of play, which in this case is understood as something children engage in to learn. This may suggest that adults should see to it that children play in a way which ensures appropriate learning. Playwork practice, as understood in the Playwork Principles (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005), is equally a striated space. In this striated space of playworking, staff conform to other orders and are then also produced as staff facilitating play, but here play is understood as something children engage in to survive and/or develop. This may suggest that adults should avoid intervening in play to ensure that adult agendas do not get in the way of children’s inherent drive to play. Both schooling and playworking seem to trap staff in the above-mentioned dichotomies.

Deleuze and Guattari’s concept (1980/2004) of the rhizome opens up the possibility to resist the arboretic, dichotomous logic and disturb this either/or concept of play as well as of staff as facilitators. Playing can then be conceptualised as events of becoming, staff’s and/or children’s events becoming-different. The assemblage of school-age childcare can be understood as a striated space that has the potential to both support the strata and open up lines of flight to smooth spaces (1980/2004, p. 556). When staff uphold the existing orders, they support the strata and they become-the-same, and when staff and/or children playfully disturb the orders or do the unexpected, they open up space for becoming-different.
In this space of multiplicities, which school-age childcare can be conceptualised as, there is a constant flow of the re- and deterritorialisation of play. Both staff and children can be agents of striation and smooth space. Sometimes children regulate the playing and establish the orders, while staff contest them playfully, and at other times, it is the other way around. There seems to be a relationship between the strata and the smooth space when playing. Resisting the strata (deterritorialise) through playing (opening up smooth space) and reconstructing a strata (reterritorialise).

Sometimes staff seem to be captured by a multiplicity of forces acting in/on school-age childcare. They have to negotiate and manage these forces even when there are no apparent lines of flight open to them. The forces of *schooling* and *playworking* constitute a messy entanglement that may at times be hard to negotiate. When observing children playing, staff seemed to become more aware of the lines of flight and felt that they had found unexpected ways of becoming-player. Playing seemed to act as an engine or a “machine” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/2004, p. 178), which made it possible to momentarily escape the orders of schooling and playworking and instead have fun together and affirm becoming-different. With this sensitivity to lines of flight, staff could also see children as becoming-players in situations that previously had not been recognised as opening up this potential, for example computer use or board games. There seemed to be a continuous flow of playing games on the computer and playing with each other. In the same way, staff seemed sometimes to flow effortlessly between schooling, playworking and playing.

When putting Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of striated/smooth space and de- and reterritorialisation to work, it was possible to go beyond tensions and explore simultaneity. Staff seemed to negotiate the demands and regulations of the school while at the same time opening up a space for children to be, and further become, players. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts produced an understanding of staff doing *schooling, playworking* and *playing* simultaneously, and thus overcoming the apparent policy dichotomies.
Article 3. ‘What If? As If’, an approach to action research practice: Becoming-different in school-age childcare

Eva Kane (2015).

Educational Action Research.
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The article explores the relationship between planning and the unexpected in school-age childcare practice and critical action research. Transcribed conversations from an action research project focusing on play in a Stockholm school during the autumn of 2011 and the spring of 2012 were explored using some of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts (1980/2004). Collaboration with this particular school provided an example of how playing can disturb and open up for new possibilities. The initial plan was to collaborate with staff in one of the school’s school-age childcare settings (there were four) over a four-month period looking at play facilitation. In the end, my involvement with the school lasted a year; during that time, some of the staff headed up an action research project involving all four school-age childcare settings. After the research collaboration ended, the staff decided to set up their own collaborative research group and focus on break times in the school playground as a common project for all the settings. During the year of ongoing learning, many unforeseen things happened, and the article intended to explore this.

Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy (1980/2004) allowed a reading of the data from the critical action research project that moved away from the play-to-learn discourse common in education and challenged the normativity of the critical approach. With Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004), it was possible to disturb the taken-for-granted aspects of practice and instead think constant change. When conceptualising playing as suspending limitations, opening up for asking “what if . . .”, it is possible to “respond with behaviours that are marked by ‘as if . . .’” (Lester, 2012, p. 6). The “what if” question may be considered an invitation to becoming-different and the responding “as if” behaviour allows for the actualisation of potentialities. These processes of change, of becoming-different, may be afforded by playing together.

The process of the collaborative action research project was conceptualised as our playing together, asking a number of What If? questions and responding with an As If behaviour. Staff identified their mischievous attitude to each other and the children as something positive that already opened up space for play. When asked What If? they transferred this attitude to the physical space; it did not take very long for them to come up with the idea of turning everything in the space upside down. So they acted without fear of what might happen when disrupting sedimeted practices, As If this was completely normal. The event led to reflections on the children’s level of participation in the setting, and the staff then asked: What If? the children took ownership of
one of the rooms, and the children answered with an *As If* behaviour; it was completely normal for children to change the set-up of rooms in school. When writing a report on the action research project, the staff were also asked by the school management to develop local pedagogical plans (LPPs); they were expected to break down the curriculum learning outcomes and show how these could be achieved in their setting. When the idea was mooted that they could write an LPP based on what they had already done, for example the upside-down project, the question became *What If?* we do it back to front? They decided to describe the emergent playful process after it had happened. This opened up for the process to play with us as much as our playing with the outcome-based management system.

The original plan had been to work with one setting for four months and then move on to another setting in the school. When the time came, the principal had asked two staff members involved in the research if they wanted to take responsibility for all the school-age childcare staff’s weekly meetings with the aim of developing work focused on play. They had said that they would like to if they could use an action research–inspired approach. At that point, I was a prisoner of my own plan, my own striated space, and I did not recognise the *What If?* question, the line of flight away from striation. When I shortly after recognised the importance of the question, I quickly responded *As If* this was the plan. The other setting was happy to be part of the bigger project; henceforth, my role changed as I supported the staff as they facilitated a process for their colleagues. As the other settings developed their own *What If?* questions disturbing habits or norms in their own practice, issues surfaced regarding structural support for school-age childcare staff to engage in this type of development work. Despite general management support for the action research in day-to-day practice, it seemed more difficult to find enough time for reflection and writing up. When circumstances changed from day to day (for example due to illness among the teaching staff), and the school-age childcare staff were asked to reprioritise their time, they often did so for the benefit of the children. When this was verbalised, the question became *What If?* the school-age childcare staff’s reflection and planning time were as important as other teachers”? It was agreed that the *As If* behaviour was to affirm this by, for example, saying no to requests for reprioritizations. At the end of the term, when my time at the school came to an end, all the school-age childcare staff decided collectively to set up what they called a research group to explore break time in the school playground the following term.

Looking back at the events, it seemed that playing together could be conceptualised as *What If? As If* events of becoming-different. Sometimes this was resisted and yet when the potentiality was felt, intensities of becoming-different seemed contagious and opened up for rhizomatic growth. The conclusion was that playing may be a way to resist the type of planning which attempts to categorise activities against outcomes and instead conceptualise a mode of planning which affords continuously becoming-different.
The practice of asking What If? may well be a common practice in action research, yet this article conceptualised the As If response as the playing approach to action research. When safe communicative space afforded playing together with both practice and concepts, it opened up the possibility to disturb the taken-for-granted school-age childcare practice. If playing was to suspend the hierarchies, dualities and limitations of everyday life, was playing not a way to be continuously critical?

The article argues that there may be such a thing as a What If? As If approach to practice, according to which collaborators play to change social situations and develop new knowledge. Being sensitive to invitations to playing may allow the process of planning to continuously become-different.
This research aimed to explore, together with staff in school-age childcare settings in Sweden and England, how they talked about play and what practices could facilitate play. These explorations led to further questions, namely how concepts of play contributed to different play practices and how it might be possible to disturb and transform play practice architectures.

The different ways of facilitating play as part of school-age childcare practice are in this dissertation called play practices, which are enabled and constrained by the schools’ practice architectures: the “cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements” (Kemmis et al., 2014) with which they are intertwined. For this reason, play practices intertwined with schools’ practice architectures are here called play practice architectures. The following sections will discuss how different ways of conceptualizing play (foregrounding the discursive aspects) in the action research settings may be considered traces of (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 36) different play practices.

The chapter will also discuss how action research was a way to disturb these play practices, and when they were disturbed, new play practices emerged. The dissertation argues that play practice architectures can be transformed intentionally or unintentionally by the practice of playing, and that even if it may be possible to facilitate play, it may not be possible to facilitate playing. Mapping play practices involved retaining the complexity and multiplicity of the social situations in the settings collaborated with. This mapping also meant retaining “multiple truths” (McNaughton, 2004, p. 92) about play as a tool for transformation.

Play facilitation

The many different ways to facilitate play in school-age childcare are all “prefigured” but not “predetermined” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 212) and intertwined (or “bundled together”; Schatzki, 2002, p. 71) in sayings (how staff talk about play), doings (how/if staff engage/intervene in play and what space/material is provided) and relatings (roles, rules, norms and values) in practice (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 33). In the case of this dissertation, how and what it was possible to think and talk about play influenced doings and relatings in the specific school and school-age childcare setting at the time of the action research.
To be able to explore play practices requires a definition of play since an analysis is always dependent on a conceptualization (Bergen, 2015, p. 51). The idea that play has to be seen as something is implied in the article ‘Making Magic Soup’ when it describes play as “children exploring their agency” (Kane, Ljusberg & Larsson, 2013, p. 8). Yet this is only one of many possible conceptions of play that can influence play practices in a setting. The review of previous research (chapter 4) identified five play practices in school-age childcare and playwork. These practices conceptualised play as social competence, freely chosen behaviour, participation, exploring agency, and emergence and becoming.

The article ‘Becoming-player’ argues that the words “play facilitation” suggest that staff are needed to provide for play (Kane & Petrie, 2014, p. 21). What this dissertation highlights is that what may be facilitated and provided for are particular conceptualizations of play. When staff conceptualise play as, for example, contributing towards social competence (Evaldsson & Aarsand, 2011), then this will influence their practice. Staff’s intentions may then be to support and maximise opportunities for children to develop, practice or display social competence, and what they say and do and how they relate to the playing children and each other will reflect this. When playing is conceived of as social competence, staff could perceive a lone child as not playing and intervene accordingly (School 2, 30 Jan 2012). When the *sayings about play* are that everyone should engage in play, be allowed to play or alternatively get the opportunity to learn to play with other children (Dahl, 2014, p. 16, 115), staff will try to facilitate this.

On the other hand, staff may conceptualise play as freely chosen behaviour. In this case, their intentions may be to allow, or at least not intervene in, some behaviour that may not otherwise be acceptable in the school. Both ‘Making Magic Soup’ (Kane, Ljusberg & Larsson, 2013) and ‘Becoming-player’ (Kane & Petrie, 2014) provide examples of what staff, mostly in the English playwork setting, called “their (meaning the children’s) play”. This was playing that became problematic for staff since it was also perceived as not caring for equipment or relationships. When the *sayings about play* were that “anything [any behaviour] could be play” and that staff should be “allowing for that play to happen” (English school, setting 1, 26 Sept 2012), then this prevented staff from intervening. Previous research provides evidence that children often challenge staff’s notions of the appropriate use of space (Smith & Barker, 2000a) as well as appropriate ways of relating to your friends and staff (Johansson & Ljusberg, 2004; Dahl, 2014). It could be argued that, from a children’s perspective, playing is often a way to challenge adult orderings (Øksnes, 2008, 2013), and when this is done, it may create great difficulties for staff, especially in relation to the other school staff. When playing is conceived of as freely chosen behaviour, then using physical space under certain pre-ordained conditions, for example not touching the teacher’s desk or resources, (English school 1, setting 1, 26 Sep 2012) creates difficulties for
staff, who may then have to supervise the use of the room and limit or constrain the kind of playing that goes on there. This does not align with their socially shared knowledge of playwork’s non-intervention approach and therefore creates a serious dilemma for their practice.

It seems that when staff members focus on facilitating play in a specific setting, in a certain school, at a particular time, there needs to be a discussion with the team about what is to be facilitated, even when multiplicity is retained. Being aware of each other’s ideas of what to facilitate may avoid conflicting situations where one member of staff may allow one type of play, while another staff member does not. It also seems as if this discussion may benefit from including all the school staff.

Play practice architectures

Even with a multiplicity of conceptualisations of play, the two examples above (play understood as social competence or as a freely chosen behaviour) seem to be common in the practice traditions of leisure-time centres and playwork settings in school-age childcare services as seen both in previous research and in this research. These concepts of play seem dominant, as in taken for granted and habitual, building on socially shared “common sense” knowledge (Marková et al., 2007, p. 17) and seem to hang together (Kemmis, 2014, p. 31; Schatzki, 2002, p. xiii) with doings and relatings in the play practice. When these play practices become intertwined with a school’s practice architecture, it is in this dissertation called play practice architecture.

In the practice tradition of leisure-time centres, the concepts of play seem mostly influenced by what Sutton-Smith (1997, p. 215) called the “progress rhetoric”, where the function of play is thought of as “adaptation, growth and socialization” that “provide rationalization for the adult control of children’s play: to stimulate it, negate it, exclude it, or encourage limited forms of it” (p. 49). The focus groups provided many examples of conversations of these types of staff interventions. For instance, staff in one of the Swedish settings recalled how they intervened in what boys and girls were allowed to do in the setting. The school’s practice architecture seemed to be schooling (Kemmis, 2006, p. 465) the staff. At this particular time, the schooling was focused on issues of gender. This resulted in staff restricting boys from playing in the construction area and at the same time encouraging girls to do so (Swedish school 2, setting 2B, 17 Feb 2011). This regulation of play corresponded to the school’s practice architecture, where “[t]he school has a responsibility to counteract traditional gender patterns” (SNAE, 2011, p. 10). The spaces of schooling “magically capture us” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004, p. 471), “what is best for school and society is also, magically, the individual’s [staff’s] desire” (Kane & Petrie, 2014, p. 21). The staff’s play practice may also school children into the setting’s play practice architecture: girls are encouraged to engage in play that otherwise mostly boys choose. ‘Making Magic Soup’
(Kane, Ljusberg & Larsson, 2013) refers to other examples of what the article ‘Becoming-player’ (Kane & Petrie, 2014, p. 20) calls *schooling*. Kane, Ljusberg and Larsson (2013, p. 14) provide an example of schooling in relation to leisure-time centres’ aiming to ensure that children develop social competence (SNAE, 2014a, p. 37); in this case, staff see to it that children are sensitive to other children’s playframes (for one child to use a hockey stick as a rifle during a game of hockey is not considered appropriate). When play is understood as a resource for practising and developing social competence (Evaldsson & Aarsand, 2011), staff will intervene accordingly. The practice of facilitating play as social competence seems here to be intrinsic to a play practice architecture where the leisure-time centre’s play practice and the school’s practice architecture have become intertwined.

In the practice tradition of playworking (Kane & Petrie, 2014, p. 20), the concepts of play can be traced back mainly to evolutionary and psychotherapeutic perspectives (Russell, 2013, pp. 72–74). Play is here seen as a human drive and, as such, a response to an evolutionary need for human survival and development. Play is also seen as having a therapeutic effect. These conceptions of play combine to suggest that humans need to play, and playwork is a response to the diminishing space (physical as well as temporal) for play in society (Russell, 2013, p. 69). Its role is to compensate for lack of space for children’s (in this case) freely chosen behaviour and *not* limit this intrinsic behaviour by judging, intervening or controlling. In the United Kingdom, a particular practice tradition has developed around playwork (Russell, 2013, p. 67). More recently, peer-driven initiatives have developed playwork principles (Playwork principles scrutiny group, 2005) and playwork qualifications (SkillsActive, 2007). The article ‘Becoming-player’ (Kane & Petrie, 2014) suggests that playworking is the equivalent of *schooling* within the playwork setting. Here staff are “magically capture[d]” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004, p. 471) by the practice tradition of playwork. With playwork being introduced to schools, this practice tradition encounters the school’s practice architecture, possibly leading to tensions with teachers in the school unless school-age childcare staff conform to the school’s practice architecture. This research does not seem to indicate that the practice tradition of playwork and the school’s practice architecture have developed into a cohesive play practice architecture since they are not yet intertwined but seem to exist side by side. Staff may see themselves as separate from the school even though some of the school’s practice architecture, for example their contracts, enable as well as constrain their own practice.

The non-interventionist approach may create tensions with the teachers in the school. This research shows that it also seemed to create dilemmas for the staff themselves in the setting. In the space of the English setting, lots of materials are usually put out to inspire play; the staff try to anticipate what the children might want to do next, and so they “make magic soup” (Kane, Ljusberg & Larsson, 2014). This usually means that the space is full of odd...
things lying about both on tables and on the floor. At the same time, the staff are concerned about diminishing resources and the children damaging materials and equipment. When observing a child kicking play material, a hat, across the floor, there is later a discussion about the inappropriate use of resources. The staff then end up asking themselves if this behaviour, kicking the hat, is play or not (Kane & Petrie, 2014, p. 24). The playing that takes place can be considered disturbing the practice tradition of the setting.

Playing can disturb play practice architectures

[T]o play is to interrupt the flow of events . . . (Henricks, 2006, p. 185)

Even though staff in a particular setting, in a certain school, have a specific play practice at a particular time, this play practice may not be considered fixed but instead continuously transformed, intentionally reorganised or unintentionally recomposed (Schatzki, 2002, p. 241) as it unfolds in the everyday life of the school-age childcare setting. If or when play becomes conceptualised differently (sayings change), it is likely that doings and relatings will undergo transformation since they are “bundled together” in the play practices (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 3). The act of playing (doing) may equally transform sayings and relatings in staff’s play practice. Playing (both children’s and staff’s) seemed to disturb (detrimentalise) play practice architectures in a site, and this encouraged the staff team to reflect. Sometimes this led to the emergence of alternative play practices (reterritorialisation). The following is an example from the article ‘What If? As If’ (Kane, 2015, p. 7, 9).

The staff in setting 2A aimed to increase space for play since they felt that the children did not play very much. They did so by offering a playframe that consisted of turning everything upside down. During their reflections after the event, some staff were concerned that no child had questioned this or changed things back even though the staff always thought of the space as the children’s. The previously dominant play practice architecture, based on play as social competence, had been unintentionally disturbed by the events of playing (detrimentalised). The staff then started talking about the children’s influence over what the setting looked and felt like, and issues of democracy and participation came to the fore. Since play can also be perceived as children’s participation, or as a “form of minor political activity in their everyday worlds” (Lester, 2013b, p. 38), these discussions opened up for a reconceptualisation of play. When common-sense or socially shared concepts of play were explored, alternative concepts of play became accessible. Play as participation became an emerging play practice as they operationalised a project where the children (in small groups, in turn, over a period of time) were given an empty room to set up as they wished (Kane, 2015, p. 9). As the
staff eventually started to plan for this idea, they also wrote about it. In the staff report (Swedish school 2, setting 2A, Dec 2011), they linked this idea to the general guidelines which suggest that a precondition for children experiencing their leisure time as meaningful is that they can influence what the setting offers (SNAE, 2014a, p. 32). In the report, this process of linking their play practice to the general guidelines may be considered a process of reterritorialisation.

Action research may be a way for staff to intentionally disturb play practice architectures. The article ‘What If? As If’ (Kane, 2015, p. 12) suggests that when playing became the focus, then the socially shared, common-sense knowledge and the sayings of the play practices were disturbed and transformed. When engaging with each other in the action research, other ways of conceptualising what was going on became possible. In amongst learning outcomes, appropriate behaviour, democratic values and self-directed play ideals, the staff started playing with ideas and possible actions, and their doings changed. They empowered each other to go beyond what was and anticipated possible futures.

There are also examples of how playing disturbed the schools’ practice architectures. The staff in the Swedish school, setting 2A, wrote an LPP (Att ge utrymme för lek) after they had already put it into practice (Kane, 2015, p. 8), and the staff in the English school started working on accessing space that they could have primary use of (see chapter 6). Both these events exemplify how staff’s doings changed when they acted ‘As If’ they were equal members of the school’s staff team. The practice of playing, whether intentional or unintentional, not only can disturb play practices but may also transform play practice architectures.

Playing cannot be facilitated

When playing is conceived of philosophically, when understanding it as a force of potentiality or of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004) then, it seems no longer possible to categorise. Play no longer is, it becomes, playing.

[举办的... has no identity (being) except as a secondary characteristic of its ontological difference (becoming). (Harker, 2005, p. 53)

Playing escapes categorisations, and so it may be impossible to facilitate. It may no longer be conceptualised as a psychological behaviour that can be analysed and be “assign[ed] its place in the scheme of life” (Huizinga, 1949, p. 1). Instead, playing seems to find its own space; it finds the cracks in between the “existing social, economic and discursive orders” (Kemmis, 2006, p. 465). Playing just happens (Gadamer in Øksnes, 2008, p. 247). The article ‘Becoming-player’ describes a staff-initiated playframe (called “the market”) in Swedish school 2, setting 2A (Kane & Petrie, 2014, p. 24). The
children had to earn currency to buy material and equipment (that normally would be freely available) to play with that day. After a while, “[o]ne of the staff became inspired and turned into a robber who stole from the ‘currency lady’” (staff report, Swedish school 2, setting 2A, Oct 2011, emphasis added). During the subsequent team meeting, the staff agreed that it was a spontaneous event (Swedish school 2, setting 2A, 5 Oct 2011).

When staff engage in play, they may give up control of intentions (facilitation), and playing can take over; intentions seem no longer to be in focus, only the potentialities of becoming-player. Playing may then be conceptualised as lines of flight, as becoming-player (Kane & Petrie, 2014), affirming provisionality and potentiality.

Playing as a philosophical concept, as becoming, cannot be categorised or captured in play practices; instead, playing seems to traverse them. Play practices can be conceived of as stratifications, territorialisation. Playing and play practices seem to be simultaneous. Playing may use play practices as footholds to play with them. It is not that they do not exist; playing becomes “other”. The staff in the Swedish school 2, setting 2A, had planned “the market” so that children could “test and develop their social competence” (staff report, Swedish school 2, setting 2A, Oct 2011); they had planned for a specific play practice. Yet playing took over and an event developed “where both staff and children are playing and continuously de- and re-territorialise” (Kane & Petrie, 2014, p. 25).

Playing seems to play with play practices (disturb them), and staff can sensitise themselves to be able to pick up the lines of flight provided by playing, which, if taken seriously, can open up for continuous becoming in school-age childcare practice, allowing both staff and children to avoid being captured by (Kane & Petrie, 2014, p. 25), as well as contribute to the transformation of, play practices and their architectures.

Mapping playing practices in school-age childcare – concluding remarks

The dissertation is a contribution to research in two emerging fields: not only the practice traditions of school-age childcare but also play facilitation or play practices in educational settings. It is an attempt at mapping the complexity of the social situation and the site of play facilitation in school-age childcare settings.

To explore play facilitation, it was necessary to define what was to be facilitated. With such a multiplicity of perspectives on play, it eventually became important to retain some of this diversity. Tracing previous research and holding focus groups provided a variety of sayings about play and play practices (different ways of facilitating play). This research identified five play practices, which, this research argues, conceptualised play as social competence, freely chosen behaviour, participation, exploring agency, and
emergence and becoming. The seemingly most common play practice in leisure-time-centre practice facilitated social competence, and in the case of playwork practice, it was freely chosen behaviour. It appears that when staff conceptualise play as something specific, then this aspect of play is what is being facilitated; it becomes their play practice at that time in that space. The specific play practice will encourage those forms of play which at that time are the focus of staff, and other forms of play may be discouraged and excluded.

With different theories and concepts, it also became possible to conceptualise playing as an activity that could disturb staff’s play practices. When we collaborated in the action research project, we intentionally foregrounded and focused on play and put ourselves “in play” (Henricks, 2011, p. 212). We opened ourselves up to becoming-different and our practices (whether school-age childcare or research practice) were transformed, intentionally reorganised or unintentionally recomposed (Schatzki, 2002, p. 241) as they unfolded. Staff came to think differently (cultural-discursive arrangements) as they started to use language with specific play terms and concepts (play cues, playframes, etc.) or began to pose previously unasked questions about their practice. Their play practices were disturbed not only in the way they were talking about it (sayings) but also in terms of their doings (material-economic arrangements) and their relatings (socio-political arrangements). The practice of playing, whether intentional or unintentional, can not only disturb but also transform play practices and the play practice architectures with which they are intertwined.

A playing practice could be conceptualised as a practice that sensitises itself to the disturbances caused by playing but also puts itself ‘in play’, which opens up for a continuous de- and reterritorialisation. Such a transformative playing practice may include staff exploring which play practice is presently dominant in their setting and continuously and intentionally disturbing it by asking “What If?” and responding “As If”. It may also include saying yes to invitations to playing, which may engender the unintentional recomposure of play practices. When staff sensitise themselves to playing, it may become a tool for avoiding that their play practices have become taken for granted and habitual. This may be called ludocentric (play-centred) practice.

Limitations and future research

This research could have benefitted from as much time spent in the English setting as in the Swedish (the original plan was for four months). Equally, a greater effort to reengage with school 3 in Sweden may have provided an even-deeper and wider understanding of the possible play practices of staff. It may also have been interesting for more of the data analysis for the articles to have been done collaboratively. The analysis the staff were involved with focused on developing their practice rather than developing academic texts,
and this could be considered a problem when aiming to go beyond the theory/practice binary. To deal with these issues would have required resources not readily available and would therefore have taken considerable time to access. This would have included more staff time (some of which would have had to be paid for) and possibly also travel and accommodation costs for the researcher in England.

Despite the limitations of this research, it has already contributed to the discussion among both practitioners and academics about how to understand and do play in school-age childcare.

The way play is thought and done as part of the school offer will continue to be an important area of research as long as children’s leisure time is spent in school. Play practice architectures in school-age childcare need further research in order to consider other aspects not included here. The following need to be taken into account as part of this mapping: (i) children’s play practices and their perspective on what enables and constrains their playing in school-age childcare; (ii) school management’s play practices as they enable and constrain playing in school; and (iii) teaching staff’s play practices in and out of formal learning time in school. It may also be of interest to explore parents’ and the wider community’s relationship with the play practice architectures of school-age childcare. In terms of staff’s play practices, a wider study across a number of school-based settings in both Sweden and England, as well as in other countries, would be helpful for mapping the play practices and play practice architectures. This may contribute to the discussion on whether “too much regulation – by schools . . . destroys the play spirit” (Huizinga, 1955, in Henricks, 2008, p. 167).

**Introduktion**


Nordisk fritidshemsforskning visar att när syftet med verksamheten beskrivs dominerar de diskurser som har fokus på fritid och lärande. Forskningen visar också att det finns en gemensam idé bland både barn och vuxna om att verksamheten ska bygga på barnens egna intressen. Ett genomgående tema i forskningen tycks vara de spännningar som uppstår i mötet mellan traditionell fritidshemspedagogik och skolan. Det finns ytterst lite forskning om skolbarnomsorg och playwork i Storbritannien. Det lilla som finns pekar dock på att introduktionen av playwork i skolans lokaler inte är oproblematisk. Forskningen i både Norden och Storbritannien pekar på att personalens praktiker existerar i ett spänningsfält mellan att försona barns fritid och deras egna val av aktiviteter å ena sidan och behovet av att visa hur man bidrar till att uppnå skolans lärandemål å andra sidan. Dessa spännningar blir också tydliga i synen på lek. Lek och lekande kan förstås på många olika sätt inom fritidshemspartiklen. Varje uppfattning om lek relaterar till ett specifikt teoretiskt eller filosofiskt perspektiv. Tidigare forskning i fritidshem pekar på ett antal olika sätt som personalen ger utrymme för lek. Dessa praktiker ger utrymme för en konstruktion av lek som: (i) social kompetens; (ii) fritt valt beteende; (iii) delaktighet; (iv) utforskande av aktörskap; (v) ständig tillblivelse. De olika sätten att tänka lek spänner över att peka på lekens instrumentella värde (med fördjöjda vinster), dess egenvärde eller som tillblivelsens kraft.

Avhandlingen belyser förhållandet mellan talet om leken och vilken typ av lek personalen ger utrymme för. Det har varit viktigt att bevara mångfalden av idéer om vad lek kan vara och vilken funktion den kan ha eftersom det kan bidra till att se praktiken inte bara i ett spänningsfält utan också som en potentiell praktik som öppnar upp för det vi ännu inte vet något om (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 177).

Teoretisk inramning


Frågeställningar


- Hur talar personalen på fritidshem om lek och finns det för-givet-tagna föreställningar om lek?
- Vilka praktiker bland personalen ger utrymme för lek?
- Hur bidrar olika föreställningar om lek till olika lekpraktiker?
- Hur är det möjligt att transformera lekpraktikarkitekturer?

Metod och data


Fynd och sammanfattande diskussion


I den andra artikeln, “Becoming-player” (Kane & Petrie, 2014), utforskades några diskursiva ordningar när det gäller lek på fritidshem.
Ambitionen var att gå bortom dessa ordningar genom att tänka lekandet som ett oupphörligt-annorlunda-blivande (becoming-different). Vid analysen av de transkriberade samtalen från aktionsforskningen verkade det som om både barn och personal oavbrutet de- och re-territorialiserade utrymmet för lek, när de lekte tillsammans. Med leken i förgrunden tycktes personalen se både sig själva och barnen som oupphörligt-blivande-lekare (becoming-players) vilket öppnade upp för mer lek. Detta i sin tur gjorde det möjligt att tänka lekandet som ett förhållningssätt “to go beyond what is to what could be” (Saar, 2014, p. 264) vilket påminde om hur vi hade experimenterat i aktionsforskningen.


För att utforska vilka praktiker som kunde ge utrymme för lek var det nödvändigt att definiera vad som skulle ges utrymme. Det kom att bli viktigt att bibehålla mångfalden i de olika perspektiven på lek. Tidigare forskning tillsammans med fokusgruppssamtalen erbjöd ett urval av olika sätt att tala om lek och lekpraktiker (olika sätt att ge utrymme för lek). Denna forskning identifierade fem lekpraktiker (se ovan). Den lekpraktik som tycktes vara vanligast på de svenska fritidshem som deltog i aktionsforskningen gav utrymme för lek som social kompetens och den lekpraktik som var vanligast i den engelska out-of-school playwork club gav utrymme för lek som fritt valt beteende. När lek konstrueras av personalen som något specifikt så tycks det vara just denna aspekt på leken som det ges utrymme för och det blir då personalens lekpraktik på denna plats vid denna tid. Den specifika lekpraktiken möjliggör de former eller typer av lek som står i fokus just då, andra former eller typer av lek kan förhindras och motverkas.

fokus. Lekandet bara sker (Gadamer i Øksnes, 2008, p. 247), det tar sig utrymme och tycks undgå definitioner och kategorier.


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Invitation to Swedish schools to take part in research

Är du intresserad av att utveckla möjligheterna för barnen att leka på fritids?
Jag heter Eva Kane och är doktorand på Stockholms Universitet och min forskning handlar om hur fritidspedagoger ger utrymme för lek. Jag söker några skolor vars fritidshemspersonal är intresserade av att arbeta med mig för att få syn på och utveckla arbetssätt i relation till lek.
Det eventuella samarbetet börjar med en informationsmorgon på Universitetet och följs upp med att jag besöker er skola och ert fritidshem. Om vi sedan har hittat en överenskommelse om hur vårt samarbete ska fungera börjar jag med att intervjuar och observera de som arbetar på fritidshemmet. Detta material får sedan fungera som en grund för ett eventuellt utvecklingsarbete som i så fall tar sin början under nästa läsår (2011-12).
Jag bjuder in till en informationsmorgon fredagen den 15 oktober 9.30 – 11.30 på Campus Konradsberg, Rålambshovsgatan, Kungsholmen (T-bana Thorildsplan).
Om du vill komma eller om du har frågor så kan du kontakta mig på eva.kane@utep.su.se
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Med vänlig hälsning

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