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Play in Adult-Child Interaction: Institutional Multi-Party Interaction and Pedagogical Practice in a Toddler Classroom

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Abstract

This paper considers the ways in which adults' active participation in play has the potential to manage and manipulate participation frameworks in adult-child joint activities, drawing on a dataset of 150 hours of video-recorded, naturally occurring adult-child-group interactions from one Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) institution for children under the age of three. A total of 47 instances of multi-party make-believe play were located from the dataset and subjected to multimodal conversation analysis. The data-driven microanalysis revealed that adult role in play is more complex and multidimensional than prior research has shown. Playing can be understood as a shared communicative project, a form of mutual understanding, between adults and children. In adult-child interaction play has the capacity to simultaneously invoke two different institutional frames: that of playing and that of caring or educating (e.g., soothing or including). In a multi-party context, adults' playful stance taking can serve different kinds of institutional tasks and balance asymmetries of participation among children and between adults and children. The results contribute to theoretical and pedagogical discussion of adult roles in children's play and facilitate early childhood education practitioners' pedagogical reflection and imagination.

Keywords: play; stance; adult-child interaction; multi-party interaction; early childhood education

1 Introduction

“He who must work during and at an occasion defined for play still knows that his job locates him in a play occasion, not in a serious one, the fact that it does being an important job-contingency for him.” (Goffman, 1963, 20)

While interactional research has subjected children’s multi-party peer play to empirical scrutiny for several decades (e.g., Björk-Willén, 2007; Karrebæk, 2011; Sawyer, 1993), multi-party play between adults and children has been dealt with in only a few empirical studies (Bateman, 2015; Lobman, 2003; 2006; Pursi & Lipponen, 2018; Pursi, Lipponen & Sajaniemi, 2018). Within educational sites, theoretical and empirical work on children’s play distinguish peer play as a valuable feature of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in its own right, as well as a fruitful space for learning and socialization. Yet, the role of play in adult-child institutional interaction is not nearly so clear. An overview of existing theoretical literature shows a lack of consensus regarding the value and validation of play in adult-child pedagogical relationships (Pyle, DeLuca, & Danniels, 2017). Three things seem to be unclear; firstly, whether or not playing is an institution-relevant practice for adults, secondly, if yes, how playing is organized on the level of adult-child-group interactions and thirdly, what kind of institutional goals these joint play activities could possibly serve (van Oers, 2013).

Addressing these questions requires deeper empirical understanding of the situational properties and institutional characteristics of multi-party play in adult-child interaction. A systematic focus on multi-party interaction is important, as time for individual one-to-one play interactions with children is limited in group-care settings. Study designs that do not take children’s and adults’ perspectives into account in both dyadic and multi-party contexts may be insufficient for understanding young children’s and adults’ experiences and

involvements in the institutional settings of ECEC (Ahnert, Pinquart, & Lamb, 2006; Degotardi & Pearson, 2009; Moss & Penn, 1996).

The present study looks at situations in which adults and very young children engage in joint play activities in an institutional group-care setting. More specifically, the interest is in the particular structures of multi-party interaction which arise when an adult opens an interaction or responds to children in a playful manner. In what follows, I first outline the analytical and theoretical framework, present main findings from prior research and specify the problem. After describing the data and method, I then analyze two representative examples in which three or more participants are engaged in joint play. Finally, I discuss how documented micro-level processes of multi-party play reflect policy-level understanding of ECEC institutions, their tasks, values, and adult role regarding children's play.

2 Play as an analytical account of what participants are doing

This study draws on ethnomethodology and a sequential perspective of conversation analysis, a methodological framework that focuses on the situated and interactional accomplishment of practical action in its naturally occurring form and underpins a data-driven analytical orientation towards the *participants' perspective* and *members' methods* of making the social situations what they become (Garfinkel, 1967; Goodwin, 2000; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Conversation analysis is based on a theory of the organization of social action in its everyday interactional context (Sacks & Schegloff, 1973; Schegloff, 2007; Sidnell, 2010). In this study the theoretical frame is formed around the prior interactional research on the organization of protoconversations and verbal conversations within educational sites for very young children (Kidwell, 2013b).

From this standpoint, “what is play or not is an interactional problem rather than a taxonomical one” (Butler, 2008, 79). Play is treated here as an orderly and observable

interactional *stance* that can shape what goes on in interaction and can be oriented to by multiple participants at the same time (Du Bois, 2007; Goodwin, 2007b). Conceiving of *joint play* as a form of shared playful stance taking makes it possible to analyze play as an account of what participants are doing, how they are doing it (the manner) and what their joint play is about (the content).

Sequentially, when playful interaction begins, the organization of the first two moves, as dynamic, co-coordinated *stance shifts*, show whether the interaction is joint play or not (Pursi et al., 2018). Through *play signals* (Bateson 1976), players communicate their playful stance to others in order to initiate and maintain joint play activities. The ultimate proof of the ‘jointness’ of play can only be provided by the recipients’ subsequent actions when they are responding to these play signals. A *play connection* is constituted if the recipients of the play signal display *alignment* with the play activity and *affiliation*¹ with the player’s stance (Pursi et al., 2018). In this sense, joint play activity as overall structural organization of aligned and affiliated play actions can be understood as a complex interactional accomplishment that constitutes a jointly constructed *communicative project* (Linell, 2009; Shegloff, 2007), a shared *play frame* (Goffman, 1974) and a *participation framework* (Goodwin, 2007a) in which production (play signaling) and reception (play response) roles are managed and negotiated together in a qualitatively distinguishable way.

3 Prior research on play in adult-child multi-party interaction

Within educational sites for very young children, both theoretically and empirically, adults’ institutional role and pedagogical practice in relation to children’s play is traditionally tied to educational and caring purposes, such as maintaining classroom order (Danby &

¹ In analytical terminology, *alignment* relates to the structural level (e.g., attentional display, body orientation, gaze direction) and *affiliation* to the affective or action level (e.g., emotional display, the content of play) of joint activity (Stivers, 2008).

Baker, 2000, 111-117; Kidwell, 2005), emotional availability (Singer, Nederend, Penninx, Tajik & Boom, 2014) and conflict resolution (Kidwell, 2011; 2013a). Most of these institutional roles are positioned outside the actual play frame; thus, systematic empirical descriptions of the adult as an equal co-player in a multi-party peer context are very scarce.²

On the one hand, systematic patterns of how adults and very young children begin and maintain playful encounters during free play gatherings, outdoor activities, circle times, and other adult guided activities have been recognized in interactional studies (e.g., Bateman, 2015; Jung, 2013; Lobman, 2003; 2006; Pursi & Lipponen, 2018). These studies show that turn designs (lexical choice, visible conduct, emotional stance, lamination of verbal and nonverbal displays), specific turn-taking, and sequential structures play a crucial role in enacting the shift between in-play and off-play interactional frames (e.g., organization of shifts between play and other activity frames such as educational and caring frames, Bateman, 2015), negotiating participants' understandings and perspectives (Pursi et al., 2018), as well as managing and manipulating participation frameworks in a classroom community (e.g., encouraging interaction between peers, Bateman, 2015). Overall, these studies have revealed the importance of play in adult-child interactions in toddler classrooms and recognized it as a fruitful interactional environment for children's learning, development and socialization, as well as for making sense out of experiences together.

On the other hand, research has mainly explored play in adult-child interaction by analyzing dyadic encounters and two-way interaction between one adult and one to three children. Almost systematically, the complex multi-party nature of the interaction has been simplified in observations, transcripts, and analysis. This narrows the understanding of very

² For a few notable exceptions see: Bateman, 2015; Jung, 2013; Lobman 2003; 2006; Pursi & Lipponen, 2018; Pursi et al., 2018. These studies situate adult-child interaction in a multi-party play context, but do not focus on systematically describing the multi-party nature of play interaction or the management and manipulation of participation frameworks.

young children's interpersonal competences in group-care settings, making it difficult to develop pedagogical practices that systematically consider the unique group ecology of ECEC communities.

This paper considers multi-party adult-child play interaction from the point of view of participation frameworks in one Finnish toddler classroom. I examine how play signals and play responses are managed and negotiated in adults' and children's joint play and how adults' active participation in play has the potential to manipulate participation frameworks.

4 Method

4.1 *Setting, participants, and data collection*³

This study is part of a larger research project on adults' and children's joint play culture in one Finnish toddler classroom.⁴ This particular classroom was selected because initial short-term observations revealed that adults frequently co-participated in children's play activities and also actively initiated joint play. During the four-month data collection period (34 full-day observations between in spring 2016), the researcher was a *non-participant observer*, intending to disrupt the everyday life of the group as little as possible (Løkken, 2011). Interaction was video-recorded mainly at floor level using a handheld camera. The camera was focused on the interactants (toddlers and adults) and interaction was recorded whenever there was evidence of joint play activity between adults and children.

³ All participant names have been anonymized. ECEC practitioners and the children's parents have signed a consent form allowing the data and frame grabs from the video to be used and presented in publications.

⁴ The classroom is a municipal group-care setting for 13 children under the age of three with one qualified kindergarten teacher, two qualified nursery nurses and one personal assistant to a child with special needs (adult-child ratio 1:4).

4.2 *Synopsis of data*

A collection of 47 multi-party make-believe play instances form the basis of the present study, and are an exhaustive representation of instances of multi-party play from the larger dataset (150 h). The criteria for including play instances in the collection were: 1) three or more participants (adults and children) were co-producing play interaction as a mutually focused encounter and 2) the analyst found evidence of shared playful stance taking (alignment and affiliation between at least three participants) in the video recordings. The focus was limited to joint make-believe play, a form of activity that involves transformation of ordinary objects, persons and situations into characters in a fictional world, since it is replete with creations, negotiations and clarifications of shared understanding and therefore provides an excellent opportunity to examine how and when joint play is constituted and maintained (Garvey & Berndt, 1975).

Rather than treating make-believe as internal representations of individual minds (e.g., Lillard, 1993) the focus was on those *public understandings* which come to inform adults' and children's ongoing lines of make-believe actions. This publicly available "*as if*" *frame* (Bateson, 1976; Goffman, 1974) is a shared state of understanding and agreement that enables the analyst to locate joint play in the flow of interaction with some rigor. Other forms of playfulness, while equally important, are very difficult to distinguish empirically from other behaviors such as exploration, joking, or storytelling.

Although difficult to characterize precisely, most of the multi-party play instances can be placed into two general, qualitatively different categories: 1) spontaneous (n=33) and 2) ritualized (n=14) play. Above all, this categorization illustrates how multi-party play either unfolded spontaneously from moment to moment, with a highly improvisational structure which was not tied to certain play rules and previously shared play experiences, or it had a ritualized structure with a social pre-history, more fixed play patterns and roles. Secondly, the

categorization elucidates the fragmented nature of multi-party play between adults and children (also see Bateman, 2015, 59). Multi-party play consisted of very brief moments of play connection and accumulation of these moments during longer periods of time (from 7 s to 11 min 41 s). Sustained sequences of multi-party play were typically ritualized.

All 47 play instances were transcribed and subjected to the multimodal conversation analysis method (Goodwin, 2000). What follows is an analysis of two extended play sequences, the first spontaneous, and the second more ritualized. The examples are presented using a mixture of simplified transcripts, verbal descriptions and frame grabs from the video. Extended sequences are reported to capture the key aspects and complexities of multi-party play activities in a toddler classroom without reducing findings to a list of isolated practices (e.g., typologies of play openings and closings and their typical sequential features). Thus, the examples do not present only the most frequent or typical multi-party play trajectories. The cases cover the large dataset and extend prior research by outlining some *unacknowledged potentials* or *latent functions* of play in institutional adult-child interaction (Merton, 1957).

5 Making a call to imagined third party: Multi-party play in the service of soothing

My first data example is an extended make-believe play sequence in which an adult opens joint play activity with a child in order to accomplish a specific institutional task of soothing (Extract 1). This dyadic play eventually extends towards multi-party engagements among several (5) children and (2) adults (Extract 2). First of all, this case shows that the interactional potential of multi-party adult-child play resides in its capacity to invoke two different institutional frames simultaneously: that of playing together and that of caring (e.g., soothing). Secondly, these different institutional projects, co-existing frames of play and care, are not reducible to dyadic adult-child encounters. Rather, they are distributed between all participants who are involved in the situation.

The sequence unfolds in the early morning when parents are bringing their children to the classroom. Two children are arriving at the same time. Venla (V, 1;4) is arriving with her father and Matias (M, 1;4) is arriving with his father (F) and big brother Joonas (J). In the classroom, these arrivers meet not only kindergarten teacher Kaisa (K) but also some other children, Sofia (S, 2;3) and Tuuli (T, 2;9), who have already arrived, and are now engaged in joint and parallel play with dolls.⁵ Extract 1 begins after Venla's father has handed Venla to Kaisa, waved goodbye and left. In lines 1-9, Kaisa's talk overlaps with Venla's escalated crying (the crying is omitted from the transcript).

⁵ The larger dataset reveals that these kind of complex multi-party gatherings are everyday circumstances in the toddler classroom during mornings and afternoons when parents drop off and pick up their children.

Extract 1. Making a call to imagined third party

(0.00.00–0.17.00) The opening phase of joint make-believe play activity
 ((K has received V from the father^{Fig.1} and is preparing to take a bit of distance from the other participants^{Fig.2}))

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

- 1 K: katotaan et mihin me mennään tekemään hommat ((walking))
let's see where do we go to do things
- 2 K: {kyllä (.) {helistellään puhelimella isille mitä:
yes let's make a call to daddy huh?
- 3 {((prepares to put V down))
- 4 {((puts V down and straightens her shirt))^{Fig.3}
- 5 K: {otetaan puhelimet ja helistellään vähän=
let's take the phone and let's make a call
- 6 {((lifts a toy phone from the floor))
- 7 K: {=sanotaan et
let's say that
- 8 {((picks up the receiver))
- 9 V: {((orients to K, still crying))
- 10 K: {.Hh missä se isi viipottaa^{Fig.4} (0.3) joko sinä ehdit autoon^{Fig.5}
.Hh where's daddy going did you make it to the car already
- 11 V: {((stops crying, mutual gaze with K))

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

In this extract make-believe play, *making a call to imagined third party* (Garvey & Berndt, 1975, 12-14), is a sequential outcome of a situation in which emotional distress is displayed by Venla (separation anxiety in the form of whining, escalated crying, bodily protesting) and a soothing response in the form of a play signal is provided by the adult, Kaisa. In Figure 2 we can see multiple participants (Tuuli, Sofia, Matias, Joonas) oriented to

Venla's escalated negative stance and Kaisa's soothing task. Kaisa begins to reorganize the gathering with her talk and embodied actions in order to manage the multi-tasking nature of her work, i.e. (1) soothing Venla, (2) welcoming and greeting Matias, (3) watching for and facilitating Sofia's and Tuuli's joint play with dolls. First, by projecting future action with her talk ("let's see where we go to do things") and then by distancing from other participants, Kaisa is producing a transition from public gathering towards more private dyadic encounter with Venla.⁶ With these practices she is putting all the other participants on hold and focusing on a soothing task in a dyadic adult-child interaction.

Another distinctive institutional practice Kaisa uses emerges on the level of activity frames, as she organizes the transition from the caring frame towards the make-believe play frame (lines 2-10). The design of Kaisa's talk and nonverbal actions reveals this practice in a stepwise fashion. First, in lines 2 and 5, Kaisa is talking about play, *mapping out* (Bateman, 2015) her forthcoming play actions, thus producing transition from actual "going" and "doing things" in a situated here and now towards "calling daddy" in a play frame. Next, having established a mutual alignment with Venla and embodied configuration of making a call, Kaisa is able to launch the actual play signaling turn (*doing make-believe play*, Bateman, 2015). In lines 7-8, she is explicitly indicating the transition from talking about play to actual playing as she is lifting the receiver of the toy phone. She marks this transition also verbally by saying "let's say that".⁷ With this verbal utterance Kaisa is coding the jointness of the activity and balancing asymmetries of participation between herself and Venla, who is pre-verbal.

⁶ From the larger dataset, it is observable that Kaisa typically co-coordinates projected talk and distancing from other participants in order to carry out soothing tasks when heightened emotions and escalated crying are involved in a multi-party situation (cf. Cekaite & Holm Kvist, 2017).

⁷ "Let's say that" is a ritualized way in Kaisa's everyday practice of marking the shift between talking about play and actual engagement in it (there are multiple similar turn designs in the larger dataset, cf. Extract 2, line 33). This kind of stage-setting talk provides children with a relatively predictable structure to identify the shift into the shared play frame.

Finally, in line 10, Kaisa creates the actual make-believe frame of making a call to the imagined daddy (Fig. 4-5). Her in-frame talk resembles a typical phone call opening as it topicalizes information related to location and mobility (*a cellphone call opening*, Arminen, 2006). The first part of her in-frame talk is addressed to Venla (a forced inhalation and inquiry about the daddy's location, ".Hh where's daddy going") and the latter part to the imagined daddy ("did you make it to the car already"). Given this dual addressing, Kaisa's play signaling seems to perform two tasks: apart from attracting Venla's undivided attention, Kaisa is also able to create an intimate multi-party encounter between herself, Venla, and Venla's imagined daddy in a shared play frame.

Although Kaisa's playful stance taking may superficially, appear to be about treating play as a mere instrument to distract from the child's emotional distress, a closer look at the content of the play shows that it is nothing of the sort. The topical foci of the play signal arise from the child's emotional situation. The way in which Kaisa is tying Venla's emotional situation (separation anxiety/longing for daddy) and the content of the play (calling daddy) together invites rather a new perspective on the father's leaving than pure distraction from it. By making a call to the father in particular and not to any imagined third party, Kaisa is able to prolong the presence of the father thus 'soften' the reality (*a mobile presence and intimacy*, Arminen & Weilenmann, 2009). Thereby, the play signal is a hybrid utterance that blurs boundaries between frames of care and play, as two institutional tasks, soothing and playing together, are intertwined in Kaisa's actions. Venla's response in line 11 indicates firm alignment (Fig. 4, a mutual gaze and bodily orientation) and minimal affiliation on the emotional level (emotional stance shift from escalated crying towards more neutral stance between lines 10-11, Fig. 3 → Fig. 4). As a result, from Venla's perspective, reality (longing for the father) and the make-believe play world (being in contact with the father) are interconnected in a meaningful way in shared play frame with Kaisa.

Now, if we extend the analysis beyond the dyadic encounter between Kaisa and Venla, we can see that the interaction is not just two-way. Rather, complex multi-party engagements are involved. Figures 4-5 reveal that Tuuli is aligning with the play activity as she positions as an onlooker by actively shifting her orientation between the participants. At this point her position is peripheral to the primary dyadic play unit; however, the subsequent sequences of interaction reveal how Tuuli and others have a more active role in the play. In Extract 2 we join the interaction 12 seconds after the previous extract (1). Omitted lines (8-17) involve Kaisa maintaining the play connection with Venla by talking on the phone with the imagined daddy with an intense gaze towards Venla.

Extract 2. Making a call to imagined third party continues

(0.29.00–0.57.00) Opening the make-believe play for multiple participants

18 K: se:lvä↓(0.5) joo ja kaikki hyvin_{Fig.6}

ok yes and everything is all right

19 K: .hh no ↑venlakin täällä hiljeni kuuntelemaan {(0.4) hm-m (0.4)}

.hh well here Venla also quieted down to listen hm-m

20 K: {((nods))}

21 K: [joo-o matiaskin hiljeni] kuunte[le]maan=

yes Matias also quieted down to listen

22 S: [MINÄKIN OLEN]

I am too

23 F: [tch]

24 S: =MINÄKIN_{Fig.7}

me too

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

25 K: v- hh ↑no Sofiakin=haluatko Sofia jutella jotain

v- hh well Sofia as well do you want to say something Sofia

26 (0.5) ((K & S share mutual gaze, K begins to smile))

27 K: ((offers the receiver to S))= _{Fig.8}

28 S: =€ehh::: €=

29 K: =((moves the receiver closer to S))=

30 S: =((begins to take the receiver))=

31 K: =↑Noh=

so

32 S: =hahah=

33 K: =haloo [(0.5)][et o]:::nko meillä jo asiat rauhottunu=

hello do we have things calmed down

34 V: [hh ((smiles and stomps her feet))]

35 V: [hehe((smiles and stomps her feet))]_{Fig.9}

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

36 S: =haha

37 K: [€o:::n€]

yes

- 38 T: [vauvakin] [haluaa jutella]_{Fig.10}
baby wants to talk as well
- 39 V: [haha]
- 40 K: €on on€ >tuu< joo katotaan otetaan uus puhelu
yes yes come yes let's see let's take another call
- 41 K: sanotaan että ((lifts the receiver on her ear))=
let's say that
- 42 K: =onko rauhottumispalvelu=
is it the calming down service
- 43 K: =((offers the receiver to T)) _{Fig.11}

Fig. 10

Fig.11

In Extract 2 we can witness how a dyadic ‘soothing play’ extends towards a complex web of multi-party engagements between seven participants. Figure 6 reveals that Venla has shifted her focus (bodily orientation and gaze) from Kaisa towards Matias and his father and big brother Joonas who, like Tuuli, have followed Kaisa and Venla and positioned as onlookers in relation to the dyadic play encounter. In line 18, Kaisa’s utterance “selvä” (“ok”) with falling intonation indicates that she is beginning to close the imagined telephone conversation (*a possible pre-closing*, Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, 303). In the middle of this utterance she is simultaneously shifting her gaze for the first time from Venla towards other participants. It seems that the multi-party engagements that Kaisa becomes aware of at this particular moment affect how she designs her next actions. Rather than closing the phone call, Kaisa continues it by producing a running commentary about the features of the social landscape that she witnesses. First, she comments on Venla’s emotional stance and behavior (line 19). Then, by explicitly addressing Matias by name and commenting on his behavior (line 20), Kaisa acknowledges his presence and includes him in the play frame, extending the make-believe play into a multi-party context.

This new multi-party orientation begins to attract more active responses from other participants in the gathering. In line 21 Sofia, although sensitive to the pause that Kaisa is producing in line 19, eventually begins her turn just as Kaisa provides an extension for her own turn (line 20). In order to gain the floor and ensure that her message is fully heard, Sofia *recycles* (Schegloff, 1987; Danby & Baker, 2000, 108-111) her turn after an overlap by latching it right on after Kaisa has completed her turn. She laminates the excited announcements of her own presence (“I am too”; “mee too”) with running over, seeking contact with Kaisa (Fig. 7). Whereas all these verbal and embodied actions indicate Sofia’s eagerness to become part of the encounter, the lexical choices and content of her contribution

do not tell us whether she wants to take part in the play frame in particular or join in the encounter more generally outside the play frame.

In lines 23-25, Kaisa aligns and affiliates with Sofia by sensitively taking into account all the particularities of Sofia's prior turn. First, Kaisa affiliates with Sofia's excited emotional stance with her facial expressions (Fig. 7) while Sofia is still talking (*an emotional transition*, Kaukomaa, Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2015). Then, Kaisa's verbal response in line 24 first acknowledges Sofia as a ratified participant and then cumulates the shared play frame by providing Sofia an active role in play. Interestingly, while Kaisa's talk is firmly including Sofia into the play frame, her embodied actions create interactional space which is sensitive to Sofia's freedom of choice. Right after the verbal offer, there is a pause during which Kaisa and Sofia share an intense mutual gaze. At this point Kaisa is clearly providing Sofia an opportunity to signal whether she is willing to take part in play or not. Figure 8 reveals how Kaisa then offers Sofia the receiver, from a distance, as if to give Sofia the opportunity to signal an interest in taking it, but not in such a way as to expect her to do so. These actions demonstrate that Kaisa is building her response by considering the understandings which have been established earlier in the interaction, thus creating a more focused and responsive encounter.

What follows in lines 27-36 is a special kind of dyadic turn-taking pattern⁸ in which verbal and nonverbal play actions latch onto each other without a break. This collection of short two-way turns produces a *heightened moment of play connection* between Kaisa and Sofia (cf. Pursi & Lipponen, 2018) and creates impression of infant-mother *proto-conversation* exchanges in which participants find shared rhythm by delicately calibrating and co-coordinating playful contributions with each other (Bateson, 1975). Sofia's breathy

⁸ Similar turn-taking structures are presented in Extract 3, lines 38-39, and Extract 4, lines 16-18; 22-23; 55-56. The larger dataset and this study data reveal that this turn-taking pattern seems to be a typical feature of playing in both dyadic and multi-party adult-child interaction in a toddler classroom.

smiles and short laughs (lines 27, 31 and 35) work as small comments on or positive evaluations of the situation and indicate her willingness to take part in play. From Kaisa's perspective, this special kind of turn-taking structure seems to be about following Sofia's lead and calibrating the development of play to Sofia's rhythm. With these delicately timed play actions, Kaisa is also obtaining the floor in the dyadic playful encounter with Sofia and putting other participants on hold. However, at the same time, the content of Kaisa's play enactments in line 33 indicates that she is not beginning a new phone call play with Sofia. Rather, she is tying Sofia in as a member of the multi-party soothing play and shared theme—Venla's emotional situation.

The sequential outcome of this intense moment of play connection between Sofia and Kaisa (lines 20-35) needs elaboration from the multi-party perspective. Multiple participants are affiliating with these play events (lines 23, 34) and as the interaction unfolds further, some participants proceed to more active contributions (line 38). I analyze these in sequential order: first Matias' father's, then Venla's, and finally Tuuli's contributions to the joint play.

Figures 6, 10 and 11 in combination with line 22 reveal that Matias' father is taking a stance towards the play activity on many levels. By positioning as a silent onlooker, delaying his leave-taking (saying goodbye to Matias, which he began in Extract 1, Fig. 2) he is giving interactional space for this joint play to develop and progress. Second, the way he shifts his gaze between the participants demonstrates his orientation to the multi-party nature of the encounter. He is not present just for his two sons by witnessing their intensive engagement in the play events, but is shifting his gaze between Kaisa, Venla, Tuuli, Sofia, and Matias. Third, in line 22 he is contributing more actively, with a tongue click marking his presence in the conversation. This “tch” laminated with an excited facial expression is designed to affiliate with Sofia's excited approach. All these actions, although peripheral, make a key contribution to maintaining a shared play frame.

Venla, before withdrawing from the playful encounter (she shifts her orientation to the surroundings and begins her own usual explorations in the classroom Fig.10), also takes an emotional stance towards Kaisa's and Sofia's heightened moment of play connection by producing short bursts of laughter (lines 34, 35 and 39, Fig. 9). Although we cannot say much about her affiliation with the actual play actions, it is worth noting the sequential outcome of the initial soothing practice and the sequential organization of Venla's emotional involvement. While the initial institutional task of soothing Venla was framed as dyadic activity between Kaisa and Venla, the actual emotional transition from escalated crying towards joy, laughter and self-confident exploration was accomplished with regard to the contributions of multiple others in a multi-party play frame.

Lastly, before summing up the key observation of the overall play episode, a few points are raised about Tuuli's play contributions and Kaisa's subsequent responses in lines 38-43. The way Tuuli designs her play contribution in line 38 demonstrates competence. She is sensitive to prior turns in the talk (pauses) and to the understandings which have been established earlier in the interaction. With her turn ("baby wants to talk as well"), she is not only indicating her willingness to take part in the encounter but is contributing to making the play progress, thus already establishing co-participation and ratified membership in the play group. Furthermore, she demonstrates patience as Kaisa's response is delayed. She does not rush to recycle her turn after the overlap but waits and observes how the interaction unfolds. With these actions, Tuuli provides Kaisa an interactional space to build proper closing with Sofia (line 39-40 and Fig. 10 together reveal how Kaisa provides interactional space for Sofia to put the receiver in its place after the call, before orienting to Tuuli's contribution) and secure the appropriate configuration of her own body for the following dyadic playful encounter with Tuuli (sitting down, Fig. 10→Fig. 11). Tuuli's and Kaisa's actions support smooth transition from one intense dyadic encounter to another. Kaisa's play contribution in

lines 42-43 is tying in Tuuli as member of the cumulative play theme of soothing and calming down. By naming the new phone call recipient “the calming down service” Kaisa explicitly glosses the caring features of the play and the ties to Venla’s emotional lifeworld, from which it emerged. Figure 11 captures the complex multi-party engagements and how the non-calling participants (one parent and three children) watch and listen intently to those who are making the call.

To sum up the overall organization of this extended make-believe play sequence by capturing the essence of Kaisa’s institutional practice, we can conclude the following. By orienting to the multi-party engagements, skillfully balancing her orientation between the participants, and cumulating the same play theme from one focused encounter to another, Kaisa was able to meet the needs of the individual child and group in a shared play frame. She managed the multi-tasking nature of her work meaningfully for all the participants involved. Opening up the dyadic play to multiple others made it possible to produce shared understanding in a larger group and create interactional space in which all participants seemed to interact in a complementary and supportive way. Kaisa’s skillful lamination of embodied and verbal play enactments, sensitive orientation to local understandings, and smooth shifts between dyadic and multi-party encounters were central interactional resources in making the shared understandings of make-believe available to multiple participants.

6 Accumulation of brief moments of doctor-patient play: Multi-party play in the service of soothing and inclusion

The significant precondition for becoming a ratified participant in multi-party play activity is to have one’s presence acknowledged in the shared interactional space (Goodwin, 2007c; Danby & Baker, 2000). Prior research in toddler classrooms has shown that it can be very challenging for adults to locate and acknowledge silent onlookers from the *outer circle*

of play⁹, let alone balance asymmetries of interaction during multi-party play gatherings (Kalliala, 2014). Such dynamics are at work in the following play segment. I focus on describing how Lilja (2;5) a child in the outer circle of play is *included*¹⁰ in multi-party joint play. The play trajectory documented in this section stands out as evidence of multi-party play in which the adults' institutional work is organized around three overlapping tasks, playing together, soothing and including. I argue that both the situation of Lilja and the shifting forms of her emotional stance and participation arise within, and are sustained in and through, sequential organization of action in a multi-party context. In other words, Lilja's soothing and including in joint play is an interactional achievement that is co-constructed between Lilja, the adult Kaisa, and other children in the group.

The play trajectory presented in extracts 3 is a representative case of multi-party play activity with a more ritualized structure. The play is organized around a particular song and has characteristics of a doctor-patient play.¹¹ The play is about taking care of and soothing dolls and fluffy animals that participants pretend are hurt. The same play patterns are repeated over and over again with small modifications: 1) Before beginning to sing and do the actual caring actions participants select one doll or fluffy animal to be a patient and decide which body part of the patient is 'hurt'. 2) In overlap with the adult's singing, participants enact the role of doctor by doing the relevant soothing and caring actions (stroking the patient, blowing on the patient's 'hurt' body part, sewing up a wound, and

⁹ I use "outer circle" as a metaphorical term "to describe the situation of a child who often falls outside the attention of adults and shared play with peers" (Kalliala, 2014, 8). In the outer circle, the child's position in joint play is that of a *peripheral* and *unratified participant* (Goffman, 1963; Goodwin, 2007).

¹⁰ By "including" I mean the actual interactional practices through which a child from a peripheral position is 'drawn' into alignment and affiliation with joint play in a multi-party context (e.g., *doing including*, Pillet-Shore, 2010).

¹¹ This is only one multiple doctor-patient play theme in the group. It is the most ritualized play form as it is organized around a particular song, all the play enactments are highly patterned, and co-coordinated in a certain order. It is structured as a singing game, however, every time it is performed, this play is open for negotiations and might get features from or transform into another doctor-patient play during its course. During free play gatherings this play is not restrictive with regard to number of participants; children can choose whether or not to take part, and for how long.

taking a sympathetic stance towards the patient's suffering, e.g., with facial expressions and subdued tone of voice).

6.1 *Noticing Lilja and drawing her into alignment with joint play in a multi-party context*

Fig. 12. Multi-party doctor-patient play: Lilja is positioned in the periphery, finger in her mouth

In Extract 3 we join in the interaction during the closing phase of a doctor-patient play encounter between Kaisa and five children. Before Extract 3, Lilja had stood still, silently next to the adult, slightly behind her back at the periphery, with a distant gaze and finger in her mouth for 2.36 minutes (Fig. 12). During that time she had not shown any kind of active participation in the joint play. Neither had other participants (peers or the adult) addressed her, oriented towards her, or even briefly glanced at her. In the beginning of Extract 3, the children have one by one drawn away from this joint play encounter towards other activities and Kaisa has begun to close the play by singing the last lines of the play-related song more quietly. In line 1, while singing, Kaisa glances over her shoulder and notices Lilja at the periphery for the first time. This noticing opens up a focused encounter between Kaisa and Lilja (lines 2-36). In the analysis I focus on describing how this dyadic encounter in the frame of care eventually develops towards multi-party joint play between Kaisa (K), Lilja (L, 2;5), Sylvia (S, 2;7) and Tuuli (T, 2;6) (lines 37-47).

Extract 3. Noticing Lilja

(0.00.00–0.49.00) Aligning and affiliating with Lilja's emotional stance

- 1 K: ((while singing glances at L for the first time in 2.36 min))
 2 K: no:n{ni jokohan se nyt on terveempi jo
well I wonder whether it is better now already
 3 {((orients to L, makes caring acts for the doll))
 4 L: °()°
 5 K: mi:kä: ((leans closer towards L, a subdued tone of voice))
what
 6 L: °(haluun äitin syliin)°=
I want to get into my mommy's lap
 7 K: =haluat äitin sylii:n
you want to get into your mommy's lap
 8 a:rvaan varmaan et haluatkin äitin syliin
I'm guessing that sure you want to get into your mommy's lap
 ((20 seconds omitted (lines 9–21), involving soothing talk))

Fig.13–14

Fig.13

Fig.14

(0.49.00–0.59.00) Soothing and play signaling unfold in overlap

- 22 K: hm kerrotaan {äidille et me ollaan paljon äitiä mietitty
hm let's tell to mommy that we have thought about her a lot
 23 {((sways L while embracing))
 24 K: eiks niin
right
 25 (0.4)
 26 S: {↑hä:ntä [kipee:
tail is hurt
 27 S: {((takes a fluffy dog from a window sill))
 28 K: [ja sit sanotaan et on ihana äiti
and then let's say that yes it is lovely mommy
 29 K: [{ja tulee °hakemaan°
and she comes to pick you up
 30 K: {((taps L's back, orients to the surroundings and briefly
 31 glances at S))
 32 S: [>häntä< kipee Kaisa ((carries a fluffy dog and approaches K))
tail is hurt Kaisa
 33 L: {°äiti [tulee]°=
mommy comes
 34 K: {((returns her face near L's face))
 35 S: [>häntä kipee<]
tail is hurt
 36 K: =iltapäivällä tu{°lee°
yes in the afternoon she will come
 37 S: {((reaches K's line of sight))

Fig.15

Fig.16

Fig. 15

Fig. 16

(0.59.00–1.15.00) Creating a brief moment of play connection and drawing Lilja into alignment with joint play

38 S: häntä kipee:= ((a subdued tone of voice, hands the dog to K))
tail is hurt

39 K: {=↑He::i Fig.17 {häntä kipeenä tällä kattokaa nytte
hey this one's tail is hurt you see now

40 {((a subdued tone of voice))

41 K: {((receives the dog from S))

42 L: {((orients to the fluffy dog))

43 T: {((approaches with a doll in her hand))

44 K: häntä sille- täytyy häntäjutut laulaa varmaankin
a tail to it- we must sing tail things to it I guess

45 T: {täl on peppu kipee
this one has hurt her butt

46 T: {((shows the doll's bottom to K))

47 K: lauletaan ensin tälle hännälle sanotaan että=
let's sing first to this tail let's say that

48 K: =((starts to sing the song and stroke the fluffy dog))

49 S&T: ((gather around K into touch contact with her))

Fig.18

Fig. 17

Fig. 18

As in extracts 1-2, in Extract 3 we can see a soothing sequence between an adult and a child. Although the triggering event (child's emotional distress) and the sequential outcome (multi-party play) are the same in both cases, the sequential unfolding of playful stance taking shows a different pattern. In lines 2-3 Kaisa initiates contact with Lilja by turning towards her and continuing the doctor-patient play in Lilja's line of sight. By thinking aloud "well I wonder whether it is better now already" and by laminating her talk with embodied play actions (handling the baby doll in her lap) Kaisa creates a playful context for Lilja's participation. By designing her play signaling turn in this way, Kaisa treats Lilja as an affiliated member of the play activity, providing multiple possibilities for her to contribute.

In lines 4-6, Lilja's stance towards Kaisa's play signaling starts to take shape. Rather than affiliating with Kaisa's playful stance, Lilja provides information about her present personal state ("I want to get into my mother's lap"), thus producing a transition from play frame towards situated emotional here and now. In lines 7-22, Kaisa suspends the doctor-patient play, aligning and affiliating with Lilja's emotional stance through a soothing sequence. Kaisa laminates her soothing talk by lifting Lilja onto her knee and embracing her. With these embodied actions, Kaisa frames her own lap as a substitute for the mother's lap, thus building a response to Lilja's emotional needs (longing for the mother's lap).

Figures 13-14 demonstrate the embodied formation of Kaisa's soothing and Lilja's response. There is clear alignment and affiliation observable in how Lilja receives Kaisa's embrace as she binds her fingers around Kaisa's hand. These finely attuned actions indicate that Kaisa has 'correctly' chosen her stance (i.e. dropping the play frame and creating contact with Lilja in the situated here and now). Thereby, in this soothing sequence, contrary to the sequence presented in Extract 1, caring takes priority over the play frame (also see Bateman, 2015). If we put extracts 1 and 3 side by side, comparing the sequential unfolding of playful stance taking reveals the subtle complexity embedded in the adult's institutional practice. In

any given moment, the adult has multiple different stance designs to select from when responding to a child. Sometimes the priority can be given to playful stance taking, as in Extract 1, and sometimes to the situated here and now in caring (or educational) frame, as in Extract 3.

As the dyadic soothing sequence continues (lines 22-37), we can see that Sylvia's play signaling begins to unfold in overlap with it. By repeating "tail is hurt" multiple times (lines 26, 32, 35), adding the adult's name in the tag position (line 32), and simultaneously approaching, Sylvia is indicating her eagerness to continue the doctor-patient play with Kaisa. Her recurrent play signaling turns draw on accumulated understandings which have arisen earlier, when Kaisa and several children including Sylvia were sharing a doctor-patient play encounter (Fig. 12). The utterance "tail is hurt" is a minimal but still understandable unit of talk that might provide a triggering event for the shared doctor-patient play frame to emerge again. It indicates the first phase of the play in which children and adults negotiate together about which body part of the patient is 'hurt'.

Although Kaisa doesn't show any kind of aligning (only a quick glance in lines 30-31) or affiliating response to Sylvia's play signaling in lines 26-37, the way she laminates her talk to Lilja (a brief orientation to the surroundings, tapping, withdrawing from the deep embrace) demonstrates that she has begun to close the soothing sequence (Cekaite & Holm Kvist, 2017). Moreover, as Figure 16 reveals, Lilja has also begun to withdraw from Kaisa's soothing by orienting to Sylvia's approach. Consequently, as lines 38-49 confirm, Sylvia's approach and play signaling is the catalyst for re-establishing the joint play frame. Her play signaling provides new possibilities for Kaisa to create a smooth shift from a soothing and caring frame towards a shared playful frame, thus drawing Lilja into alignment with multi-party play.

Turn-taking organization in lines 38-39 demonstrates a heightened moment of play connection between Kaisa and Sylvia, as Sylvia's play signaling turn (fourth repetition of "tail is hurt", line 38) and Kaisa's aligning and affiliating response (agreeing with and recycling Sylvia's turn, "hey this one's tail is hurt", line 39) unfold in close proximity without a break. This distinctive feature of turn-taking¹² not only makes shared understanding publicly available but tells us more about the qualitative nature of this understanding. The turn organization represents an *adjacency pair* (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, 1974) of a play signal and play response sequence that embodies a special kind of playful understanding between an adult and a child which is instant and highly co-coordinated. Sylvia's play signal not only makes a given type of response from Kaisa especially relevant. Sylvia and Kaisa are almost like one agentic unit in their joint play communication.

If we elaborate the design of Kaisa's response from the perspective of multi-party engagements, we can see that with a single turn she is able to do two things. First of all to create a firm playful connection with Sylvia ("hey this one's tail is hurt") and second, to open the play frame up to multiple participants ("you see now"). The lexical choice of her request, "you see", indicates that she is addressing more than one recipient, seemingly drawing Lilja into alignment with the shared play frame. Consequently, with her delicately timed and designed play response, she is able to connect with an individual child and a group at the same time, prioritizing neither dyadic nor multi-party encounter. In other words, her response balances the demands of several interactional frames of the situation, thus managing the multi-tasking nature of her work.

¹² The larger dataset and this study data confirm that these kind of play signal-play response adjacency pairs were typical of institutional interaction in both dyadic and multi-party playful encounters between adults and children and worked in both directions, from child to adult and vice versa. For similar play signal-play response sequences, see Bateman, 2015, 55, 61; Pursi & Lipponen, 2018, 28, 31, 33. For similar organizations of adjacency pairs in the other institutional contexts, see, e.g., Harjunpää, Mondada & Svinhufvud, 2018.

This new multi-party orientation begins to attract active responses from the periphery as well.¹³ The way Tuuli contributes to the play activity in lines 45-46 gives clear evidence that she is positioning herself as a ratified member of the play group and the activity at hand.¹⁴ The way she designs her contribution shows the competence we already witnessed earlier (similar interactional pattern in Extract 2, line 38). Kaisa receives Tuuli's participation as unproblematic, but puts Tuuli's agenda on hold as she clarifies that they are going to first take care of and sing to the fluffy dog's tail (line 47). After this clarification Kaisa proceeds without a break to the actual play enactments and singing. In this way, she does not give interactional space for Tuuli to respond in their dyadic encounter. These actions indicate that for Kaisa, in this situation, multi-party play encounter takes priority over dyadic play negotiation.

Drawing together the observations from the perspective of adults' play practice, we can conclude that during this encounter the adult's orientation towards play and other activity frames (care in the form of soothing, and including in the frame of education and socialization) as well as towards dyadic and multi-party interactions was in continuous flux. In any given moment, the adult was choosing not only whether and when to take and share a playful stance with children but also how to display her stance. This involved orientation towards dyadic (lines 1-37) and multi-party encounters (lines 47-48) and included turn designs that addressed both orientations at the same time (lines 38-40).

From the perspective of Lilja's participation, we can conclude that some prevailing asymmetries were systematically balanced during this course of encounter. Although we have no convincing evidence about her affiliation in play, by comparing her alignment in the first

¹³ Note the same interactional pattern in Extract 2, lines 18-38, where the adult's multi-party orientation is followed by children's play contributions from the periphery.

¹⁴ By reaching a close perceptual range, she might have experienced Kaisa's turn as involving her. However, the video record does not provide sufficient evidence for this, as Tuuli enters the camera's view only after Kaisa's request.

segment of joint play (Figure 12) and embodied alignment in Figure 18 laminated with Kaisa's including and addressing talk, we can see her more centered relational position in play and a firm visual alignment to play actions and objects. Lilja was not only drawn into alignment with joint play by dyadic interaction with Kaisa. Sylvia's play signaling and Kaisa's delicately timed play response played a crucial role in this project.

7 Conclusions

By systematically examining the situational properties and institutional characteristics of multi-party make-believe play between adults and children in one Finnish toddler classroom, this study has extended existing knowledge of the field. Considering how play signals and responses are managed and negotiated in adults' and children's multi-party joint play and examining how adults' active participation in play has the potential to manipulate participation frameworks has led to finding some unacknowledged functions of play in institutional adult-child interaction. The data-driven microanalysis revealed that adult role in play is more complex and multidimensional than prior research has shown (Bateman, 2015; Lobman, 2006; Jung, 2013). The results contribute to theoretical and pedagogical discussion of adult roles in children's play and facilitate early childhood education practitioners' pedagogical reflection and imagination.

First of all, taking all the observation data together (n=47 multi-party play sequences), one distinctive but recurrent feature of turn-taking between adults and children during joint play situations was an adjacency pair formation in which a play signal and an aligning and affiliating response unfolded in close proximity without a break. Being playfully available and beginning to design your own aligning and affiliating contribution while the initial play message is still on the way may indicate a particularly close collaboration and partnership. Through these brief but heightened moments of play connection and their accumulation (e.g.,

proto-conversation sequences), adults and children repeatedly resumed their roles, not just as co-players (*aligning*) but also as intimate play companions and pro-social collaborators (*alignment and affiliation*) (*forms of intersubjectivity*, Beebe, Knocblauch, Rustin, & Sorter, 2005; Stern, 1985; *forms of cooperation and pro-social behavior*, Stivers, Mondada & Steensig, 2011). In broader terms, these adjacency pairs can be seen as signs of an institutional play culture in which playful encounters between adults and children are everyday practice and a valued feature of institutional interaction in the community (Singer, 2013).

Second, and related to the content of play in adult-child interaction, the interactional potential of play resides in its capacity to simultaneously operate in multiple different institutional frames: playing, caring (e.g., soothing) and educating/socializing (e.g., including). A shared play frame provided an interactional space in which adults and children were able to orient towards the everyday events that produce heightened negative emotions and distress. Rather than distancing participants from these events and emotions, play provided a new perspective on them. Based on these observations, it can be concluded that in joint play between adults and children the social organization and the relationship between play, care and education is multidimensional, complex, and in continuous flux.

Third, and related to the adult role in play, the observations emphasize the primacy of local understandings in the adults' play practice. An essential part of the adults' competence in relation to play was the ability to assess, moment by moment, whether, when, and how to share playful stances with children across a range of situations and activities. The ability to correctly choose one's stance was largely based on the local (prior and prevailing) understandings (alignments and affiliations) between the participants, not on any static activity context (basic care, educational, free play situation, dyadic or multi-party encounter) in which the participants seemed to be situated. In other words, playing together was not

confined to certain places and times, or predetermined sets of institutional goals. Instead, sensitivity to local understandings made playful stance taking relevant for adults and revealed the situational goal-oriented potentials of the interaction. Consequentially, rather than treating play in adult-child interaction as a mere pedagogical instrument for adults, it could be seen as a shared communicative project, *a form of intersubjective understanding* between adults and children in which institutional goals and tasks are emerging and achieved on the spot (Beebe et al., 2005).

Fourth, and as an extension of the third point, the results illustrate how playing with children in a multi-party context creates a special space for the adults to locate and balance asymmetries of interaction on the group level. An essential part of the adults' competence in this kind of work was the ability to assess, moment by moment, whether, when, and how to divide the orientation between multiple participants and when to engage in an intense dyadic encounter. To be able to balance the asymmetries of interaction, the adult had to repeatedly resume her role as co-player and play companion, as well as managing her orientation between the periphery and inner circle of play (locating and noticing children in the outer circle, drawing them into alignment with joint play) (Kalliala, 2014).

Taken together, the play sequences examined in this paper reveal that participation frameworks can be systematically manipulated on a local level, allowing unique, creative, co-operative and inclusive patterns of interaction to emerge. In their everyday play practice, the professionals in this classroom, with the children and their parents, locally produced something new. Overall, the findings of this study make a little headway with the understanding of ECEC as ECEPC (early childhood education, play and care). A notion of ECEPC has far-reaching implications for understanding not only the role of the adult in institutional play situations but also how micro-analytic interaction research can contribute to play research in ECEC settings. First, by moving children from the outer circle of joint play

to the center of multi-party interaction analysis, researchers can refine views of the micropolitics of social life in group-care settings and more clearly reveal the subtle asymmetries of interaction (cf. Goodwin, 2007c; Kalliala, 2014; Karrebæk, 2011). Second, by focusing on the intersections of institutional frames of education, play and care, researchers can deepen understanding of the institutional tasks of ECEC and multi-tasking role of the adult in these settings. Lastly, play is an institution-relevant professional activity for adults in ECEC settings. If and when a shared play frame enables these adults to encounter children as both teachers and play companions, without giving either institutional role a priority, managing and making use of the simultaneous invocations of these two roles becomes an admirable aspect of their professional practice.

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Appendix. Transcription conventions

Based on Jefferson (2004).

[]	Overlapping talk
{ }	Overlapping nonverbal actions
↑↓	Arrows indicate shifts into especially high or low pitch
:	Sound before colon is stretched
<u>word</u>	Underlining indicates stress/emphasis
WORD	Loud voice
°word°	Quiet voice
€word€	Smiley voice
>word<	Talk is speeded up
<word>	Talk is slowed down
tch	Tongue clicking
-	A dash indicates a cut-off
=	No break or gap between or within turns
(0.5)	Elapsed time in silence in tenths of seconds
(.)	Micropause
(())	Words in double brackets are descriptions of nonverbal actions

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