

Initiating interactions in the toddler peer group

Embodied conversation starters

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Two-year old children often express their understanding and intentions through embodied interactions as they co-produce social relationships. This article presents findings from an ethnomethodological study using conversation analysis to explore turn-taking in toddlers' interactions in a preschool in Iceland. Here, we focus on how toddlers initiate interaction through touch and gaze. These findings demonstrate that toddlers are adept at reading social cues from their peers and are competent at turn-taking and repair in embodied interactions resulting in significant exchanges in the peer group. As such, this article contributes to a growing body of research that demonstrates toddler's competencies in organizing their own social worlds through embodied strategies that co-construct peer relationships in competent ways.

Keywords: early childhood education and care, toddlers, conversation analysis, embodied interactions, peer interactions

Introduction

The peer group and social relationships within the peer group are found to be important to toddlers (e.g. Greve, 2008; Løkken, 2000; Pálmadóttir, 2017). In this study, we add to the growing literature by exploring how toddlers (18–36 months old) use the embodied strategies of gaze and touch to initiate interactions with their peers within an early childhood education and care (ECEC) setting in Iceland. When considering what ‘quality’ care for toddlers in ECEC might look like, it is important to consider research exploring toddler social relationships, as all pedagogy is co-constructed in social ways. Previous research indicates that young children are competent social actors who are keenly attuned to engage in peer interactions, and are able to read social cues and act accordingly (Alcock, 2013; Bateman & Church, 2017; Greve, 2008; Kidwell, 2009; Løkken, 2000; Pálmadóttir, 2017). This study adds to this growing body of knowledge of toddler social experiences within ECEC and aims to contribute to the development of a deeper understanding of how toddlers competently co-construct their peer groups in multimodal ways, revealing their social organization skills from a very young age.

Ethnomethodological perspectives on toddler interactions

This study sits within the theoretical framework of ethnomethodology (EM) using the approach of conversation analysis (CA) to collect, transcribe and analyse the video data. The main focus of EM is to examine the mundane, the everyday happenings that we might otherwise ignore (Garfinkel, 1967). Within the context of early childhood, multimodal EMCA research can be useful when examining social interactions in the peer group of very young children. Toddlers use different embodied strategies to interact with their peers and these interactions may not be noticed easily by adults. Interactions between older children are often more noticeable as they can express their wants and needs verbally, so it is easier for adults to overlook, ignore or misunderstand toddlers’ attempts at interacting with their peers in multimodal ways. It is important for teachers in ECEC to be aware of and understand the way toddlers interact to be able to assist and provide them with opportunities for meaningful interactions. Using multimodal EMCA which explores the subtleties of gaze, touch, gestures and prosody

(Ekström & Cekaite, 2020; Filipi, 2009; Kidwell, 2005; Mondada, 2016) provides unique insights into the ways in which these embodied interactions might be visible.

Prior CA work demonstrates that turn-taking is fundamental for conversation and interactions and that adjacency pairs are important to turn-taking (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Adjacency pairs form a framework for expectations within talk-in-interactions, that need to be learned and practiced by emerging speakers. This is of particular importance to this study where what is being studied is how toddlers organize their turn-taking and ‘open up’ conversations with their peers through embodied strategies. This study is therefore exploring how adjacency pairs can be seen within the strategies toddlers use in their embodied interactions.

When misunderstanding occurs within interactions one can often see ‘conversational repair’, in which a ‘trouble source’ is fixed by the participants (ten Have, 1999). Conversational repair is important to intersubjectivity, in that repair is not necessarily about saying the right thing within the context of the interaction, but more that speakers are establishing a shared understanding and meaning of the interaction (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). This is significant here as intersubjectivity is often embodied and occurs through haptic and corporal interactions as children work to connect with their peers (Cekaite, 2015; Pálmadóttir, 2017).

Embodied interactions in the toddler peer group

Toddler aged children try hard to have meaningful interactions with their peers, utilizing varied types of strategies to initiate these interactions, such as vocalization and presenting their peers with play materials, using different embodied strategies to show clear preference to one peer over another (Andrén, 2017; Engdahl, 2011, 2012; Howes, 1983; Katila, 2018). Those embodied interaction initiating strategies are the focus of this study, in particular the use of gaze, smile and touch. Toddlers also co-construct shared meaning and action through these strategies within their participation framework (Goffman, 1981). Studying toddler participation in an interaction can highlight the reflexive relationship of embodied interactions, where participation shapes the interaction and the interaction, in turn, shapes the participation (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004).

Over the last several decades, research on conversations and social interactions have shown that gaze plays an important part in creating joint

engagement in an interaction (Goffman, 1963; Kidwell, 2005). Furthermore, research with toddler age children has shown that toddlers use gaze and facial expressions to gain each other's attention to create joint attention, which is crucial for successful interactions with peers, such as playing (Pálmadóttir, 2017). When wanting to play together, toddlers seek each other's eyes, wanting to make contact, often accompanied with a smile (Engdahl, 2011). These embodied interactions can be quite complex and intricate, sort of 'silent negotiations' leading to either preferred or dis-preferred responses.

Mardi Kidwell's (2005, p. 443) research on toddlers and their caregivers' gazes found that '[b]eing looked at is a complex communicative matter', where toddlers responded differently to different types of 'looks' from adults. Kidwell's results make evident the importance gaze has for social interactions within early childhood settings and how the children can regulate and organize their behaviour in line with the type of look they have received (Kidwell, 2005).

Although this current study is focusing on child–child interactions, and not child–adult, the fact that young children are able to read the meaning of different types of gazes is of relevance when examining peer group interactions to see if making eye-contact is significant for meaningful interactions between child–child interaction too. Further work by Kidwell (2009) demonstrates how toddlers also monitor the gaze of their peers to respond to the situation around them and the likelihood of caregivers intervening in social interactions. Here she identifies 'toddler harassments', which involve such actions as hitting, taking away a toy or biting. Kidwell (2009, p. 150) has identified different types of looks made by children, '*looking to, noticing, and searching*', where understanding the different types of gaze shifts is something children learn by interacting with their peers and others. These gaze shifts become a 'notification device' (ibid., p. 158) which allows children to recognize events that may have certain consequences and gives them an opportunity to react appropriately. Understanding the significance of the duration of a gaze is also important in social interactions as it indicates whether something is holding the gazer's attention, or not. These are highly complicated social acts which require the child to 'read' the behaviours of themselves and others and to understand the consequences those behaviours can have.

Toddler use of gaze is often accompanied with a smile. Research on the role of the smile in interactions, shows that 'turn-opening' smiles (i.e.

smiles that happen at the beginning of an interaction) are an important factor in moving an interaction from a neutral stance into an affective stance (Kaukomaa et al., 2013). This shared emotional stance is crucial for building joint attention and a shared understanding of what an interaction means and when this shared understanding is missing, an interaction can fade away or even lead to a misunderstanding and/or conflict (Bateman, 2020).

Touch is also important in building relationships, where it is an ‘affective encounter’, and can be used to build a shared ‘we’ (Cekaite, 2016). There is a growing body of research on the part touch plays in social interaction and communications between peers. In their research on touch in child–child interactions with a group of 1–5-year-old children, Anna Ekström and Asta Cekaite (2020) found that touch has many uses for children. Apart from being used for emotional interactions to show affection and to comfort, it can also be used to control or to guide, to get attention and to experience a ‘shared attention’. When looking at the role touch plays in social interactions, it is important to look at it through a multimodal lens and as a collective action rather than an individualistic one (Cekaite & Mondada, 2021). There is always a *toucher* and a *touched* and there needs to be a certain receptivity and reciprocity between the two for the touch episode to be successful.

The study

The data presented and analysed here is a single case-study which took place in a toddler unit in an ECEC setting in Iceland over a period of 9 months and is taken from the lead authors’ doctoral study. The doctoral study was initiated to respond to the Icelandic context where the ECEC sector in Iceland has grown extensively in the last two decades, especially for children under the age of two. In 2003, 24% of 1–2-year-old children in Iceland attended ECEC while in 2020, just over 50% attended (Statistics Iceland, 2021). Currently, the average starting age for children in ECEC is 18–24 months. In the last couple of years, there has been a policy change on the municipality level and most municipalities are in the progress of offering places in ECEC settings to children from 12 months of age. Given this increase in numbers on a national level, and the change in municipality policy for this age group, quality care and education for the youngest children is an important current topic in Iceland. The doctoral study aims

to explore this ECEC context for toddlers and the opportunities they have for negotiating social interactional practices in this space.

In the toddler unit where the research took place, there were 16–19 toddlers attending; the study focuses on four case-study toddlers. The case studies were Sandra (1;10–2;7 years old during the study) Harry (1;8–2;5), Vera (1;8–2;5) and Adam (1;7–2;4). These are pseudonyms. The researcher followed the case-study toddlers, video recording 50 hours of their interactions with their peers, mostly during free play inside the rooms of the toddler unit or in the outside playground. The case-studies interacted with several other toddlers so the sequences of interactions being examined usually include more toddlers than the four case studies.

When conducting research with young children, it is important to gain informed consent from all relevant gatekeepers as well as gain assent from the children themselves. As video recordings of the four case study toddlers were being made, it was likely that other toddlers would interact with these four during the filming and also have their images captured, therefore consent was sought from parents of all the toddlers who shared a room with the case studies. Of the 19 toddlers in the room, parents of 16 toddlers gave their consent. Some of the parents gave conditional consent and did not want their child's face to be shown in publications, and so their faces will be covered with a circle in this article. When the three toddlers whose parents had not given consent were present, the researcher would move the camera in different directions, go to different areas of the room or stop filming while they were there. Throughout the data collection period, the participating toddlers' assent was continuously negotiated. Their behaviour was carefully monitored while filming occurred, and the researcher would withdraw and stop filming at signs of the toddlers being unhappy and/or upset.

The transcription conventions we follow in this article are adapted from Jefferson's conventions described in Sack, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), although only one of the CA symbols was used: ((brackets)) double brackets with words in italics indicating unspoken actions. This is because the interactions under observation are embodied and unspoken.

Findings

In the following section, we will be presenting and analysing three different sequences of interaction between toddlers. In these sequences, we are

examining the embodied strategies toddlers use to initiate an interaction, focusing on gaze, smile and touch. In Extract 1, we are focusing on the role of gaze as an initiation of an interaction as well as what can happen when a toddler is inserted into an already established participation framework. In Extract 2, we are looking at the multimodal strategies a toddler uses when initiating an interaction from a peer who seems reluctant to interact at first, and in Extract 3, we are examining what happens between two toddlers in the build-up to a possible conflict.

Extract 1: The importance of gaze as a first step in an interaction

The toddlers are sitting at two half-moon tables that have been arranged as a circle table. There is a double birthday party, and the two birthday girls are sitting in the middle. Adam (aged 1;10) and Vera (aged 1;11) are sitting next to each other, but a teacher comes and moves them apart and places a chair between them (Figure 1.1). The teacher then places Sandra (aged 2;1) in the chair. Adam is sitting on the left and Vera on the right, and Sandra has now been inserted in the middle (Figure 1.2).

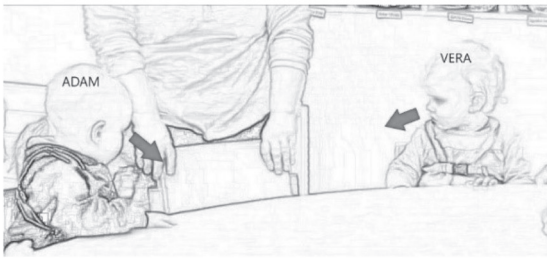


Figure 1.1

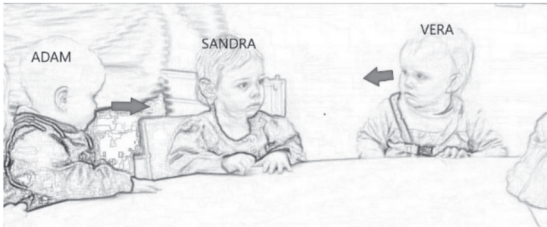


Figure 1.2

In this short sequence that follows, lasting only 23 seconds, we can see a clear use of gaze – or making eye-contact – as a first step in initiating interactions, the connection between gaze and touch, which often follows, and the relevance of the smile.

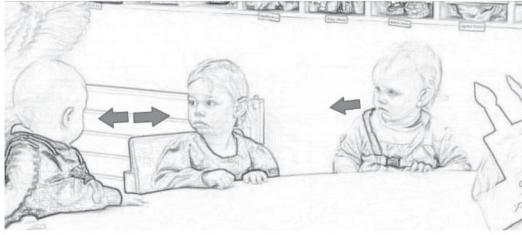


Figure 1.3

- 01: Sandra: ((turns her head towards Adam and gazes at him)) (Fig. 1.3).
02: Adam: ((gazes back at Sandra and starts to smile)) (smile is not visible on the camera but the researcher noted it in the research diary).
03: Vera: ((gazes at Adam and Sandra)). Her facial expression is very serious.

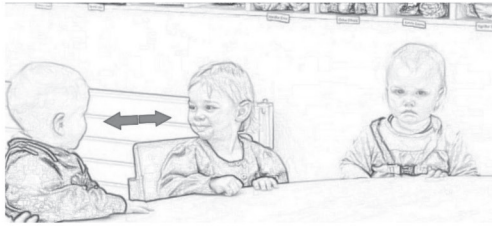


Figure 1.4

- 04: Sandra: ((smiles back at Adam while still with her gaze turned towards his)) (Fig. 1.4).
05: Adam: ((continues to smile at Sandra while looking at her)).
06: Vera: ((turns her gaze forward and towards the researcher)).

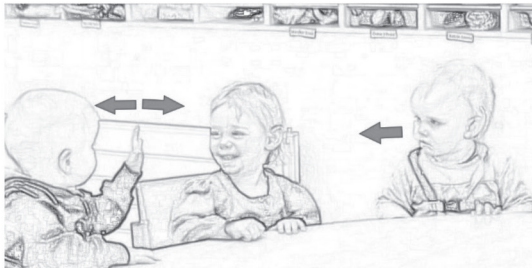


Figure 1.5

- 07: Adam: ((raises his hand in a kind of striking position)) (Fig. 1.5).
08: Sandra: ((keeps smiling)).
09: Vera: ((turns her gaze back at Adam and Sandra)). Still looking serious.

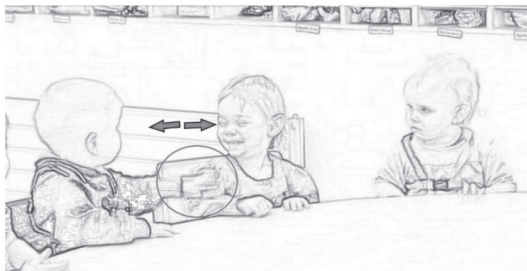


Figure 1.6

- 10: Adam: ((touches Sandra rather forcefully on her upper arm)) (Fig. 1.6).
 11: Sandra: ((flinches but keeps still and her smile broadened)).
 12: Vera: ((keeps looking at Adam and Sandra and her facial expression is still very serious)).

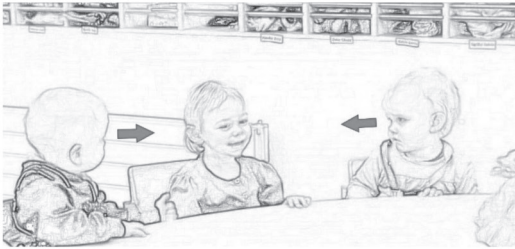


Figure 1.7

- 13: Adam: ((strokes Sandra gently on her upper arm while still gazing at her)) (Fig. 1.7).
 14: Sandra: ((turns her gaze forward while still smiling, although the smile is fading)).
 15: Vera: ((gazes at Sandra, tilts her body a little backwards and her chin downwards)). She looks very serious.

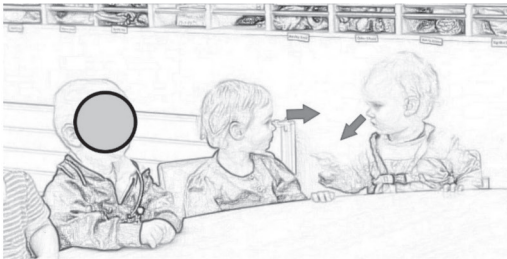


Figure 1.8

- 16: Adam: ((turns away from Sandra and gazes forward)) (Fig. 1.8). (Adam's face is hidden due to parental wishes).
 17: Vera: ((touches Sandra's upper arm while gazing at it)).
 18: Sandra: ((turns her gaze towards Vera as Vera withdraws her hand)). There appears to be eye contact between them.



Figure 1.9

- 19: Sandra: ((reacts to the touch and gazes down at her arm. She is smiling slightly)) (Fig. 1.9).
 20: Vera: ((gazes forward with her body turned away from Sandra)). She looks very serious still.



Figure 1.10

21: Sandra: ((turns her gaze forward)). She has a serious facial expression (Fig. 1.10).

22: Vera: ((turns her gaze towards Sandra with a serious facial expression)).

In this sequence, gaze is observable as a resource that plays a big role in the initiation of this interaction, and so is a phenomenon of interest here. It is also interesting to explore more generally what happens when a toddler is inserted into an already established participation framework.

Prior to the start of the sequence, Adam and Vera had been sitting next to each other at the table and had been interacting through an adjacency pair (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Sacks & Jefferson, 1995) of gaze and smile. They had created their own participation framework (Goffman, 1981) through interactions in close proximity. A teacher then moves them apart and inserts Sandra between them, which interrupts their ongoing interaction. Sandra's insertion interrupted the interaction between Adam and Vera; the consequences of this insertion is what we are examining here.

In the beginning of the sequence, all three toddlers have a serious facial expression but when Sandra meets Adam's gaze (lines 2–3, Figure 1.3) the two of them start to smile. Here is an example of a preferred adjacency pair, demonstrated in multimodal ways that is common throughout the data, gaze followed by a smile. Sandra reacts to Adam's touch by maintaining eye-contact throughout the interaction, and Sandra seems to accept his touch as an invitation rather than as an act of aggression. She flinches as Adam raises his hand in a striking position and touches her quite forcefully (line 10; Figure 1.6) but keeps smiling and Adam's subsequent touch is soft, demonstrating a change in the forcefulness of his touch to be sequentially much less aggressive. It is possible that this sequential action of the use of a softer touch marks the initial forceful touch as a 'trouble source' (ten Have, 1999) and that Adam needed to 'repair' his approach in response to Sandra's action of flinching to the initial touch. Both had

looked at each other, made eye-contact, and smiled at each other before the touch occurred. In observing this interaction, one can see the touch as an ‘affective encounter’ (Cekaite, 2016), where Adam is recognizing Sandra as a friend, as someone who belongs there and that he is happy to interact with; Adam’s touch can be seen as an ‘upgrade’ from the gaze, progressing the interaction further. This is seen with older children who often use embodied strategies, such as gestures or touch, to support their verbal actions to make sure the other child is understanding them, and therefore enhancing intersubjectivity (Bateman, 2012).

When looking at the episode, the initiation of their interaction seems to be their gaze. They make eye-contact and then Sandra smiles towards Adam. She does not smile until they have made eye-contact and have been gazing at each other for just under a second. The interaction resulting from the initial gaze is indicative of intersubjectivity and joint attention. They recognize that they are together and that they both want to have a social interaction with each other.

It is interesting to contrast this interaction with the following interaction between Sandra and Vera. Vera has been watching Sandra and Adam and seems very interested in their interaction. She follows them carefully with her gaze, but with a very serious facial expression. When Sandra and Adam seem to have stopped interacting, Vera imitates Adam and touches Sandra on the arm, but without the initial eye-contact. Sandra’s reaction to Vera’s touch is not negative, she does not outright reject Vera. She looks down at her arm and then turns her gaze towards Vera. Vera, on the other hand, quickly draws her hand back from Sandra and looks away, before turning towards Sandra again. They miss each other’s gaze. So even though both girls seem interested in interacting, there seems to be a missing element in this interaction. In this instance, it may be the lack of the initial eye-contact before the touch, which made the touch into a ‘trouble source’ which Vera did not repair. There is a lack of intersubjectivity where both girls would have understood the touch in the same way. The importance of meeting gaze in the initiation of interactions is also significant in this next excerpt.

Extract 2: The delayed gaze

In this extract we are focusing on what happens when the initiating toddler gets a delayed gaze from the peer they are trying to interact with. The interaction takes place between two girls, Vera (aged 2;0) and Susan (aged

2;1). Vera had shown many signs of being very taken with Susan and she wanted to play with her all the time. In the example below, Susan was coming back into the toddler room after having played outside – just before lunch and nap time – and she looked tired. Vera immediately approaches Susan after spotting her return to the room and attempts to initiate an interaction through multimodal strategies, such as gaze, smile and touch, but there is initially no take-up from Susan.



Figure 2.1

01: Vera: ((gazes at Susan, smiles, and then moves her body towards Susan with her hands outstretched)) (Fig. 2.1).

02: Susan: ((keeps walking away from Vera, looks down at the ground and rubs her eyes)).



Figure 2.2

- 03: Vera: ((touches Susan softly on her back whilst continuing her gaze on Susan's head)) (Fig. 2.2)
 04: Susan: ((stops walking, turns her body towards Vera, still looking down on the ground, and then continues to walk away)).

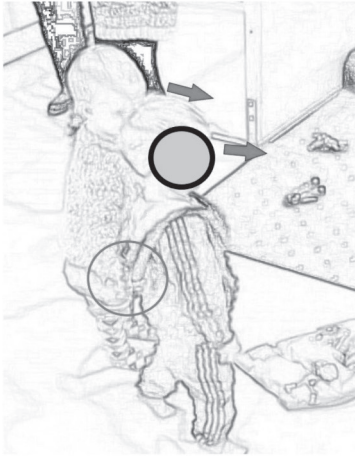


Figure 2.3

- 05: Vera: ((follows Susan and reaches her hand out towards Susan's hand. She turns her gaze forward)) (Fig. 2.3).
 06: Susan: ((moves her hand slightly away from Vera's hand, stops walking and turns her gaze forward. She then turns around, facing the direction they came from)). (Susan's face is hidden due to parental wishes).



Figure 2.4

- 07: Vera: ((turns around as well, mirroring Susan's movements)) (Fig. 2.4).
 08: Susan: ((starts to walk again)).



Figure 2.5

- 09: Vera: ((stands still, turns her gaze towards Susan's head)) (Fig. 2.5).
10: Susan: ((stops, turns her upper body, and looks towards Vera. Their gaze meets and they exchange a slight smile)).
11: Vera: ((starts walking towards Susan)).

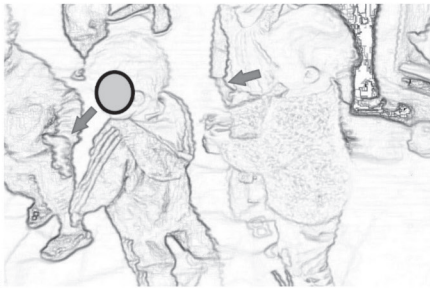


Figure 2.6

- 12: Susan: ((moves her gaze forward)) (Fig. 2.6).
13: Vera: ((reaches out her hands towards Susan with her gaze on Susan's head)).



Figure 2.7

- 14: Susan: ((turns her body half-circle to the left, stops, gazes and points at a doll on the floor that another child is playing with)) (Fig. 2.7).
15: Vera: ((turns her body in alignment with Susan, follows her pointing and looks at the doll as well)).

In this sequence we can see how Vera and Susan both use multimodal strategies to collaboratively initiate an interaction together. First, Vera's determination to interact with Susan is noticeable as she follows her and touches intermittently. The delayed securing of gaze contact does, however, impact the interaction where Vera continues to just follow Susan rather than lock into a mutual interaction with her. There is one moment in the sequence (Figure 2.4, lines 8–10) when Vera stops following Susan and at that moment, Susan starts to respond to Vera's initiation of interaction and following as they meet each other's gaze; here the interaction becomes more connected as they also exchange a slight smile. What is even more interesting here, is how this sequence showcases Vera's social competence. At the time of this interactions, she is 24 months old and already showing her ability to read social cues and react to Susan's responses appropriately in gentle ways that do not force the interaction. In Figure 2.3 (lines 5–6) Vera tries to take Susan's hand as they are walking around but Susan moves her hand away. In Figure 2.6 (line 13) Vera again moves her hands towards Susan but does not make contact, even though the smile had occurred between them. She keeps her hands close to Susan's body without touching her. Through these actions, Vera demonstrates her ability to engage in appropriate embodied actions that are sequentially responsive to Susan's previous reactions to touch that marked a rejection; Vera refrains from touching her again to avoid this interaction turning into 'harassing' (Kidwell, 2009). This in turn, gives Susan space and time to react to the initiation on her own terms.

Another point of interest in this sequence is the interesting choreography that is taking place that can be seen as a dance of interacting bodies (Mondada, 2016) where Susan moves her body and Vera mirrors her and moves her body the same way. After this little dance, Vera stops for less than a second and does not move forward like Susan, who then turns and finally meets Vera's gaze. The girls exchange smiles and from here on, they are interacting with each other with Susan using gestures and gaze to gain shared attention with Vera. This interaction showcases the importance of locking into a gaze to progress the interaction; the interaction cannot be fully initiated until there is a securing of eye-contact. Throughout this interaction, Vera has actively been pursuing a participation framework for friendship with Susan. As stated earlier, Vera has made several signs of wanting to interact and play with Susan previously and Vera's reading of the situation is very adept. She mirrors Susan's bodily movements

with confidence and can competently move the initiation into the stage of actual interaction. With Vera's careful responses to Susan's hesitation, Susan can evaluate Vera's intentions, and because Vera is very gentle and careful in her touch, her movements and her facial expressions, Susan is able to read the situation and respond to the initiation. After their little dance of going back and forth, something clicks, and Susan seems finally to understand and agree with Vera's interaction project to initiate the interaction.

Extract 3: A dispreferred touch

The third sequence of interaction takes place between two boys, Harry (aged 2;0) and Simon (aged 1;7). It is a short interaction of 12 seconds. At the beginning, Harry has been sitting next to two girls that are playing together. Just before this sequence starts, the two girls had a small conflict over the doll one of them is holding but they had managed to resolve it and were playing together again; they know each other well and play together often. Harry had been observing them intensively as they resolved their conflict, shifting his gaze towards the researcher during this time and then back to the girls. In the research data, the younger toddlers were often observed silently watching older children while they were playing.

When Simon subsequently moves towards Harry, Harry has an observable change in embodied stance (M. H. Goodwin et al., 2012). As he was observing the girls, Harry is relaxed, with his back slouched back and his hands on his lap. When Harry shifts his gaze towards Simon, his stance changes. Harry moves forward with his upper body and lands his feet firmly on the floor; his shoulders go forwards and he moves his head with his chin towards Simon. During this change in body posture, he stares straight at Simon. He glances at the researcher and then right back at Simon. The focus here is on the role of gaze and touch as initiations of interaction and what can happen when the interacting children do not have an intersubjective understanding of the meaning behind a gaze and a touch.



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3

01: Harry: ((shifts his gaze towards Simon, moving his shoulders and chin forwards toward Simon)) (Fig. 3.3).

02: Simon: ((stands still, with his gaze towards the two girls)).



Figure 3.4

- 03: Harry: ((still gazing at Simon. Quickly moves his gaze towards the researcher and then back towards Simon)) (Fig. 3.4).
04: Simon: ((shifts his gaze towards Harry. They make eye-contact)).



Figure 3.5

- 05: Simon: ((strokes Harry's cheek with his right hand while gazing at his face)) (Fig. 3.5).
06: Harry: ((stays still while still meeting Simon's gaze)).

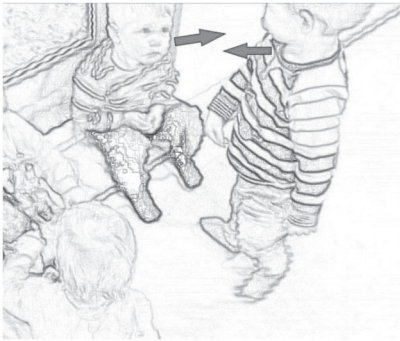


Figure 3.6

- 07: Simon: ((pulls his hand back and takes a step back with his left foot while still looking at Harry)) (Fig. 3.6).
08: Harry: ((stays still and keeps meeting Simon's gaze)).



Figure 3.7

09: Harry: *£ nay ((puts his hands up to the side of his head while looking downwards)) (Fig. 3.7).*
 10: Simon: *((turns his whole body away from Harry, swinging his hands by his sides, his gaze turned away from Harry)).*

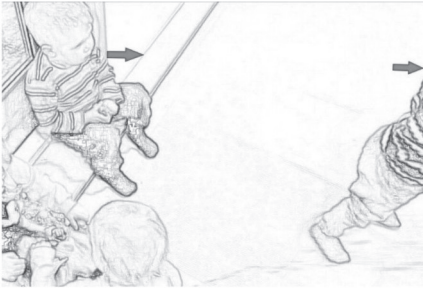


Figure 3.8

11: Harry: *((puts his hand back down on his lap, leans his body back, following Simon with his gaze)) (Fig. 3.8).*
 12: Simon: *((takes another step away from Harry, still with his body turned away)).*

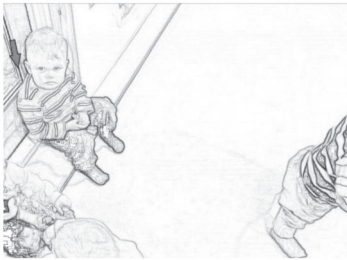


Figure 3.9

13: Harry: *((looks towards the researcher)) (Fig. 3.9).*

In this extract, the point of interest is Harry's reaction to Simon moving into the space and therefore interrupting the participation framework in which Harry is involved, watching the two girls. By moving into the space, Simon initiates a new participation framework with Harry by placing his body close to Harry. The sequential reaction by Harry can therefore be viewed as subtle increments of upgrade in attempting to prompt a responsive next action from Simon. In line 1 (Figure 3.3), Harry responds to Simon by moving his body and chin towards him, still with his gaze fixed on Simon. Within the context of Harry's previous actions, this response from Harry can be interpreted as defensive towards Simon. He is protecting his participation framework that he has with the two girls. Harry tended to be drawn towards the older girls in the toddler unit and was often observed either watching them quietly or imitating their

play. He might therefore have interpreted Simon's arrival as harassment (Kidwell, 2009).

In this extract, it appears that all the rules of social interactions are followed by Simon. He looks where Harry is looking indicating joint engagement and joint attention (Goffman, 1963; Kidwell, 2005; Pálmadóttir, 2017). They make eye-contact and then Simon touches Harry, but Harry's reaction to the touch is a dispreferred one. He brings his hands to his face and says 'nei' (e. no) very clearly which indicates strongly that he did not read the situation in the same way as Simon. It could be that Harry's dispreferred reaction took place because Simon had started to move away before Harry had reacted, so perhaps Harry was reacting to both the touch and Simon's reaction to having touched him. There was not a joint understanding between the boys of what the touch meant.

An important point to explore here is that there was no smile after the initial eye-contact between the boys. Quite often, when toddlers are seeking to interact with peers, their initial gaze is accompanied with a smile (Engdahl, 2011), as was clearly visible in Extract 1, and more subtly in Extract 2. Inserting a touch after a gaze, without the interlocking smile, may indicate that the 'silent negotiation' of an agreement to interact was not completed. Simon did not act in a way that complied to those unspoken rules, resulting in Harry demonstrating his unwillingness to be touched and the initiation of the interaction failing, noted by Simon as he walks away.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that toddlers are adept at using the embodied strategies of gaze, smile and touch to initiate interactions with their peers. These findings indicate that these three embodied strategies function as a whole and each component is important for an initiation to be accepted by a peer. Furthermore, these sequences of action show how toddlers are capable of interacting through turn-taking and repair in embodied ways that result in the co-construction of interaction with their peers, as is evident in Extracts 1 and 2. In Extract 1, after Adam's somewhat forceful touch of Sandra and her flinching reaction, his sequential touch becomes much softer. He 'repairs' his touch through reading Sandra's reactionary cue, as they continue to gaze at each other, both interpreting the interaction as meaningful through their shared understanding and

intersubjective reading of the situation, creating their participation framework together (Goffman, 1981). This can also be seen in Vera's reaction to Susan's reluctance to accept her initiation by refusing to take her hand and moving away from Vera (Extract 2). With perseverance, Vera keeps on gently trying, modifying her approach, mirroring Susan and in the end, she is successful, as Susan accepts her initiation and they start interacting together. This interaction highlights Vera's competence and knowledge about the rules of social interaction (Bateman & Church, 2017) even at this young toddler age.

The findings also suggest that toddlers are competent in initiating interactions with their peers through their engagement in a range of specific embodied strategies, such as gaze and touch, to co-produce shared attention in competent ways. The data discussed above as well as the data in the overall research project, shows that gaze and touch are very often joined together in the interaction episodes – they are adjacency pairs (ten Have, 1999). Although gaze is a necessary condition for touch to be considered a preferred response, it is not a sufficient one. There is more needed. There needs to be joint understanding of what the action means, in this case, what the meaning of the touch is. The data indicates that for the touched toddler to look at the touching as a preferred response, it needed to follow both a look and a smile. As such, we see the importance of the sequence of an initiation of an interaction as: *a look, a smile and a touch*; an 'adjacency trio', perhaps. The 'turn-opening' gaze and smile seems to be a crucial part of the interaction (Kaukomaa et al., 2013) and when that is missing there may not be the necessary joint understanding of what the touch means and it can therefore easily be interpreted as harassment.

One of the main findings of this study, is that interactions between toddlers are not random or without a purpose. The toddlers are showing preference to interact with one peer over others (Engdahl, 2012; Howes, 1983). In Extract 1 the toddlers were placed next to each other without having a say in the matter. They could have chosen to not interact. There were several toddlers at the table who did not interact with their neighbours. Both Adam and Vera, however, made the decision to interact with Sandra, they took the initiative instead of doing nothing. They wanted to interact with Sandra, specifically.

It is also important to keep in mind that these interactions do not need to lead to another activity, such as play, to have a significant meaning for the toddlers. Many of the interaction episodes in the data are of short duration

and they simply end, without any interruptions or outside reasons that cause them to end. This article has explored how toddlers use embodied strategies for ‘opening up’ (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) interactions with their peers, but how they conduct their ‘closings’ warrant further study and is something the overall PhD project is examining.

Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the strategies toddlers use to initiate interaction with their peers. The findings indicate strongly that toddlers are competent social actors who utilize varied embodied strategies, such as gaze, touch, and smile, to create joint understanding and shared attention with a preferred peer. They are adept at reading their peer’s reactions to their initiation and can ‘repair’ and change their approach when needed. Overall, this study supports previous research on toddler social interactions by providing an original outlook at how these interactions take place, contributing to valuable knowledge to the global field of early childhood teacher education.

As previous research has suggested, the ‘turn-opening’ smile is crucial in creating an affective stance between two interactants (Kaukomaa et al., 2013). A question raised by this study is whether a smile could be one of the missing factors in the interaction episodes where touch was not followed by a preferred response. The findings indicate that this is the case and that a smile is crucial as an intermediary between the gaze and the touch. Further study of this is though needed. This study does show that toddlers competently work to ‘repair’ when preferred response did not happen and that using video recordings of these natural interactions provide unique footage of how toddlers learn in situ about social rules and then apply them to their interactions.

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