Calibrating joint attention and affective stances in young children's peer interactions

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ABSTRACT

The present study addresses young children’s (three-to-five-year-olds’) peer interactions and explores a recurrent interactional genre, i.e. children’s affectively heightened attention-organizing practices used when initiating an exchange in preschool interactions in Sweden. The data consists of 40 h of video recordings collected in two regular preschools in Sweden. By using Multimodal Interaction Analysis (Goodwin, 2000) of video-recordings from everyday activities, we examine the verbal, embodied and material features of children’s interactions. The analysis shows that children exploited common access to objects or physical personal attributes within their socio-material environment and relied on them to secure the others’ attention, while using various methods for making the object ‘noteworthy’. By indexing their affective stance towards the referent, the children created the interpretative framework for the recipient’s response. However, the recipients’ orientation and stance alignment were not to be presumed. The peer responses comprised a continuum of their affective engagement: the children aligned with or downplayed the prior speaker’s stance through the affective quality of their response. In all, detailed interactional analysis reveals the young children’s interactional repertoires and the communicative challenges associated with children’s peer interactions.

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1. Introduction

Initiating social interaction, establishing the recipient’s attention and providing relevant contributions present communicative tasks in which various social actors, children and adults, engage in their day-to-day lives. Attention-getting is considered one of the initial and crucial communicative skills, and the establishment of joint attention between the participants is fundamentally a social “interactional process” (Brown, 2012; Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007: 592). Communicative acts that allow one to solicit the other’s orientation to oneself and to one’s communicative message contribute to achieving a status of a ratified participant in social life, and constitute an important area of young children’s communicative repertoires. Numerous studies have examined these practices in adult-child interactions, demonstrating their characteristics, design and uses in social interaction (see Brown, 2012; De Leon, 2012; Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007). Adults are shown to provide scaffolding in various conversational tasks (Blum-Kulka and Snow, 2002), willingly responding to and supporting children’s interactional attempts, and thereby confirming their participant status. However, while children’s peer interactions present an interactional environment where the participatory rights, availability of conversational scaffolding and...
communicative genres (e.g. playful language and heightened affective stances) can differ from those children adopt when interacting with adults (see Blum-Kulka et al., 2004; Cekaite et al., 2014), thus far little is known about children’s ways of establishing mutual attention and initiating peer interactions.

The present study addresses young children’s (three-to five-year-olds’) peer interactions and explores a recurrent interactional genre, i.e., children’s affectively heightened attention-organizing practices and peers’ responses in preschool interactions in Sweden. By using Multimodal Interaction Analysis (Goodwin, 2000) of video-recorded data from everyday activities, we will outline verbal, embodied and material features of these practices. The study specifically investigates the interactional design of affectively heightened initiating actions that conveyed positive affective stances and allowed children to indicate the “noteworthiness of something” (Fasulo et al., 2021: 58) in their social and material environment. We argue that studying children’s peer interactions can deepen our understanding of young children’s interactional skills and show how children’s peer groups achieve social organization not only through verbal but also through affective and material means (cf. Bateman, 2020; Corsaro, 2018; Evaldsson and Karlsson, 2020; Goodwin, 2006).

1.1. Attention-getting in adult–child interactions

Attention-getting is a basic way of initiating interaction; it constitutes young children’s early communicative repertoires, and attests to their developing skills in intersubjectivity (Brown, 2012; Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007). Research shows that even very young children are able to initiate social interaction by using pointing gestures and minimal verbalizations. Notably, several studies have argued the central role of verbal resources as well as materiality and objects1 in attention-organizing sequences. Toddlers solicit caregivers’ attention towards a particular focus of concern, usually a material object, a person or a feature of the environment (cf. Fasulo et al., 2021; Kesainen and Rauniomaa, 2019; Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007), engaging them in “showing sequences” (Tuncer et al., 2019: 386). However, the public character of objects is not necessarily enough and a frame of relevance of the object as an “attendant” (Tuncer et al., 2019: 388) can be established through systematic preparatory work. Such work can involve both verbal practices and physical rearrangement of objects in the sociomaterial space. Interactional studies on “basic attention-organizing practices” in preverbal toddler-caregiver interactions show that toddlers skillfully engaged in recipient design: they lifted a toy to attract the adult’s attention to create a mutual point of attention and adults’ responsive identification expressed “a particular social-relational feature of the object” (Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007: 593). Toddlers drew and sustained adults’ “attention to an object”, simultaneously conveying (primarily through non-verbal means) “what for” — that is, what another should do in response (Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007: 592). Adults readily responded verbally, identified, confirmed and incorporated the suggested referent in their following turns. For young children, arranging and establishing adults’ attention to some visually available entity in the immediate physical environment was a necessary feature for their collaborative engagement in activities that centre around their involvement with these objects.

Research has also demonstrated that children, in their address to adults, sought not only the adults’ orientation towards the material object, but also the adults’ alignment with their own perspective (e.g., Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007). The interactional purpose of the children’s actions was not simply an attempt to transmit and gain information, but also to express a stance towards the ‘attendant’ object.2 Such social-interactional uses are demonstrated in a recent study that has explored dyadic play interactions between three-to six-year-old children (children with limited lexical and syntactic knowledge) and caregivers (Fasulo et al., 2021). Interaction-initially, the children highlighted objects in the immediate interactional surrounding and communicated noteworthiness of the material referent to the caregiver. They used verbal and nonverbal ‘marking initiations’ that were compact and short but had rich meaning potentials in that they both indexed the referent and expressed a stance towards it. For instance, the children used prosody — e.g., high-pitched voice, combined with the long stretching of the word to convey their “high excitement” (Fasulo et al., 2021: 72). This practice allowed the children to shape social interaction and “share with their parents the noteworthiness of something that has just occurred or will occur in the immediate future” (2021: 58). The study attests to the importance of “co-experiencing as a driver for communication” in adult-child encounters (Fasulo et al., 2021: 61, see also Cekaite and Björk-Willén, 2018; Pursi, 2019). It also highlights that young children, when using marking initiations (that included announcements, assessments and noticings3), repeatedly pursued a response if the response was not forthcoming, indicating thereby that children sought the acknowledgement of their perspective.

Children’s affectively valorized summonses have been shown to serve as significant rhetorical resources that allow one to solicit and achieve the recipient’s (teacher’s) attention and uptake (Cekaite, 2009). In busy multiparty classroom settings, students recipient designed their summons by configuring them as specifically relevant and interesting for the recipients to respond to by targeting teachers’ social institutional responsibilities. The children embellished their verbal announcements (about their progress on tasks) with coordinated displays of ‘troubled’ affect (configured through bodily positionings, prosody

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1 We adopt Oxford Online Dictionary (2022) broad definitions of objects as “material things that can be seen and touched” as well as “[a] person or thing to which a specified action or feeling is directed”.
2 On sociocultural psychological studies illustrating young children’s interactional work of designing adult-relevant attention getting moves that indicate their affect, see Tomasetto (2019), Liszkowski et al. (2004).
3 They have been conceptualized as “non-canonical” social actions that in adult data invoke lesser interactional obligations to respond compared to “canonical” actions, e.g. requests, offers, invitations according to Stivers and Rossano (2010: 5).
and facial expressions) and visible displays of material objects (notebooks etc.). In these ways, children exploited their knowledge of how to succeed in gaining teachers' attention in the multiparty social interactional ecology of the classroom. In all, research shows that heightened affect displays are used by children as a part of recipient design in their address to adults and that affect serves interactional purposes, such as soliciting attention by indexing the noteworthiness of the summons, co-experiencing with the other, and as rhetorical means when aiming to secure the recipients' response. Below we will describe the interactional conceptualization of affect and affective stances in social interaction.

1.2. Stance, affect and alignment

Affect in social interaction has been conceptualized in terms such as stances and stance-taking that contribute to the turn-by-turn meaning-making processes and social relational features of encounters (Du Bois, 2007; Goodwin and Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin et al., 2012; Ochs, 1988). Stances are dialogic acts through which social actors “simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field” (Du Bois, 2007: 163). Affective stances refer to a “mood, attitude, feeling, and disposition, as well as degrees of emotional intensity vis-à-vis some focus of concern” (Ochs, 1996: 410). They are mediated through linguistic and embodied resources that are lodged within sequences of action, forming contextual configurations of stance display (Goodwin et al., 2012). Participants, in their responses to each other's stances, indicate their affective orientation towards the “object of” stance (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, 2012: 439). Flat or neutral affect in response to a heightened affective stance ‘deflates’ the situation and can affect the development of a social encounter (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, 2012). For instance, some studies of child–adult interactions demonstrate that adults can systematically respond with contrasting affective stances towards children’s interactional moves: adults frequently respond with mitigated stances towards children's laughter, downgrading the situation (Cekaite and André, 2019); “stance inversion” characterized parents' responses to children's whining, serving as a way to contest children's claims (Butler and Edwards, 2012: 55).

Participants can also respond with congruent aligning affect, sequentially co-constructing “a dialogic resonance” between their stances (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, 2012: 433). Co-experiencing through congruent affective stances is a fundamental element in various activities with children, e.g., joint play (Corsaro, 2020; Pursi, 2019), telling stories (Cekaite and Björk-Willén, 2018) or socializing children into expressing and responding to ‘suprise’ (Waring, 2021).

1.3. Children's peer group interactions

Young children’s peer interactions are characterized by pervasiveness of play genres and playfulness, compared to adult-child encounters (Blum-Kulka et al., 2004). As young children spend considerable amounts of time in educational institutions, their social interactions are shaped (and their times constrained) by available participant constellations, as well as by interactional ecologies, rights and responsibilities characterizing institutional settings. One of the significant characteristics of educational settings is their predominantly multiparty interactional conditions. Children need to navigate activities while being constantly surrounded by others and they have to orient to the collective social and interactional order (Bateman, 2012, 2020; Corsaro, 2018; Pursi, 2019). Compared to dyadic interactions, such interactional conditions contribute to a rather demanding and challenging context for children to receive an uptake, initiate, or gain access to an ongoing play activity. For instance, when a question is asked in a multiparty participation framework, a response is summoned from several participants and the pressure of responding decreases (Haakana, 2010; Strid and Cekaite, 2021). Moreover, in educational contexts, children, when not engaged in teacher-led activities, are not necessarily part of ongoing social interactions, although they are in a state of physical "copresence" (Goffman, 1963: 22). In such social contexts, participants need to engage and re-engage in talk and play activities with each other on a continuous basis. Numerous studies show that children can experience social obstacles and rejection when trying to get access to ongoing peer play. For this purpose they use a broad range of verbal and non-verbal access strategies (Björk-Willén, 2007; Corsaro, 1979, 2018; Evaldsson and Karlsson, 2020; Houen and Danby, 2021).

However, only a few studies have examined children’s ways of initiating social interaction within the peer group. They indicate that achieving peers’ response constitutes a considerable challenge for young children (Cathcart-Strong, 1984/1986, 1986; Cekaite and Evaldsson, 2017). For instance, Cathcart-Strong (1984/1986) showed that in their interactions with peers, children usually had to make many attempts before successfully initiating and sustaining interactional encounters (e.g. play). They needed to be persistent, and make their talk interesting for the other to respond. Children's successful attempts were characterized as featuring various ways of ‘being entertaining and interesting’. Children demanded attention with imperatives (“Lookit!”, “Hey!”), used shouting, called peers with questions, or labelled objects that will engage interest. Another example is found in Bateman and Church’s (2017) study focusing on how objects are used as resources to initiate interaction with other peers and establish play groups. These findings suggest that, together with material resources, heightened affect and entertaining potentials of children’s interactional moves were of crucial importance in securing peers’ responses. Below we examine this relatively uncharted area, i.e. young children’s attention-organizing practices in their peer group preschool interactions. We will specifically focus on children’s affectively valorized initiating moves that index speakers’ stance. The study will detail the affective continuum of peers’ responsive stances and discuss children’s interactional practices with regard to stance alignment in the peer group.
2. Method

The data consists of 40 h of video recordings collected in two regular preschools in Sweden. The data was recorded over a period of 18 months by members of the project who used a hand-held camera. Children’s everyday activities (circle time, free play, educational activities, mealtimes and transitions between the activities and preschool spaces) were recorded. A multimodal interactional approach was deployed to examine the organization of situated activities (Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018) with an adapted multimodal transcription system according to Mondada (2018). Data was logged and children’s recurrent interactional practices and the multimodal features of these were identified. The chosen instances were narrowed down to children’s initial address practices (i.e., initiating acts) towards their peers in situations where they were not already engaged. Instances where children displayed a heightened affective stance, that selected and highlighted the object for peers, were chosen for further analysis. These interactional moves were shaped as summons (Swe. ‘kolla’, Eng. ‘look’) or other types of turns that performed a set of related actions — assessments, announcements, noticings — about the speaker or some feature of the environment (Sacks, 1992: 87—97). Children communicated noteworthiness of the referent and presented a visually available entity (e.g. a material or bodily object) for peers’ interpretation. The verbal and nonverbal features of peer responses, their orientation and affective stances taken were further analysed. This article presents a selection of four sequences that cover key variations of the phenomenon (children’s initiating moves and peer responses).

3. Findings

The children made numerous efforts to initiate an exchange by attracting peers’ attention, usually pointing out an object (as interactional referent) and indicating its noteworthiness by expressing a heightened affective stance towards it. Such sequence-initiating actions made salient a referent and simultaneously conveyed “affect about it” (Fasulo et al., 2021: 61). The children indexed a positive, heightened stance, configured through coordination of bodily resources, such as prosody, loudness, facial expressions that could combine smiles, open mouth, and movements (jumping, running, walking quickly). The children drew attention to something that was presented as noteworthy because of specific characteristics of objects, or conduct, thus making the object a relevant ‘attendable’. In doing so, their initiating acts created a framework for a response that made relevant their peers’ affective alignment. However, achieving a response as such, and especially a response that indicated a congruent aligning affective stance, was an intricate task, and peers’ attention was not guaranteed. The stance taken by the recipients in their response turns demonstrated their assessment of the object and its noteworthiness, and it confirmed or rejected the speaker’s stance. Peer responses involved a continuum of actions: the recipients could i) ignore the summons, ii) respond with a neutral stance, simply acknowledging the speaker or the object through gaze, iii) respond with a different, incongruent, stance that contradicted the peer’s claim of noteworthiness, or iv) align with the prior speaker by displaying a congruent affective stance (e.g., Cekaite and Andren, 2019; Pursi and Lipponen, 2020). Below we discuss the multimodal interactional organization of children’s initiating turns and outline the various interactional trajectories that emerged through peer responses.

3.1. Soliciting recipients’ attention to a noteworthy object

The children’s multimodal initiating turns usually invoked the noteworthiness of the verbal or material referent. They invited the recipients’ gaze and made relevant their alignment. For instance, the summons and gestures directed the recipient to look at a visual referent. Together with the concurrent stance that indicated the speaker’s heightened affect, i.e. that something remarkable or noteworthy is happening, the children made it relevant to notice the referent. Notably, while initiating turns called attention and invited a stance-aligning uptake, the turns did not necessarily garnered a response, and the lack of uptake constrained the further development of the topic. Such a case is discussed in Excerpt 1, where two boys (four-year-olds) stand on a slide spending time talking and looking around. In line 1, Navid and Milan stand facing the slide, talking (line 1). They then turn from the slide and face the playground. Navid then notices something nearby and summons Milan’s attention to it (line 2).

Excerpt 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>NAVID</th>
<th>(</th>
<th>}</th>
<th>+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>navid</td>
<td>stands facing slide</td>
<td>turns, gazes to his right</td>
<td>--&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>milan</td>
<td>stands facing slide</td>
<td>+turns, gazes to his right, grabs pole</td>
<td>--&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NAVID</td>
<td><em>CYCLE</em></td>
<td>TITT:A? (.) DÅR! :han i blå jacka!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>look there! him in blue jacket!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4 The present study is part of a larger project on children’s emotional and moral socialization. Financial support from The Swedish Research Council, project ‘Communicating emotions, embodying morality’ (PI A. Cekaite, project number 742-2013-7626 742-2013-7626).

5 The study conducted was done in accordance to Swedish Research Council’s ethical principles and was approved by Regional Ethical Board. Participants’ names and images are anonymized.
Navid's summons are loud and prosodically embellished to index a heightened affective stance (line 2). He requests Milan's visual orientation with a quick touch, a pointing gesture and a verbal noticing ‘han i blå jacka’ ‘him in blue jacket’ (line 2). With an environmentally coupled gesture (Goodwin, 2000) he points at a man in blue work clothes outside the preschool fence. The child's talk when he points at the object elaborates his embodied action (Fig. 1): Navid verbally identifies the referent and simultaneously prosodically indexes his heightened affective stance of excitement: he uses quick pace, loud volume, heightened pitch, and repeated emphasis (see Fasulo et al., 2021; Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007 on children's stances of excitement) combining these features with embodied actions: a quick touch and a gesture with fully extended arm. The focal referent point is thereby marked as noteworthy and remarkable, i.e. something that is “newly discovered” (Kidwell, 2009: 153).

The recipient's alignment in this situation can be signalled by acknowledging Navid's noticing (his discovery) about something in their environment. However, Milan does not respond, turning to face the pole and putting his legs and arms around it. His bodily actions show that he is preparing to climb down the pole; this is a new type of play action during this situation. Then, Navid in a sad voice articulates his disappointment with the lack of his peer's attention, thus attesting to the noteworthiness of his call (‘nu såg du inte honom’ ‘you didn’t see him’, line 3). In this situation, there is no confirmation of understanding that there is something that the recipient finds noteworthy and the further development of the topic is constrained.

3.2. Neutral and disaligning, contradictory responses

Peers did not simply adhere to the interactional expectations for uptake and congruent assessment that were brought about by the speaker's heightened stance. The initiating turns that indexed the noteworthiness of the object referent were not sufficient to achieve the peer's affective alignment (i.e., “dialogic resonance”, Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, 2012). The initial turns did not always comprise conventional attention-getting resources such as summonses or gestures, instead, they could involve verbal and embodied noticings or announcements (about some object in the environment or about the speaker, Sacks, 1992 II: 87–97). In the peer responses, the noteworthiness of the object was publicly inspected and examined. Gaze direction was therefore an especially significant resource for mutual monitoring of an emergent participation framework (Goffman, 1981; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992). Gaze orientation towards the visual referent served as a minimal confirmation of the recipient’s uptake; however, even when peers responded by directing their gaze towards the visually available material point of reference, their responses, upon their inspection of the referent, could in various ways reject the prior speaker's claim of noteworthiness. Such responses were shaped as neutral or divergent affective stances that 'flattened' the affect of the situation.

In Excerpt 2, the children are gathered in a room, waiting for the teacher, when Joel (boy, five years old) calls out loudly ‘apples in the trees’ while directing his gaze and bodily orientation towards windows that face the outside area with an apple tree garden (line 1).

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6 According to the recordings made during children's activities outside, there was a garden in the outer area of the preschool. The current situation is video-recorded in spring.
Excerpt 2

1. **JOEL**
   
   🍎APPLE in the trees 🍎APPLE in the trees
   
   lucas + gazes at Joel + gazes at window -->
   lea + gazes at Joel + gazes at window -->
   fig #fig.2.1

   ![Figure 2.1](image)

2. **JOEL**
   
   🍎APPLE in the trees 🍎APPLE in the trees
   
   lucas --> +
   lea --> %
   signe @ gazes at Joel and then at window -->
   frida @ gazes at Joel -->
   fig #fig.2.2

   ![Figure 2.2](image)

3. **JOEL**
   
   @APPLE in the trees
   
   signe -> @
   lucas + silently mimicking Joel’s chant+
   frida --> @ gazes at window -->
   fig #fig.2.3 #fig.2.4

4. **FRIDA**
   
   det är inte äpplen i träden
   there are no apples in the trees

5. **SIGNE**
   
   heh, det är bara blommor heh.
   heh, there are only flowers heh.
Joel’s chanting is affectively charged: he moves (jumps slightly) up and down, hitting the couch as he looks at the window, loudly repeating ‘apple(s) in the trees’ (line 1, Fig. 2.1).\(^7\) Joel’s bodily and gaze orientation towards the window, where visual referents are located provide cues as to the potential location of the object. His affectively heightened, noteworthy multimodal act is temporally extended and is therefore available for multiple participants to attend and respond to. In that Joel’s actions are not addressed at any particular peer, and they do not comprise a summons, they can be viewed as noticings about a feature of the environment that do not solicit a specific peer to respond. The multiple peers’ responses throughout the episode show that they consider Joel’s actions as noteworthy: the boy is successful in achieving peers’ visual orientation traceable through the peers’ gaze trajectories. Several children – Lucas, Lea, Signe, and Frida – respond by first looking at Joel, whose facial expression and movements are publicly visible; his bodily actions index a visually observable heightened affective stance (lines 2, 3, Figs. 2.1–2.3). After first looking at Joel and potentially noticing his facial expression, bodily movements, and his gaze and bodily orientation, the peers direct their gazes at the focal point of his gaze and gestures. Lucas, Lea, Signe, and Frida first observe Joel’s embodied stance, and then follow his gaze direction, shifting their gazes towards the window (Figs. 2.2–2.5). Their gaze direction indicates that they attentively examine what Joel with his affectively charged action is referring to.

However, the peers do not adopt a congruent affective stance (Figs. 2.1–2.4). Rather, in this multiparty situation, a variety of stances is taken. For instance, Joel’s chanting is treated as a possibility to somewhat convergent action by Lucas who starts mimicking the chant, while looking towards the window (Fig. 2.4). However, his uptake is silent, and it is not visible or hearable for the co-present peers. Lucas tempers the stance taken by Joel by enunciating the words with no volume and lower intensity (Fig. 2.4). Lea initially adopts a neutral stance, as she simply orients her gaze towards the proposed focal referent (Fig. 2.3). Such a response does not ignore or explicitly reject the speaker’s act, but it does not acknowledge or align with the affective stance taken by the child. Frida and Signe, after looking in the direction of the window and observing outdoors then dismiss Joel’s noticing, stating that ‘det är inte äpplen i träderna’ ‘there are no apples in the trees’ (line 4) and ‘det är bara blommor’ ‘there are only flowers’ (line 5). Their matter-of-fact, outright unmitigated disagreement moves indicate “stance inversion” (Butler and Edwards, 2012: 55) and deflate the situation. The sequence ends when Joel stops chanting (line 3).

To sum up, the child uses multiple resources when he addresses the peer group with affectively heightened turns that describe apples and trees as something noteworthy and attendable that has drawn his attention. Despite some ambiguity concerning the form and topic of his repetitive, loud and temporally extended noticing (i.e., it does not contain a summons), Joel is able to establish the peers’ orientation and their engagement in scrutiny of the noteworthy object across several turns. However, the noteworthiness is contested and rejected in that Joel’s affective stance does not receive his peers’ congruent affective alignment. The lack of a congruent stance uptake suggests that there are some conditions for ‘noteworthiness’ that may apply in order to be able to secure the peers’ stance alignment.

3.3. Emergent alignment through congruent affective stances in multiparty participation frameworks

When the children elicited their peers’ attention and appreciation of the object, they could receive evaluative responses that aligned with their excited affective stance. A positive assessment involved “resonance” between the stances taken by successive speakers (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, 2012: 433). Peers’ congruent stance displays indexed heightened affect towards the visual referent and aligning stance responses co-constructed a common course of action within various, including multiparty participation frameworks.

Just prior to Excerpt 3 a group arts activity is about to finish, and children are washing their hands in the bathroom. Signe (a five-year-old girl) has painted her entire palms with water colour. The teacher has asked her to wash her hands, and when she walks to the bathroom to wash her hands, she meets Sara (four years old) in the doorway. Signe attracts Sara’s attention to her hands: she positions them in the centre of Sara’s visual attention, close to her face (Fig. 3.1).

Excerpt 3

\[\text{signe} \quad \text{+++ walking, shows hands to Sara} \quad \text{sara} \quad \text{walks towards mirror} \quad \text{sturns around} \quad \text{fig} \quad \text{fig.3.1} \quad \text{fig.3.2}\]
signe shows her hands in the mirror#-->
fig #fig.3.3

1 SARA ięAh ięAh. ėğOhj. hh, hęähęähęähęäh
sara #looks at Signe’s hands then opens her mouth -->

2 #(0.5)+
signe +turns to Linnea, smiles and shows her hands -->>

3 (0.5)§
sara -->$turns to Linnea with open mouth, smiling -->
fig #fig.3.4
Signe attracts the recipient’s attention by assembling a visual display: with a big gesture she raises her palms and positions them in front of Sara’s face. She attracts the recipient’s attention towards an incongruent feature her palms are covered in paint and indicates this visual display as something noteworthy (Figs. 3.1–3.2). The initial act is configured by simply using nonverbal means. Sara responds to this action as attendable: she turns around and follows Signe to the bathroom, where Signe displays her hands in front of the mirror (Fig. 3.2). Although Signe does not use talk, her multimodal actions highlight and extend the noteworthiness of the referent: she attracts attention to the visually available object (here, her body part) as a relevant attendable by temporally sustaining her gesture in front of the mirror (Fig. 3.3).

When Sara positions herself close to Signe (both girls stand in front of the mirror), she has good visual access to Signe’s showing the image of her hands in the mirror, and to Signe’s positive affective stance indicated by her smile. Signe then aligns with a heightened affective stance (line 1, Fig. 3.3). By configuring a “body gloss” (Goffman, 1972: 9–11) of excitement (Fasulo et al., 2021: 72; Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007: 601) – with her eyes and mouth wide open, gaze directed at the object in the mirror, concurrent with emotive interjection, interlaced with inbreaths and shifts in pitch “Ah hā, hāhāhāhā” – the child visibly displays her stance: Sara treats Signe’s coloured hands as something remarkable and worthy to explore in more detail for some time (Figs. 3.3–3.4).

The temporally sustained visual display creates conditions for the girls’ stances to be noticed, observed and responded to by others. Signe extends the participation framework to include a new participant, Linnea, who has been standing nearby (Fig. 3.4). Signe turns to Linnea, while she continues her visual display (coordinating it with a smiling facial expression that makes her affective stance visible), and she solicits the new recipient’s attention. Notably, stance alignment is emergent and distributed across multiple participants: when the visual referent (Signe’s hands) has changed spatial position, Sara follows and changes her bodily orientation and turns towards Linnea as well. Sara’s heightened stance (visible in her facial expression) indexes the object as noteworthy and publicly observable to both co-present peers (Figs. 3.3–3.4). Sara’s and Signe’s congruent affective stances and embodied orientation invite Linnea to join into a triadic interaction and Linnea responds with laughter (line 5). The three girls sustain the ‘object-related’ conversation for some time, elaborating with queries about the stance object (‘hur gjorde du det där?’ ‘how did you do that?’), line 6). The peers’ stances contribute to confirming the on the “evaluative punctuation” of the object referent (Fasulo et al., 2021: 65).

As demonstrated, the participants display their congruent stances toward the object that is made ‘attendable’ and publicly available for collaborative scrutiny. The embodied affective stances (Goodwin et al., 2012) emerge and are sustained within the multiparty participation framework through the participants’ responsive actions across several turns, allowing the children to construct an extended common course of action.

3.4. Congruent affective stances in collaborative exploration of the referent

The children’s interactional moves and congruent aligning stances provided resources and conditions for identifying, negotiating and confirming noticeable features of the object between multiple participants. These characteristics were not given, although the object that the children drew attention to was publicly visible. The children jointly oriented to and exploited their material environment in ways that highlighted the object as a noteworthy attendable and a meaningful element within the social situation. In doing so, they developed social interaction around and through the objects. Notably, the children’s contributions went beyond the ostensive action of object labelling. Rather, through the sequential development of aligning affective stances towards the referent, they indicated “dialogic resonance” (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, 2012: 445) between the participants as they participated in and contributed to a collaborative exploration of the object.
In Excerpt 4, during circle time (recorded around Christmas celebration), children listen to the teacher and eat Christmas sweets. Joel (five years old) summons the others’ attention: he shows his candy cane and a foam sweet construction: he has licked both sweets and put them together. However, he does not label this visually available referent (line 1, Fig. 4.1). The children who participate actively in this situation are Elsa (girl, four years old), Theo (boy, five years old) and Simon (boy, five years old).

Excerpt 4

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8 Joel’s candy construction is made by putting together a candy cane and foam candy; it therefore looks different from the original candy cane. This new invention creates news value for the children. We call this novel construction a ‘candy stick’ (Ex. 4).
Joel loudly shouts “OOO” and summons the others’ attention, using a gesture to position the ‘attendable’ object in the visual field of the group (line 1, Fig. 4.1). His assessment attracts the co-present others’ attention to the object (a construction of a candy cane and a foam candy which he has licked and put together). In response, several children immediately turn to look at Joel. The teacher responds with laughter and a smily voice. Summoning the others to look (‘look’, line 2), she confirms Joel’s action as noteworthy and she receives an aligning response when an unidentified child laughs (line 3). In this short episode, after some visual scrutiny, the recipients’ laughter, together with their visual orientation, indicate their convergent alignment with Joel’s stance: multiple participants show their congruent assessment and collaboratively confirm that the object is funny and entertaining.

The object does not yet have a verbal label, and some moments later conversation about it continues. Several children — Elsa, Theo, Joel and Simon — collaborate in co-inventing, elaborating and affirming the characteristics of the noteworthy object. Through their actions the peers show convergent alignment and affiliation deeming the presented object as remarkable and worthy extended attention (Goodwin, 1986). Elsa searches for a label (line 6) and suggests “.hh £ fTOMTEMASKIN£”9 ‘Santa Claus machine’. Notably, the ostensive labelling is not enough as such. Rather the label is overlaid with an embodied affective stance: Elsa smiles, lightly jumps up and down in her place, talks in a high pitch, when she shows her candy cane to Joel (using a similar, but slightly different object from that of Joel’s) (Fig. 4.3). Theo aligns with the peers: he shows his interest and tries to touch Joel’s candy stick, but his attempt is rejected as Joel refers to the ownership of the object. Some moments later, Theo confirms Elsa’s labelling. Even Joel aligns with his peers, stating that it is he who had manufactured the ‘Santa Claus’ machine’, thereby orienting to his individual epistemic rights to comment on his object (Sidnell, 2011). Simultaneously as he once again makes his candy stick the focal attendable object (lines 8–9). Simon’s laughter aligns with Joel’s actions as funny (line 10).

As demonstrated, an object is publicly presented as a noteworthy candidate for positive affective assessment (Goodwin, 1986) that is dependent on collaborative visual scrutiny (see similar practices in Ex. 1–3). The underspecification (initially the object is not labelled verbally or otherwise characterized) provides affordances for collaborative attempts to verbal descriptions that emerge into sustained playful interaction between peers. Within the multiparty participation framework, the children align with each others’ stances across multiple turns.

4. Concluding discussion

The present study has examined three-to five-year-old children’s interactions in a Swedish preschool with a focus on a recurrent conversational genre used by the children in their peer interactions. More specifically, we have explored how young

9 ‘Tomtemaskinen’ (Eng. Santa Claus machine) is a famous Swedish book about Christmas. The protagonist constructs a Santa Claus ‘machine’ - a pop-up box that contains a Santa Claus figure.
children designed initial turns in social interaction, marking them with displays of heightened emotional stance while they tried to attract peers' attention to some noteworthy feature of the socio-material environment.

The study shows that children in a peer group, similar to their interactions with adults documented in a broad range of settings (Fasulo et al., 2021; Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007), on a recurrent basis engaged in social acts that aimed to establish the recipients’ attention towards a specific feature of the situation or environment by using a number of multimodal features (e.g. environmentally coupled gestures, Goodwin, 2000), combining them with verbal utterances, e.g. ‘look’ summons, rudimentary labelling of the material referent, noticings or announcements (with or without a verbal summons). The children exploited common access to objects or physical personal attributes within their socio-material environment and relied on them to secure the others' attention, while using various methods for making the object “attendable” (Tuncer et al., 2019: 338) i.e., as something noteworthy. The speaker’s heightened affective, importantly — embodied — stances towards the referent were significant in the presentation of the material object proper as something worthy of public inspection. The children’s heightened affective stances involved configurations of multiple embodied features: prosody, high-pitched voice, voice quality, loudness, chanting, facial expressions (open mouth, laughter, smiling, wide open eyes, see Ex. 3, Fig. 3.3).

The present study lends support to the conceptualization of affective stances as involving entire bodies that are located in and re-calibrated in dynamically evolving participation frameworks as “contextual configurations of stance display[s]” (Goodwin et al., 2012: 25). The children’s movements — walking quickly, jumping, running, pointing quickly and with fully extended arms — contributed to the public display of heightened affect (at times “conveying high excitement”, Fasulo et al., 2021: 72). Moreover, the participants’ body postures and bodily positionings in the socio-material space, both vis-à-vis the object (visual referent) and the peers, served as meaningful features of embodied stance configurations. The children with their body postures invoked relevant features of the environment by positioning themselves and moving in specific manner in the socio-material space. Even in cases where they did not summon specific recipients or indicated the referent verbally, through their gazes and bodily positionings (together with embodied displays of affect), they were able to draw the peers’ orientation (Ex. 2; 3). By indexing their stance towards the referent, the children created the interpretative framework for response and solicited the recipients’ stance alignment about the selected feature of the surrounding world.

Notably, exhibiting a heightened affective stance made relevant a reciprocal action from the peer addressees. However, the peer responses comprised a continuum of their affective engagement: the children aligned with or downplayed the prior speaker’s stance through the affective quality of their response (cf. Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, 2012; Goodwin et al., 2012). By responding with congruent embodied stances, the children aligned with the previous speaker and indicated their engagement in the speaker’s communicative project (see Excerpts 3, 4). However, the recipient’s congruent stance was not to be presumed and the success in establishing the recipient’s attention did not necessarily imply that the peers affiliated in their emotional stances. Peers frequently deflated the situation when they responded with a neutral or divergent affective stance. By performing stance inversion they either contested the proposed noteworthiness of the referent, thus constraining the development of the conversational topic, or they simply did not acknowledge the speaker’s action.

The children in their multiparty interactions with peers (which is a frequent interactional condition for young children who spend considerable time in educational settings) had to handle basic but important communicative challenges, namely, succeeding in establishing the recipients’ orientation and stance alignment. In contrast to accommodating adults in dyadic interactions, the recipients’ willing responsivity could not be presumed.

We propose that the interactional ecology of the multiparty educational setting contributed to the occurrence and shape of these practices. Children’s calls often emerged in multiparty settings, in transitions between activities when children’s participation was not focussed on a single encounter (e.g., Excerpts 2, 3, 4). Such situations provided affordances to initiate social encounters, but they also added to the challenges the children experienced in securing the peer group response. The children resorted to numerous, persistent and affectively valorized attempts to secure the recipients’ orientation. By attracting attention towards something that they invoked as noteworthy, they oriented to and collaboratively constructed discursive genres of peer culture that involved practices and expectations of being ‘interesting and entertaining’ (cf. Cathcart, 1986).

As demonstrated, Multimodal Interaction Analysis (Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018; Mondada, 2018) allowed us to show and detail how presenting and making something noteworthy is not an individual, but a collaborative achievement that provides affordances for children to establish sustained social interaction and establish a stance resonance between multiple participants. Notably, children’s pointing or other nonverbal ways of identifying the referent did not necessarily result in recipient’s labelling and labelling expansions (that are documented in adult-child interactions). Rather, further development of the encounter was related to sharing the noteworthiness and indicating affective affiliation in relation to something that the children had observed or done (Excerpts 3, 4). In these ways, the children established and supported their mutual understanding of what can be considered interesting for the members of the local peer group. Their negotiation and identification of the noteworthy object constituted a focal point for the peer group’s shared and sustained, playfully keyed interactions (Excerpts 3; 4). It is through the peers’ stance uptake that social relations are constituted and negotiated, and one’s status as participant established or ignored. In these ways success in calibrating the peers’ attention and achieving joint actions is instrumental in the situated negotiations of local social organization and the micropolitics of the peer group: ignoring or responding to someone’s attempts to recruit participation is part and parcel of the interactional practices of exclusion and inclusion (Goodwin, 2006; Svahn and Evaldsson, 2011). In all, detailed interactional analysis of children’s mundane peer group encounters enable one to reveal the young children’s interactional skills as well as the complexities and challenges associated with their participation in interactions with peers.
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Declaration of competing interest

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References


41


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