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Constituting play connection with very young children: Adults' active participation in play

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Abstract

A large body of educational research has focused on play as one of children's own activities, however, considerably less attention has been paid to structures and practices associated with joint play between adults and children. This article contributes to this line of research by analyzing adults' participation in joint play with very young children. The data consist of 10 rich make-believe play cases taken from 150 hours of videotaped, naturally occurring interactions in a group care setting. The results show that the ability of adults to build sustained co-participation in play with very young children demands delicately timed observations, initiatives and responses with attuned and coordinated use of gesture, gaze and talk. In all, this study provides one way to study and understand better what adults are doing in practice while they are actively co-participating in play. Pedagogical implications for early childhood education are discussed.

Keywords

play; participation; joint action; adult–child interaction

1. Introduction

Adults' active co-participation in children's play is a special kind of pedagogical practice in the context of early childhood education (ECE). While the notion of children's play is commonsensically and sociologically understood as children's own peer culture and applied to activities that are not initiated by adults, in ECE play has also been a professional instrument and practice. Among other things, this means that adults actively engage children in play activities and take part in the joint play as play companions. However, the pedagogical position of play in the adult–child interaction is not without controversy. In fact, equivocal definitions of play and differing premises concerning the purpose of play in educational settings make it challenging for adults to decide how, when, and to what extent they should participate. This study analyzes participation in joint play between adults and children by closely observing how adults' active participation aligns with children's play actions. With this focus, our intention is to contribute to existing play research by providing a way of developing a rich description and deeper

understanding of what is happening during adult–child–group interactions when the adult is actively co-participating in children's play.

Previous research has pointed out that joint play, involving children and adults, is a complex cultural and pedagogical practice in which adult participation can vary in one single interactional sequence from a withdrawal to intensive observation and active co-participation (Jung, 2013; Lobman, 2006; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011; van Oers, 2013). Although there is shared understanding among scholars about the different roles adults can have in children's play, the studies to date have not provided solid, empirically confirmed arguments about when, how and under what premises adults should participate (van Oers, 2013). Empirical interaction studies have identified role characterizations like: 1) an observer or a behavior monitor 2) a stage manager and a provider of the material resources and 3) a play partner or a play facilitator (e.g., Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Jung, 2013; Kontos, 1999). There is also research on adult's pedagogical positioning inside and outside the play (Fleer, 2015) as well as studies on adults' questions and children's responses in play situations (Meacham, Vukelich, Han, & Buell, 2014; Tompkins, Zucker, Justice & Binici, 2013). However, what these characterizations provide is a more or less static typology of different roles, positions and isolated practices, rather than analysis of how play actions are built and responded to in situ by relying of different verbal and non-verbal interactional resources and turn taking practices (Bateman, 2015; Goodwin, 2007a).

There is a large body of research on play as a situated social activity between two or more peers (e.g., Björk-Willén, 2007; Butler, 2008; Butler & Weatherall, 2006; Cobb-Moore, 2012; Corsaro, 1979; Farver, 1992; Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin, 2006; Griswold, 2007; Kyratzis, 2007; Sawyer, 1997; Sidnell, 2011; Stivers & Sidnell, 2016), however, considerably less attention has been paid to the actual structures and practices associated with joint play between adults and children. To our best knowledge, only a few studies (e.g., Bateman, 2015; Lobman, 2003; 2006) have examined how play is constituted in the moment-to-moment flow of interaction between adults and children. As pointed out by Lobman (2006) and Bateman (2015), educational study of adult–child interaction needs research designs that understand children and their significant adults as one functional unit, seeing and describing joint interactions and not just the behaviors of children or adults separately. Bateman (2015) further highlights the usefulness of data-driven approaches and fine-grained interaction analyses that can provide richer and more detailed descriptions of multidimensional and varying practices of adult–child–group play interactions. Lending support to both Batman's and Lobman's argumentation, we want to emphasize that fine-grained interaction analyses that provide

access to the actual practice through which joint play is accomplished and sustained between adults and children may clarify and extend the understanding of play in the pedagogical relationships and in this way produce important methodological and pedagogical contributions to current play research.

In early childhood education research, the notion of play has remained ambiguous for decades. Theoretically, there is a somewhat shared understanding among scholars about the key features of play, e.g. 1) spontaneity, unpredictability and improvisation 2) voluntariness and free will 3) gratification and intrinsic motivation 4) priority of process and absence of extrinsic goals and 5) imagination (e.g., Burghardt, 2011; Caillois, 1958/2001; Huizinga, 1938; Smith, 2010). Nevertheless, these theoretical characterizations alone do not produce *explanatory definition of play* and therefore offers an inadequate response to the needs of ECE theory and practice (van Oers, 2013). One reason for the lack of more detailed theoretical and practical explanations of play might be the way researcher have been framing their research focus. Examining educational and developmental journals from 2005 to 2007, Cheng & Johnson (2010) found that play was typically not the primary research focus of the peer-reviewed articles (only 19 out of 57 selected articles), as often it was treated as a research context (22 out of 57 selected articles) or had a minor role in the research (8 out of 57). Scholars remind us that if play is not positioned as a primary focus of the study and defined as an analytical account, researchers should be cautious when making claims about play in the first place.

Cheng & Johnson's (2010) reminder is still relevant after almost a decade ago if we view play-related articles published in early childhood education journals from 2010 to 2017. It seems that play research is dividing into the study of more and more specific subcategories. For instance, the notion of make-believe play has many different conceptualizations such as *imaginary play* (Fleer, 2015), *dramatic play* (Karabon, 2016), *socio-dramatic play* (Loizou, Michaelides, & Georgiou, in press; Meacham et al., 2014; Staton-Chapman, 2015) and *pretend play* (Gmitrova, 2013; Li, Hestenes & Wang, 2016; Parsons & Howe, 2013) with slightly different definitions and use of analytical terminology. Also, peer play and play between adults and children is most often separated by focusing either on *children's play* (Eggum-Wilkens, Fabes, Castle, Zhang, Hanish, & Martin, 2014; Gastaldi, Longobardi, Pasta, & Prino, in press) and *autonomous play* (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011) or on *teacher–child play* (Tompkins et al., 2013; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011) and *guided play* (Massey, 2013). This kind of fragmentation of research focuses and varying use of

analytical terminology can be inconvenient for the aim of developing deeper understanding of the foundations and basic interactional features of play in the field of ECE.

The ambiguity of the notion of play has far reaching impacts on the micro level interactions between adults and children in group care settings. Although, a number of studies have demonstrated that adults' availability and active co-participation in play can increase the duration and complexity of children's play (Bateman, 2015; Jung, 2013; Kalliala, 2011; 2014; Lobman, 2003: 2006; Singer et al., 2014; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009), in practical level, there is still confusion as to what play activities such as free play, adult-directed play and play-based learning actually mean for the adults. In current educational research, joint play between adults and children has not been examined as an analytic account of what the participants are doing. Rather, it has mostly appealed to the institutional description of the events during free play[1]or during adult-directed play and play-based learning[2]. Consequently, adult–child play interaction is loosely defined as anything that the children and adults do together during more or less structured playtime or in the presence of play materials (e.g., Kontos, 1991; Singer et al., 2014). Therefore, from the methodological and analytical perspective, the term adult–child play interaction has remained too imprecise to render a relevant account of the actual practice.

As pointed out by van Oers (2013), what remains unclear is the process of how play emerges into the flow of interaction and develops further towards sustained co-participation and joint activity between adults and children. Complexity of this process becomes evident as adults can have different kinds of orientations, positions, aims and premises that direct their interpretations of and contribution to the ongoing activity. For instance, if adults approach play from the educational point of view taking as their point of departure learning and developmental goals of an individual child or a group (*developmental pedagogy*, Pramling Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008) they will construct widely different form of social action compared to adults who position as co-equal players and orient to create, maintain and extend shared understanding of the emerging play (*co-production of play interactions,* Bateman, 2015; *improvisation,* Lobman, 2003; 2006). Since the way adults' actions align to children's play actions is shown to have considerable impact on the way interaction unfolds further (Bateman, 2015; Jung, 2013; Kalliala, 2011; 2014; Lobman, 2006), analytical tools

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[1] With free play we mean specific periods of the day when children can choose their own activities, playmates and the duration of the activity.

[2] With adult-directed play and play-based learning we mean practices in which adults guide play as a way of working towards predetermined or emerging educational and developmental goals.

like adult role, position and description of the overt behavior alone are not able to explain how adults organize and should organize their actions in joint play interaction with children.

More recent studies on play interaction between adults and children have systematically examined how play is initiated and maintained in the group level and raised awareness of the complex and multidimensional nature of play in adult–child–group interactions (Bateman, 2015; Jung, 2013). However, these studies have mostly reported analysis of adult–child dyads or group interactions of an adult and two to three children. Thereby, further research is needed in order to reveal systematic features of play in larger groups of children and adults. The systematic focus on collective multi-party interactions is important in order to provide descriptions of adults practices that produce sustained play interaction in the group level. Of note is that in group care settings adults are required to attend to the needs of multiple children simultaneously depending on adult-child ratio and size of the group and thereby close observations of dyadic or triadic play interactions are not providing exhaustive inquiry of the organization of play in these contexts.

To conclude the foregoing discussion, it seems that more detailed research around the intricacies of play between children and adults is needed in the field of ECE. Current play research needs expanded methodological tools and more nuanced and context-specific analytical terminology in order to first, detect joint play from the flow of interaction more systematically; and second, to observe and analyze the organization of play interaction as collective multi-party activity between adults and children. In this study, we address these methodologically as well as pedagogically relevant questions by analyzing participation in joint play between adults and very young children. The interactional sequences of adults' active participation are our particular interest. However, we do not focus on adults' actions in isolation, instead we elaborate participation as a way of understanding the relation between individuals and environment (Goodwin, 2007a; Rogoff, 2016). In the wider theoretical framework of participation, the relevant unit for analyzing joint action is not the isolated mind of the individual child or adult, but rather the sequential organization of joint action (e.g., Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin, 2007a). Following this line of thought, the core argument of our theoretical, methodological and empirical explanations with their associated pedagogical implications is that play should be understood not only as children's play, but also as an interactional resource between children and adults.

In our empirical study, we focused on one age group, 0–3 year-olds. Examining joint play between an adult and very young children is one relevant dimension of the play research, since studies have

shown that interaction with infants and toddlers in a group care setting sets unique demands for the adult (Kalliala, 2011; 2014; Mehus, 2011). At the level of interaction, even though very young children act in purposeful ways and have creative abilities to attune to the communication partner and to engage in joint activities (Kidwell & Zimmerman, 2006; Løkken, 2000; Stern, 1985; Trevarthen, 2011), they are not able to maintain the connectedness or the coherence of the interaction in the same way as adults and older children do (Mehus, 2011). Therefore, we can hypothesize that adults' practices are central to the process of constituting, maintaining and repairing joint play and creating interactional resources for sustained co-participation. We limited our analytical focus to joint make-believe play, a form of activity that involves transformation of ordinary objects and persons into characters in a fictional world (Garvey, 1976; Sidnell, 2011; Vygotsky, 1967). This selected analytical focus is justified since interactional sequences of make-believe play are replete with negotiations of shared understanding and therefore offer an excellent opportunity for examination of how joint play is constituted (Bateman, 2015; Farver, 1992).

The aim of this research is twofold. First, by examining how make-believe play is sequentially organized in a natural group care setting, our aim is to demonstrate the systematic features in the co-production of play interaction between adults and children. Second, by analyzing how adults' active participation aligns with children's actions in joint make-believe play, we aim to describe and examine the actual interactional resources and practices by which adults are able to initiate, sustain and develop play interaction with very young children. To do this, we pose the following questions:

1. How is joint make-believe play between adult and very young children sequentially organized?
2. How does adult active participation align with very young children's actions in joint make-believe play?

2. Methodological considerations

2.1 Notion of joint play as an analytical account

The initial premise behind the study design was that joint play interaction between adults and children in the context of ECE takes place within the ongoing activities of the group and its daily routines. Based on our theoretical thinking, joint play is not an isolated event occurring only during

free play or adult-directed play sessions. Instead, play and playful qualities of interaction can become part of any daily activity from mealtimes to transitions and more structured, adult-led circle times. Prior studies have provided empirical evidence for these claims. Lobman (2003; 2006) has described how an adult-led circle time can shift into more playful improvisation and joint make-believe play between adults and children. Moreover, Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson (2006) have demonstrated how during mealtimes adults and children can engage in conversations that involve features of joint make-believe play.

Instead of proposing one dimensional, either-or questions like *'Is this play or not?'* (van Oers, 2013) we chose to propose questions that acknowledge the complex interplay of a range of activities and their overlapping qualities. By asking *'Is there play in the interaction?'* we tried to outline a picture of the overall interactional context within which these play actions happen in the ECE setting. In this way, we were able to notice activity shifts between joint play and other activities such as care and explicit teaching. Prior studies have demonstrated the usefulness of this kind of analytical positioning especially in the study of joint make-believe play. For example, Bateman (2015) has shown how it is possible to analyze joint play sequences by simultaneously detecting shifts from reality to make-believe play and by differentiating sequences in which participants are actually engaging in make-believe play or only talking about make-believe play.

We focused our attention on joint play as an interactively organized, situated social practice (Bateman, 2015; Goodwin, 2000). Thereby, our analytical interest focused exclusively on those aspects of play that the interactants made publicly available. With the notion of '*joint*' we mean more broadly *the architecture of intersubjectivity* in interaction (Heritage, 1984; Sidnell, 2014), i.e., in the context of play the concrete, observable interactional actions and structures (turn construction, action sequencing, and repair) through which participants share their play ideas with others and constitute shared understanding of each other's play actions (Bateman, 2015; Farver, 1992; Göncü, 1993). We will return to discuss this issue in relation to our analysis, as one of our research aims is to illustrate the systematic features of sequential unfolding of joint play between adults and children.

2.2   *Participants and research context*

The research was conducted in a municipal group care setting for children under the age of three. The day-care center was located in an outer suburb of Helsinki, a southern city of Finland. In all, 13

toddlers, 8 girls and 5 boys aged between 1 year and 4 months and 2 years and 7 months and 4 adults participated in the research (adult–child ratio 1:4). The female teacher of the group was a qualified kindergarten teacher. In her team, there were also two female nursery nurses and a personal assistant for one child with special needs.

The daily schedule of the toddler group was flexible. Every morning after breakfast and every afternoon after snack time the children were given the opportunity for free play, i.e., they were able to choose their own activities, playmates, materials, and duration of activity. The free playtime lasted for approximately 45 minutes both in the morning and in the afternoon. In this environment therefore, children and adults had many opportunities to come together and spontaneously co-participate in play activities. While there are many group care settings that provide this type of environment with a lot of free playtime in Finland, the quality of the adult–child interaction may vary a lot (Kalliala, 2011; 2014). This particular toddler group was chosen because the initial short-term observations revealed that adults frequently co-participated in children's play activities and their interaction was *responsive* and *improvisational* (c.f. Lobman, 2006), offering rich context to examine joint play between adults and children.

Staff at the selected day care center were familiar with research protocols having been part of several research projects of the University of Helsinki. The kindergarten teacher of the group informed all the families about the proposed research and their rights to choose not to participate. In accordance with contemporary ethical guidelines at University of Helsinki (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity), informed consent was sought from parents, ECE practitioners, the director of the daycare center and the municipality officials. After the data collection, parents and ECE practitioners signed consent forms in order to permit the use of the material for research and educational purposes. At that time, the opportunity to see some parts of the data was provided to the parents, children and ECE practitioners.

2.3 Data collection and creation of data sources

In line with the premises outlined above, it was necessary to employ a research design that would produce first-hand information about children's and adults' daily lives and experiences at the micro-level. In this regard, a long-term observation study with video-observations of the adult–child–group interactions within the context of the ongoing activity was utilized. Full day observations were conducted, in order to be able to examine how play emerges into the flow of interaction in the

different situations during the day. The video-observation method was chosen, since it made it possible to record mundane talk, visible behavior as well as features of the setting (e.g. material environment) where the members of the toddler group constitute their lifeworld (Goodwin, 2000).

Data were collected and research procedures implemented by one researcher (first author of this article), in order to gain more coherence in the process of data collection and analysis. The research material consists of video-observations (150 hours) enriched with field notes. The data were collected between 2013 and 2016. Long-term field work consisted of three periods of non-participant video-observations. In the first period (2013–2014) several short-term observation visits (30–60 minutes) were conducted and video-recordings of adult–child–group interaction were collected to get an initial understanding of interactions in an activity-rich, multi-party setting. The second period (2015) consisted of 4 full-day observations and video data were used to pilot the methodological aspects of the study design. The third and final fieldwork period (2016) lasted 4 months and consisted of 34 full-day observations.

During the data collection period, the researcher was *an inside-outsider* (Alcock, 2017), intending to disrupt the everyday life of the group as little as possible. 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 interaction between adults and toddlers. The observational gaze of the non-participant researcher was on some occasions pointed to capturing what the toddlers or adults saw in the distance or what was happening in the surroundings. In this way, the researcher was able to anticipate the possible need to shift the video-observational focus between participants, e.g. during sequences in which someone was approaching the ongoing play and possibly play signaling from the distance. This observational strategy enabled the capture of a larger view of the multi-party context.

As a video-observation method and a long-term fieldwork raised specific ethical considerations, careful attention was paid to the situated ethics, e.g. ethical reflection (Finlay & Gough, 2003). At the beginning of the data collection period, some of the children showed confusion and a lack of self-confidence (withdrawing gaze, physical distance, safe seeking behavior) in front of the neutral faced, non-participant researcher. Also, some of the ECE practitioners were searching for acceptance from the researcher with their gaze. In order to decrease (observed) discomfort that video-observation produced, changes from neutral faced observer to responsive one was made intentionally. With this modified non-participant role (i.e. participation only with facial expressions,

Løkken, 2011) the researcher tried to signal two matters: on one hand responsiveness with the attuned and interested face and on the other participatory distance with the intention to refrain strictly from the further intersubjective interaction. The maintenance of the non-participant role was important because the goal was to observe play in as natural group care context as possible without any 'play interventions' made by the researcher.

At the end of fieldwork period, the video-observation data and field notes were reviewed and a content log was made. The log included a rough overview of all the video episodes as well as a time-indexed list of the play sequences that were identified (Jordan & Henderson, 1995). Next, significant episodes in which evidence of joint make-believe play was emerging were selected. Episodes were identified by using logic of *intensity sampling* in order to detect rich cases (Patton 1990, 171). All in all, a sub-corpus of 10 rich cases was used to undertake a more detailed analysis.

The cases were chosen according to the following criteria: 1) sustained play interaction between adults and toddlers that included transformation of ordinary objects and/or persons into characters in fictional world and 2) more than two children are participating in the joint activity. For the first criterion, the selection of only 10 cases was justifiable, since it was beyond the scope of this paper to make claims regarding the relative frequency of joint make-believe play between adults and toddlers. Rather, the goal was to illustrate how children and adults are able to constitute joint make-believe play in the first place. The second criterion was justifiable, since our goal was to develop analytical terminology to the study of play, specifically in the multi-party context. Of note is that previous studies have mostly reported analysis of adult–child dyads (Pramling Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008) or group interactions of an adult and two to three children (Bateman, 2015; Jung, 2013).

3. Data analysis

In our analysis we draw mainly on the sequential approach of conversation analysis (Schegloff, 2007) and its treatment of joint activity (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992), participation (Goodwin, 2007a) and make-believe play (Bateman, 2015; Sidnell, 2011). Joint play interactions were assessed by repeatedly examining the selected video recordings, writing narrative descriptions, making detailed transcripts of participants' actions and analyzing the temporal unfolding and organization of verbal and nonverbal interaction (gestures, facial configurations, gaze, spatial orientation, touch, posture, vocal contour, body movement and spoken language). More nuanced understanding of the

display of meaning and action in play was obtained by triangulating different modalities (Enfield, 2011). This was done by simultaneously taking into account sensory modalities and their semiotic dimensions and by treating talk, embodiment and material environment all as semiotic resources (Goodwin, 2000). An analytical distinction was made based on the form(ulation), intensity and timing of the actions (Enfield, 2011; Kidwell, 2009; Kidwell & Zimmerman, 2007; Stern, 2010). Narrative descriptions and still frames from the video as representational forms of the analysis were essential in parallel with transcripts, because transcripts alone were not able to represent all the joint play actions, especially the embodied features of the actions, as they unfold in the moment-to-moment interaction (Goodwin, 2000; Stivers & Sidnell, 2016). For an explanation of the transcription conventions used, please see Appendix A.

As the focus of the analysis was multi-party interaction in a natural group care setting and the recordings were made using only one camera, it was inevitable that the view of some of the participants' faces was obstructed at least momentarily. In these situations, triangulation of different modalities and their semiotic dimensions was an important analytical tool as it allowed the use of secondary evidence. For instance, evidence of gaze shifts without seeing the participant's face was tracked by analyzing head movements, talk, gesture and action of other participants (Kidwell & Zimmerman, 2006).

In the following two subsections (3.1 and 3.2) we will proceed to analyze in detail the participation of adults and children in joint make-believe play activity. In the illustrations of the data (narrative descriptions and transcripts) all the names of the children are pseudonyms. For practical reasons, to improve readability of the text, we use the anonym term *adult* instead of pseudonyms to refer to the ECE practitioner. All the parents and ECE practitioners have given consent for the authors to publish the still frames from the video data in scientific journals.

3.1 Transition from a single play signal into a sustained co-participation

We began our analysis with the first research question in mind: How is joint make-believe play between adult and very young children sequentially organized? By answering as precisely as possible the questions of what, when and how it is said/done in joint play, we tried to discover and capture the configurations of actions that were involved in the process of making play a social action. More specifically, we focused on structures of turn construction, action sequencing, and repair and examined how previous, current, and following components of a sequential organization

interlock and reinforce one another in play interaction (*the architecture of intersubjectivity,* Heritage, 1984; Sidnell, 2014).

According to our theoretical and empirical understanding, a sequential organization of joint play interaction proceeds from a play initiation (*to invite collaboration*, Stivers & Sidnell, 2016) to sustained, shared play interaction (*co-production of play interactions*, Bateman, 2015; *improvisation,* Lobman, 2006; Sawyer, 1997; *sustained shared thinking*, Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). However, to elaborate these sequential structures in detail, we needed more fine-grained analytical terminology that would illustrate the transition – a subtle interactional shift from the first *play signal* (Bateson, 1976; Garvey, 1976) to more sustained co-participation. Goodwin's notions of *triggering event* (1981) and *participation* (2007a) provided an analytical starting point and framework in which terminology of previous empirical interaction studies on social play aligned easily. In dialogue with this analytical framework and our own empirical data we identified sequences of 1) play signaling, 2) play connection and 3) sustained co-participation.

3.1.1   *Play signaling*

In this paper, we used the notion of play signal to describe the play initiation and the triggering event of joint play in particular. Play signal can be defined as a rich and internally complex metacommunicative sign (Bateson, 1976) and a communicative *this is play* -message (Garvey, 1976), in which both the subjective meaning of the play act for the player and its mediation through multiple semiotic resources are integrated. According to Stivers & Sidnell (2016) there are three main ways to start joint play, 1) to request collaboration (e.g. *Can you X?*), 2) to invite collaboration by beginning the activity and 3) to propose collaboration (e.g. *Let's X; How about X; Should we X*). Contrary to this classification, we do not count requests or proposals as play initiations. Instead, likewise Ariel (1984) and Bateman (2015) we argue that they should be treated as prefaces and negotiations about forthcoming play not yet actual engagement in play. Therefore, play signal in this paper is understood as a definite interactional practice in which a play act is performed e.g. visibly in others' line of sight in order to invite others to join the play.

In terms of joint make-believe play, participants must somehow attract their potential co-players' interest and establish a common frame of reference by naming or inventing objects and assigning roles (Garvey, 1976). One spontaneous make-believe case between adults and very young children

in a natural group care context is illustrated next. Consider the following extract (1) as an illustration of adult play signaling:

Extract 1:
((the adult is introducing small fluffy sheep character for the children during a circle time))
61 Adult: BÄÄ:: se sanoo
               BAA:: ((animates the sound of the sheep)) it says
62 Adult: [*((gazes intensively at the sheep figure and moves it as if it was walking and peeking at the children from behind the barn))*
63 Venla: [*((extends her head to see the sheep figure))*
64 Venla: *°hahaha°*
65 Adult: kukkuu::
               peekaboo::
66 Adult: [*((smiles and moves the sheep figure as if it was walking and peeking))*
67   [*((children are observing the manipulation of the play figure attentively, some of them are smiling and laughing))*
               [figure 1.

Figure 1: Spontaneous play signaling during adult-led circle time.

In the sequential analysis of play signaling, the aim is to identify how verbal and non-verbal interaction is used to make play actions observable and recognizable to others. In the case at hand, we can see that the adult uses multimodal interactional cues to build her invitational play signal (lines 61 and 62). Gesticulations (hand movements that produce the walking and peeking of the

sheep), animations and prolonged vocalizations (*BAA::*) as well as intensive gaze shifts towards the play object are produced to attract the children's attention and to invite joint make-believe play. In other words, the adult's embodied, multimodal play signaling marks the potential sequential shift to joint play. However, what is meaningful from an analytical perspective is not the adult's action in isolation but also the response that the adult gets from the children (lines 63, 64 and 67). Therefore, play signaling is a triggering event of play, but not yet the manifestation of joint play.

3.1.2   Creating, maintaining and repairing play connection

We use the notion of play connection to mark the transition from a single play signal into the joint play interaction. With 'connection' we refer to the way participants can align with each other's play actions and thereby constitute a visually observable connection of play actions as well as shared understanding of those actions. According to our analytical thinking, the establishment of play connection is not a binary, on-off function. Rather, it is a more complex and subtle process of creating, maintaining and repairing shared understanding of each other's play signals. As a process, play connection is constantly moving and may include different forms of making sense and making meaning with variation from disagreement to agreement and everything in between (Beebe et al., 2005; Matusov, 1996). These different forms of being connected (*forms of intersubjectivity,* Beebe et al., 2005) are observable from the nuances, e.g. form, intensity and timing of verbal and embodied multi-party actions (Stern, 2010).

In our analytical framework, we illustrate the micro moment of finding shared understanding in play by using the terms 'alignment' and 'shared stance taking' (Du Bois & Kärkkäinen, 2012; Godwin, 2007a). The analysis makes relevant different kinds of verbal and nonverbal alignments as observable interactional practices. On the one hand, a congruent alignment of gaze, body orientation and body movements indicate that participants are engaged in a single, joint activity (Goodwin, 2007a; also see *a focused interaction*, Goffman, 1963, 24). On the other hand, the shared understanding of play itself becomes observable through shared stance taking. While the notion of stance has commonly been treated as an attitudinal matter of an individual person, in this paper we align with the view of more recent studies. These studies conceptualize stance taking as dialogic phenomenon, an intersubjective act through which individuals align themselves in relation to each other (Goodwin, 2007b). Emotions play an important part in this shared stance taking process (*emotion as a stance,* Goodwin, 2007b; Goodwin & Goodwin 2001; Du Bois & Kärkkäinen, 2012). As play frequently manifests itself and becomes observable through the shifts of emotional stances

(Bateson, 1978; Darwin, 1872/1965; Kaukomaa et al., 2015), we understand playful and emotional stance taking as somewhat inseparable in the analysis of socially situated joint play action. Therefore, in this paper, a congruent alignment of emotional and playful stance indicates that participants are having shared understanding of the play and the emotional experiences it invokes. Returning to the make-believe play case, reconsider the extract 1 (see pages 11–12) as an illustration of play connection. The establishment of play connection between adult and children becomes visible, if we elaborate the initial play signal (line 61 and 62) and the subsequent responses (lines 63–67) as one functional unit.

The transition from a single play signal into the joint play interaction is observable from the social organization and coordination of multimodal verbal and non-verbal actions. In the case at hand, by gazing at and extending their heads towards the sheep figure, the children are expressing their interest and engagement (lines 63, 67). In this way, they are establishing a visually observable connection to the adult-initiated make-believe play. Then, by smiling and breaking into a laugh (lines 64 and 67, also see figure 1.) some of the children are displaying jointly coordinated emotional stance shift that indicates shared understanding of the adult's play signal. By responding with a smile (line 66), the adult also aligns with this emotionally heightened moment of play connection.

3.1.3   Building sustained co-participation

In this paper co-participation is analyzed as "*a temporally unfolding process through which separate parties demonstrate to each other their ongoing understanding of the events they are engaged in by building actions that contribute to the further progression of these very same events*" (Goodwin, 2007a, 24). Goodwin's definition of co-participation is closely related to the notions of *improvisation* (Lobman, 2003; 2006), *sustained shared thinking* (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009) and *co-production of play interactions* (Bateman, 2015) in the study of joint play between adults and children. From the perspective of turn taking, all of these analytical tools are focusing one way or another to the organization of participants' alignments and contributions by identifying activities that parties must perform in order to build relevant action that sustain the joint play interaction and shared understanding of the play. Returning to our make-believe play case, consider the following data extract (2) as an illustration of sustained co-participation in the joint play between adult and children. The extract begins from the point where the adult and children have just finished their singalong activity during a circle time. In line 76 one of the children, 2 years and 10 months-old

Tuuli gazes and points at the sheep figure intensively and returns to the adult initiated make-believe play by saying:

Extract 2:
76 Tuuli: [↑<u>HEI</u>
                [↑*<u>HEY</u>* ((*raises her eyebrows and points at the sheep figure held by the adult*))
                [figure 2.
77   sil on paha mie::li↓=
           it's feeling sa::d↓= ((subdued tone of the voice))
78 Adult: =↑tälläkö paha mie:li↓
           =↑*<u>is this one</u>* *feeling sa:d huh↓ ((subdued tone of the voice, gazes briefly at Tuuli and then directs her attention to the sheep))*
79 Adult: no millä me se lohdutellaan
           well how should we comfort it ((lighter tone of the voice, shifts her gaze back to Tuuli and begins to stroke the sheep figure))
80 Tuuli: se haluu äitiä
           it wants its mummy ((subdued tone of the voice, coordinates her gaze between the adult and the sheep figure))
81 Adult: no niin haluais
           well yes it does ((subdued tone of the voice, gazes the sheep figure))
82 Adult: [se huutaa et äiti:: missä ole::t
           [it's shouting ((shifts her gaze at Tuuli)) mothe::r where are you:: ((animates the shouting and simultaneously strokes the sheep figure))
83 Tuuli: *[((shares mutual gaze with the adult, then coordinates her gaze between the adult and the sheep figure))*
84   *[((also other children are coordinating their gaze between the adult and the sheep figure, some of the children are making sad faces by frowning))*

Figure 2. Re-establishment of play connection.

In this sequence, the adult and Tuuli are using each turn to develop the joint make-believe play further and in this way building sustained co-participation. In line 76 by gazing and pointing the play figure (see figure 2.), Tuuli is producing a visually observable connection to the make-believe play object. Simultaneously, by producing address term '*HEY'* with raised volume of the voice and raised eyebrows, Tuuli is using multimodal means to attract others' attention. Then, in line 77 by commenting on the sheep's feelings ('*it's feeling sad'*), she is re-establishing the playful stance and contributing to the adult's initial play signal (c.f. extract 1). Furthermore, by lowering her pitch (*subdued tone of the voice*), Tuuli is displaying emotional stance shift that indicates attunement to the feelings of sadness with empathic concern (*doing sympathy*, Couper-Kuhlen, 2009). In line 78 by responding without a break and by repeating the words '*feeling sad'* the adult is making her speech act recognizable as a continuation of the display Tuuli initiated. Second, by checking the reference ('*this one is feeling sad huh'*), she is working to establish a shared understanding with Tuuli. Thirdly, by lowering her pitch while producing the response (*subdued tone of the voice*), the adult is aligning with Tuuli's playful and emotional stance and in this way, is indicating shared understanding of the joint make-believe play. Tuuli and the adult have thus (re)established play connection.

In line 79 by asking '*well how could we comfort it'* with lighter tone of the voice and by beginning to stroke the play figure the adult is producing multimodal play actions which contribute to Tuuli's initial play act. As the interaction unfolds further, we can see that Tuuli is not aligning with the adult's contribution which was designed to frame the play towards comforting and finding relief to

the sheep figure. Instead, in line 80 Tuuli returns to her initial play frame by reporting a state of affairs that explains the sheep figure's sadness. Her tone of the voice stays subdued and marks the act of sympathy. The adult treats Tuuli's shift back to the initial play frame as unproblematic by expressing understanding of and alignment with it. In line 81 the adult first receipts the new information by producing an agreement token '*yes it does'*. Subdued prosody indicates that the adult is sharing the emotional stance of sympathy with Tuuli. The adult then in line 82 provides her own contribution by animating the shouting and longing of the sheep ('*mothe::r where are you::'*). Tuuli is aligning with the adult's contribution by sharing a mutual gaze and then by coordinating her gaze between the sheep figure and the adult (line 83). Also other children are participating by producing coordinated gaze shifts and by aligning with their facial expression to the shared emotional stance of sympathy. In summary, these alignments and contributions that the adult and Tuuli (and other children) are producing in concert illustrate socially situated actions that we call sustained co-participation in make-believe play.

3.2   Adult's active participation in play

In this section, we have applied the above analytical framework and analyzed the data with our second research question in mind: How does adult active participation align with very young children's actions in joint make-believe play? To report the study findings, only one interaction sequence of joint make-believe play is demonstrated. A detailed analysis of one case reveals the time contour of the developing play interaction more clearly than a collection of short, fragmented episodes from multiple cases. We provide a combination of transcripts, narrative description and still frames from the video footage in order to depict the overall six-minute make-believe play sequence of one adult and three children, aged 16–32 months. We have narrowed our analytical focus to the temporal unfolding of the action sequences of play signaling, play connection and sustained co-participation.

3.2.1   Adult's play signal as an invitation to joint play

Before describing the adult's play initiation sequence that is in the focus of our analysis in this section, it is useful to sketch out some of the initial events of the larger sequence. At the beginning of this course of action, 16-month-old Venla toddles across the playroom during afternoon free playtime. As she notices the adult sitting on the floor, she sprints towards her and reaches out with a cube-shaped toy in her hand. As soon as the adult recognizes that Venla has decided to approach

her, she directs her undivided attention to their encounter. The adult gives a warm smile and reaches out towards Venla, indicating that she is available. She simultaneously verbalizes the target of their joint attention (a cube-shaped toy with small grains rattling inside) by enquiring '*What did you find*'. Venla sits in her lap and they proceed to examine the toy together. Their joint attention is pointed to the tiny bumps and grooves on the surface of the cube. Venla points at the decorative markings and the adult acknowledges her gesture by verbalizing the situation '*Yeah, those are butterflies*'.

After a few turns of Venla's pointing and adult's naming we come to the sequence of actions that are in the focus of our analysis: The adult gently pinches one of the tiny bumps on the cube, pretending to grab one of the imaginary butterflies. She holds it between her fingers briefly and releases it into the air. She then follows the flight of the butterfly by tracing its imagined flight patterns with her gaze. She also reinforces her nonverbal make-believe act by saying '*these butterflies really wanna fly*'. These actions, embodied and verbal, executed by the adult, and accompanied with material resources form what we refer to as a play signal. This multimodal signaling can be understood as an invitation to joint play.

In this particular play initiation sequence, the adult builds her play signal by combining material resources (decorative butterfly markings on the surface of the cube-shaped toy) with a coordination of multimodal actions. The adult's gesticulation (pinching, holding, releasing), gaze coordination (tracing, looking to-gaze) and verbalization ('*these butterflies really wanna fly*') embodies the make-believe play of giving flight to imaginary butterflies. With her coordination of multimodal actions, the adult is providing a wide range of concrete interactional resources for preverbal Venla to recognize this sequence as make-believe play.

Transformation of the adult's visible actions (from explorative pointing and naming sequence to creative gesticulation) accommodates the new imaginary point of focus with reference to abstract play objects (imaginary butterflies). The chosen actions are creative, instead of accepting the toy's manipulative functions, the adult expands her actions to the make-believe play. Here the adult, just like children are used to (e.g., Møller, 2015; Sidnell, 2011), spontaneously builds entrance to the shared make-believe world by quickly assessing the affordances of available materials and putting them to novel use. In this situation, the cube-shaped toy is an *ad hoc tool* (Mehus, 2011) for the adult to display make-believe.

If we continue to examine in detail how this sequence of play initiation is designed, we can see that the adult is constituting her play signal by simply beginning the activity as publicly visible and audible display (e.g., Lerner & Zimmerman, 2003; Stivers & Sidnell, 2016). The play signal has pure invitational purpose without any overt request or proposal; the initiation do not request for agreement, rejection or any other response (Stivers & Sidnell, 2016). Moreover, the play signal is designed with a sensitivity to the potential recipient's (Venla) attentional focus as the adult with her gesticulation is entering Venla's line of sight (e.g., Lerner & Zimmerman, 2003). In the following section, we describe and analyze how Venla (and other children) will respond to this play signal and how children and adult together constitute play connection.

3.2.2 Adult is creating, maintaining and repairing play connection

While the adult is displaying a play signal to Venla, nearby, Sofia (2 years 5 months) and Tuuli (2 years 10 months) are tending to their baby dolls and sharing a mutual play idea. As soon as Sofia and Tuuli recognize the adult's play signal, Sofia instantly abandons her baby doll and gathers around the cube. Tuuli is observing the situation from a distance. Quick to grasp the basic qualities of the make-believe play, Sofia begins to create butterflies of her own by carefully picking up the form and time contour of the adult's hand gestures (line 3). Also, Venla is enthusiastically responding with her mouth agape and index finger pointing firmly to the ceiling (line 1).

Extract 3:
1 Venla: [((*pointing and gazing up with raised eyebrows and open mouth*))
2 Adult: [huomaat sä (.) siel ne lentää
            [*can you see (.) there they fly ((gazing Venla))*
3 Sofia: [((*raising her hand from the surface of the cube and letting go of the key pinch grip*))
4 Tuuli: [((*tilting her head and then gazing up*))
            [figure 3.
5 Adult: [<u>haa:h</u>   [tuolla ne lentää
                          [<u>*wo:w*</u> *((tilting head and gazing up))*   [*look at them go*
6 Sofia: [((*gazing the adult*   [*and then up*))
7 Venla: [((*still pointing up with open mouth and raised eyebrows but at same*
                          time lowering her arm))

Figure 3: Forms of play connection. Venla's noticing (child in the adult's lap), adult's verbal play act, Sofia's play gesticulation (child on the right) and Tuuli's active observation as bystander (child in front) take place in shared time and illustrate different forms of play connection.

If we first analyze how Sofia's actions align with the adult's play signal, we can see that the visually observable connection of activities is established when Sofia gathers around the cube (congruent alignment of body posture and gaze) and begins to emulate the adult's gesticulation (line 3). If we analyze Sofia's response from the perspective of shared understanding, we can see that by beginning her own play act, Sofia is accepting the adult's play signal, giving flight to the imaginary butterflies, and responding to the actions it embodies. In doing so, Sofia is displaying an understanding of the play signal. There are no signs of mechanical imitation in Sofia's hand gestures, instead, she is gesticulating the exact meaning of the make-believe play with her own style and interpretation (also see *an emulated cultural practice*, van Oers, 2012). The physical movement of the gesticulation is soft and gentle and the gaze is coordinated to the flying pattern of the imaginary butterflies with firm *looking to gaze shifts* that aligns on the target (e.g., Kidwell, 2009). Even the key pinch grip that demands great precision and motor coordination from a child under the age of three, is carried out smoothly. Sofia and adult have thus established a play connection.

At line 1 Venla is responding to the adult's play signal by noticing. By producing a pointing gesture and *a noticing gaze shift,* Venla is demonstrating that something has drawn her attention (e.g., Kidwell, 2009). In this way, she is establishing visually observable connection to the joint activity.

However, between lines 2–7, timing, intensity and formulation of her embodied actions indicate that she is not involved in the shared make-believe play with others. Rather, by prolonging the expressions of astonishment (raised eyebrows and open mouth, lines 1–7) she is expressing slight confusion. In addition, by shifting her gaze without aligning it to a target she is displaying more *searching* than *looking to* (Kidwell, 2009). Taken together, Venla's temporal unfolding of actions refer to the emotional stance shift in which her initial astonishment and noticing shifts to slight confusion and searching as she does not have any other interactional resources to connect to the joint imaginary play.

The adult's response at line 2 aligns with Venla's emotional stance shift and reveals that the adult is assessing if Venla is able to imagine the butterflies. By asking '*can you see*' and observing closely Venla's facial expressions, and then by stating *'there they fly',* the adult is simultaneously evaluating Venla's understanding of the play signal as well as directing Venla's attention to the abstract make-believe play objects. However, with this particular question-observation-statement structure, the adult is taking as her point of departure Venla's symbolic competence, without providing any concrete interactional resources for this preverbal child to participate.

In spite of the fact that the adult's first attempt to create play connection with Venla failed, the interactional decisions that she chooses to make right after are very interesting. It appears to us that by beginning her next move at line 5 with '*wow*' surprise token, looking to gaze shift and quick head realignment, the adult is re-establishing the invitational play signal and producing an emotional stance shift from Venla's confusion and searching back to the astonishment and noticing. The way the adult organizes her embodied actions emphasizes and underlines those relevant features that build the observable and recognizable transition into the joint make-believe (c.f. *doing pretend play*, Bateman, 2015). As Venla is not able to see the visual features of the invitation (see figure 3, Venla is sitting in the adult's lap), the adult redesigns the signal by highlighting the audible modalities, i.e., by modifying the initial play signal with *wow*-surprise token and more excited tone of the voice. With these kind of accumulative actions, the adult provides more interactional resources for Venla to establish a play connection. Therefore, the re-establishment of the play signal can also be treated as a practice of repair from the adult's perspective. A self-repair (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977) is evident if we compare the adult's actions in lines 2 and 5. Between these lines the adult is producing a shift from making questions and telling about pretend play (line 2) to doing pretend play (line 5) (c.f. Bateman, 2015). It seems that in this particular sequential place, delicately timed observation of Venla's response and observed emotional stance shift from

excited noticing to confusion together worked as a triggering event for the adult's self-repair and made her display engagement in make-believe through her body, emotional stance taking and vocal modalities.

In summary, taken together the interactional sequences we have described so far in subsections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2, establishing play connection in the group setting sets different overlapping demands for the adult's participation. In the case at hand, the adult's actions included three slightly different interactional practices. First of all, the adult actively produced play signals of her own to facilitate joint play in the group. Secondly, after the initial responses, the adult needed to continue inviting the younger child to the firmer interactional connection by re-establishing and modifying her invitational play signal (practices of repair). Thirdly, the adult needed to build play actions that accumulate established connections and expand the interactions with the older child, who was already firmly connected. By integrating these dimension to the same play act (e.g. extract 3, line 5), the adult was displaying active participation in the process of creating and maintaining a play connection.

Two interlocking, delicately timed practices, a sort of ground abilities, formed the adult's active participation. First, the ability to observe and discriminate nuanced features of children's actions (e.g. Sofia's *looking to* and Venla's *search* gaze shifts). Second, the ability to build actions accumulatively according to what she had observed (e.g. self-repair in order to create play connection). By play signaling and closely observing children's responses the adult discerned whether or not children had established a connection into the ongoing make-believe. This knowledge of shared understanding was co-produced in action through participation and it was crucial for the adult from the perspective of appropriate subsequent moves, possible repairs as well as their design.

3.2.3   Adult is building sustained co-participation in play

In this section, we elaborate on how established play connection develops into more sustained co-participation. The first extract (4) begins with a turn taking sequence of a bystander Tuuli approaching and the adult responding.

While the adult and Sofia are sending their butterflies into the air, Tuuli, who was observing this act from a distance (tilting her head and coordinating her gaze to others' make-believe play acts, see extract 3, line 4) is now approaching the other players and simultaneously attempting to make eye contact with the adult, then verbalizing (extract 4, line 7) and finally reaching out towards the cube-shaped toy.

Extract 4:
8 Tuuli: [sit laitetaan <u>lisää</u> perhosii=
            [*we have to make <u>more</u> butterflies= ((reaching out towards the cube))*
9 Adult: [*((gazing at Tuuli and then the cube))*
10 Adult: =lisää perhosii (.) nii niit on noin monta niit tulee vaan kokoajan lisää ja lisää
            =more butterflies (.) yeah there are so many of them and they just keep coming
11 Adult: *((raising her hand from the surface of the cube with the key pinch grip))*

By approaching (attempting to make eye contact, reaching out towards the cube) Tuuli is initiating a shift from witnessing to active co-participation. At line 8, with her verbal utterance she is displaying a shared understanding of the make-believe play and making play connection publicly observable. The structure of her utterance, '*we have to make more butterflies*', reveals that she is clearly conveying her eagerness to participate. For example, her use of the pronoun *we* indicates that she sees the activity as a joint effort. Moreover, her verbalization and emphasis on word '*more*' indicates that she is contributing to the further progression of the ongoing make-believe play (e.g., *yes, and -offer,* Lobman, 2006; Sawyer, 1997) and in this way is already establishing co-participation (Goodwin, 2007a).

Between lines 9–11 by picking up where Tuuli left, the adult is producing a multimodal including response. Firstly, at line 9 by giving Tuuli a faint smile and by sharing a mutual gaze the adult is indicating responsiveness. Then, by shifting her gaze to the center of the make-believe play (a cube-shaped toy), the adult is inviting Tuuli to join into an ongoing activity. Next, by repeating the words *more butterflies* without a break (line 10) the adult is making her speech act recognizable as a continuation of the display Tuuli initiated. Lastly, at line 11, by simply keeping up the play activity, the adult is summarizing the key actions of the ongoing make-believe, and in this way providing interactional resources for Tuuli to join in as an active co-participant.

All in all, there is no need for the adult to explicate or summarize play verbally as Tuuli has displayed her connection to the ongoing play right from her first approaching move. Of note in this situation is also the fact that typical including utterances e.g. *We were just X* (e.g., Pillet-Shore,

2010) are constituted outside the make-believe play frame. With these kinds of utterances, the focus momentarily shifts from the play connection to the telling about the play (c.f. Bateman, 2015). Therefore, in this particular situation, the way the adult builds her including response (keeping up the embodied play actions at line 11) appears to be an effective way to produce co-participation in make-believe play as it maintains the connection to the established make-believe world. In the next extract (5), we analyze how this sequence of dyadic co-participation between the adult and Tuuli develops further as the interaction unfolds in multi-party context between the adult, Sofia, Tuuli and Venla.

Extract 5:
12 Adult: [((*raising her hand from the surface of the cube with key pinch grip*))
13 Sofia: [((*a key pinch grip on the surface of the cube, then, raising her hand*))
14 Tuuli: [((*a key pinch grip on the surface of the cube*))
15 Venla: [((*gazing the cube and coordinating her gaze with others' gesticulation*))
                [figure 4.
16 Adult: vi::u::   [laitetaan sinne lentämään
                 whee::   [((*letting go of the key pinch grip*))   [*let's make them fly*
17 Tuuli: [((*raising her hand and   [*letting go of the grip*))
18 Venla: [((*coordinating her gaze with others' gesticulation*))
19 Sofia: [((*gazing the adult and mimicking the whee-sound silently*))

Figure 4: A heightened moment of co-participation.

At lines 12–19, we can see a lot of overlapping of congruently aligned play actions between the adult and 3 children. In this situation, the adult's play acts (lines 12, 16) take the lead and children's play acts respond (lines 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19), but the action sequence is not constrained by the typical turn taking structure. Rather, the adult's and children's play acts partially overlap and in this way, create a moment of heightened co-participation.

If we continue to examine in detail how this sequence of heightened co-participation is constituted, we can discern at least four different interactional practices. First, it is by virtue of the participants' gaze and body orientation that we can see they are engaged in a single, joint activity (see figure 4.). Second, there is a distinct co-coordination and synchrony between the participants' timing of the embodied play actions as the adult, Tuuli and Sofia are giving flight to their imaginary butterflies with partially overlapped timing (lines 12–14) and Venla is coordinating her gaze on the others' play gesticulation with firm looking to gaze shifts (line 15). Third, at line 16, the adult is contributing to the make-believe play by adding '*whee::*' sound effect to the gesticulation. At this point, the adult is taking the lead by contributing to her own play actions and in this way modelling for the children how to build sustained co-participation and accumulative actions. Fourth, at line 19, Sofia is picking up the new interactional resource immediately and applying it into her play repertoire by silently emulating the '*whee*' sound and integrating it to the looking to gaze shifts that tracks the flight patterns of the imaginary butterflies.

In the following extract (6), we examine how this moment of heightened co-participation develops further and how the youngest child Venla with limited verbal resources is able to build meaningful make-believe actions in concert with others.

Extract 6:
20 Venla: >A::JA< =*((gazing up, pointing up::*   [*still pointing:::))*
21 Adult: = >niin siellä menee taikaperhonen<
            =>*yeah there goes a magical butterfly*< [*((pointing and gazing up))*
22 Sofia: [*((gazing at the adult and then up))*
23 Tuuli: [*((giving flight to a butterfly))*
                                                      [figure 5.

Figure 5: Noticing as a form of active co-participation in make-believe play.

At line 20, by coordinating her pointing, gaze shift and vocalization, Venla is producing firm noticing which visibly aligns with the joint make-believe play and previous play acts of the others. With sharp, intensive and loud vocalization, Venla is demonstrating an emotional stance of excitement and enthusiasm. What is remarkable in this extract from the perspective of co-participation is the way the adult organizes her response to Venla's turn. This time, the adult does not take as her point of departure Venla's symbolic competence (e.g. by asking '*can you see the butterflies*' see extract 3, line 2). Instead, by reusing what has happened in a larger make-believe play sequence, the adult is giving Venla's turn a meaning in the context of joint action and in this way is building co-participation in the group level.

Some of the adult's interactional practices that make such co-participation visible and relevant will be described in detail. First of all, the adult is timing her response sharply right after Venla's turn without a break. By virtue of such sequential positioning, the adult is indicating high responsiveness and her talk can be heard as a direct continuation of Venla's performance. Secondly, by increasing the intensity of her voice and accelerating her speech rhythm, the adult is aligning to Venla's excited emotional stance and in this way building a shared experience. Thirdly, the adult's verbal utterance, '*yeah there goes a magical butterfly*', expands Venla's preverbal play act by connecting it with the shared make-believe frame. Lastly, by synchronizing her own noticing to Venla's

noticing, the adult is producing a heightened moment of co-participation as the adult's and Venla's pointing and gaze shifting overlap and have a shared point of focus. Also, Sofia's coordination of gaze at line 22 and Tuuli's play act at line 23 align to Venla's prolonged pointing.

To sum up, taken together, the interactional sequences we have described in this section, we can see that sustained co-participation in play between adults and children is not segmented into strict adult-lead or child-lead turn taking sequences. Shared play actions also overlapped many times, creating heightened moments of co-participation. The adult's practices of including newcomers, keeping up the previous play acts and building accumulative new nuances to the previous play acts required delicately timed observations, initiatives and responses with coordinated use of gesture, gaze and talk. The adult's practices were not only about expanding the play narrative with novel events. Rather, by adding emotional nuances (emotional stance shifts, e.g. surprise tokens) and multimodal cues (sound effects; pointing; gesticulation; gaze shifts; realignment of the body) to the repetitions of the same play act the adult was modulating the meaning and shared experiences in more subtle ways and in this way quarantining the sustained co-participation and shared understanding of the joint play in the group level.

4. Conclusion and discussion

In this paper, we have developed analytical terminology for the service of CA approaches to study the systematic features in the co-production of joint play between children and adults. We have also provided fine-grained description of adult's active participation in play. In dialogue with previous empirical interaction studies on social play and our own in-depth case study video-observation data, we outlined a unifying analytical framework of 1) play signaling (trigger event), 2) creating, maintaining and repairing play connection (transition to joint play) and 3) building co-participation. This analytical framework gives methodological insight for studying play in the group care settings. First, by using this unified analytical framework researchers in the field of ECE are able to hold the sequential context of joint play constant in order to make comparison and identification of similarities and differences in children's and adults' joint play interaction across different cases, settings and cultural contexts. Second, the notion of play connection enables researchers and ECE professionals to identify different forms of connection from the multi-party joint play activity. Moreover, the analytical framework might be useful tool for researchers and teachers in the teacher training in order to initiate and calibrate discussions of the equivocal understanding of adults' active participation in play.

Our sequential analysis of joint play between adults and children revealed interactional practices by which adults were able to initiate, sustain and develop play interaction sensitively with very young children. By closely examining these practices, this study contributes to the pedagogical discussion of adults' participation in play. Lending support to previous studies on adults' role in play (e.g., Fleer, 2015; Lobman, 2006; Singer, 2013; van Oers, 2013), this study further suggests that in parallel with the image of a playing child, early childhood education should also recognize the image of a playing adult – playfully available teachers, nursery nurses and assistants who engage in reciprocal play activities, express play signals and skillfully build co-participation with individual child and with the group of children.

With the notion of a playfully available adult, we mean actual interactional practices in which adults do not build play explicitly on the basis of children's learning and developmental goals, but rather take the process of constituting play connection and sustained co-participation in play as a starting point and as a product of the interaction. Playfully available adults are carefully managing their playful involvement with themselves, with individual child and at the same time working for sustained co-participation in the group level. In practice this means that adults are actively producing invitational play signals in order to establish play connection with children, then carefully observing children's responses in order to maintain and repair play connection and finally building on children's and their own play actions and modelling accumulative actions.

In this paper, a detailed analysis of moments of adults' active play signaling produced insight into some challenging and controversial practical aspects of the adult role in children's play. Contrary to views that criticize adult active participation in play (Sutton-Smith, 1990), the findings of this study unveiled participation practices that were not intrusive or over-directive. The analysis revealed that through invitational play signals, adults actively created opportunity spaces for joint play in the group setting and were able to approach children's play activities as active participants, with sensitivity and respect for children's experiences, and perspective. First of all, with these invitational play signals, adults were able to respect voluntariness as well as children's own free will and intrinsic motivation – the basic features of play (e.g., Burghardt, 2011; Caillois, 1958/2001; Huizinga, 1938; Smith, 2010). Secondly, when adults initiated play with pure invitational purpose, they were willing to meet children's responses as they unfold. All in all, these invitational play signals provided interactional resources for adults to build joint, spontaneous play interaction with

several very young children at the same time, and in this way, create moments of social play between peers as well.

This study presented empirical evidence in favor of arguments stating that adults have central role in the process of creating interactional resources for sustained co-participation in play. Moreover, by contributing to Lobman's and Rogoff's suggestions that adult should *lead by following* the children (Rogoff, 1990) and always *build directly with what children are doing and saying* (Lobman, 2006), this study further suggests that especially in a toddler classroom where very young children are still learning to initiate social play and contribute to each other's play actions, adults should also momentarily lead by following their own play ideas and simultaneously observe if children stay responsive and engaged. From pedagogical perspectives, these kind of interactional practices are important opportunities for adults to build sustained co-participation in play as well as model more developed play interactions for the children.

Lending support to Lobman's and Mehus' study findings and pedagogical implications, this study further suggests that besides skills of *improvisation* (Lobman, 2006; Mehus, 2011)*, responsiveness* (Lobman, 2006) and *ingenuity* (Mehus, 2011), adults' ability to build sustained co-participation in play with very young children demands delicately timed observations, initiatives and responses with attuned and coordinated use of gesture, gaze and talk. We understand these fine-grained interactional practices as intersubjective abilities and ground abilities of more general pedagogical notions of e.g. responsiveness, sensitivity and child-centered approach. As these ground abilities have received relatively little attention in the current educational literature, further research is needed. This means careful analysis of the formulation, timing and intensity of the interaction between adults and children in different contexts (e.g. play, educational, care). Interaction studies that build on this *architecture of intersubjectivity* (Heritage, 1984; Sidnell, 2014) could be one way to show more certainly what adults' and children's co-participation might and should look like in early childhood education now and in the future.

Finally, in order to bring the findings of this study to a broader context of ECE, we want to highlight one interesting point from previous studies on play as situated social action. Prior studies have demonstrated that joint play between adults and toddlers have similar sequential features as play activity between different aged child peers and between adults and older children (Bateman, 2015; Lobman, 2003; 2006). These prior findings support the idea that the unified analytical

framework of joint play activity, outlined in this paper, could be applied to different age groups in ECE and also to the study of peer play. However, further research is needed to test these claims.

4.1 Pedagogical implications

Previous studies have shown that adults spend only about 12% of their time in joint make-believe play with children during free playtime in day-care centers (Kontos, 1999). One of the reason for this situation can be ambiguous and partially controversial assumptions concerning the adult role in play. In this section, our aim is to outline the notion of play as adults' professional practice and demonstrate how fine-grained description of what is happening during joint play between adults and children could be one way to increase joint (make-believe) play between adults and children in ECE settings.

When adults learn to observe how play signals and moments of play connection are constituted in the flow of interaction, this knowledge can be transformed into concrete pedagogical practices. Therefore, notions of play signal and play connection can be understood as pedagogical tools in the process of approaching children's play activities. Adult's active play signaling can be understood as a special kind of pedagogical moment (van Manen, 1991), in which an adult recognizes the significance of the situation from the perspective of play and acts for the creation, sustainment and repair of play connection. The deeper knowledge of the interactional structure of joint play guides adults to choose the appropriate practices as well as the right intensity and extent of the involvement. Observed play connection in one corner of the day-care classroom and lack of connection in the other helps adults to coordinate their actions in the group settings and find the place where they are needed the most (c.f., Kalliala, 2011; 2014).

Furthermore, by actively participating in children's play, adults will learn to recognize the needs as well as the competences of very young children. Through participation adults will find flexible ways to respond for the social needs of *both more or less competent* toddlers (Kalliala 2014). By knowing what is happening in play and by being actively part of children's play culture, adults are able to constitute a more balanced training ground for children to learn how to initiate and sustain joint play interaction also in peer group. As Trevarthen (2011) reminds us, infants and toddlers are not conversational unless appropriate receptive invitations and responses are given by the communication partners. Therefore, very young children by themselves cannot be accountable for producing these play invitations, instead it is an adult's role to guarantee that invitations to the inner

circle of joint play are part of the group activity in peer group as well as between adults and children.

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Appendix A. Transcription conventions

Based on Jefferson (2004).

[ ]	Brackets indicate overlapping talk/nonverbal actions
↑↓	Arrows indicate shifts into especially high or low pitch
:	Sound or nonverbal act before colon is stretched
<u>word</u>	Underlining indicates stress/emphasis
WORD	Loud volume
°word°	Quiet voice relative to the surrounding talk
>word<	Talk between the arrows is speeded up
=	No break or gap between or within turns
(( ))	Words in double brackets are descriptions of nonverbal actions
(.)	Micropause

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