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**Coordinating Care: A Microethnographic Investigation into the  
Interactional Practices of Childcare Workers**

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**Coordinating Care: A Microethnographic Investigation into the  
Interactional Practices of Childcare Workers**

by

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**Dissertation**

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## **Dedication**

For my father, David Earl Mehus

July 14, 1937 – April 13, 2005

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# **Coordinating Care: A Microethnographic Investigation into the Interactional Practices of Childcare Workers**

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Siri Elizabeth Mehus, Ph.D.  
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This project is an investigation of the interactional practices of childcare workers. It is based on approximately 25 hours of videotaped interaction among caregivers and young children (2-24 months) at a childcare center, supported by observation and interviews. I approach the childcare environment as a place of *work*, grounding my analysis in the growing tradition of microanalytic studies of collaboration in the workplace. I focus on caregivers' utilization of cultural and local resources in accomplishing their jobs, including specialized lexical items, verbal and gestural routines, and aspects of the material surround.

In particular, I find that culturally available ways of interacting with children can serve the purpose of collaboration among caregivers in this site. By addressing utterances to preverbal children, caregivers act in conformance with professional and

organizational ideologies of language socialization. Through these same practices, caregivers give voice to their understandings of “what’s going on” with the children, allowing for the coordination of caregiver actions. These practices moreover provide a space for the construction and negotiation of shared interpretations of children’s conduct. I provide a comprehensive description of the ways in which collaboration is achieved through such practices of *communicating through children*, and then discuss this phenomenon as an instantiation of “collective minding,” considering what it suggests about possibilities for participation in systems of coordinated action.

In addition, I examine a particular strategy for managing children’s behavior in which caregivers create interactional and physical contexts for children’s actions. I explore this phenomenon using the analogy of “child-proofing,” which refers to modifications made to a physical environment in order to constrain or enable certain actions on the part of children, or to create a context in which the actions children are likely to take become unproblematic. The environments created through “interactional child-proofing” may be situations brought into being through words, but they can also be material environments. This is an ongoing process in which caregivers continually attend to and anticipate children’s movements in order to avoid resorting to direct forms of coercion. I consider this practice in terms of the focused attention and situated planning that it requires of caregivers.

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## Chapter 1. Childcare as Professional Practice

This project is an investigation of childcare workers' interactional practices. These include their practices of interacting with children, as well as the way in which they collaborate with other caregivers and use resources in the environment towards the overall purpose of caring for and educating the children. Indeed, I will suggest that these are not necessarily separate tasks, but are oftentimes carried out simultaneously.

The study is based on analysis of approximately 25 hours of videotaped interaction between staff and children at a nonprofit childcare center, supplemented with informal observation and staff interviews. Adopting the methods of microethnography, I ground the moment-to-moment analysis of talk and bodily conduct in a rich description of the physical and cultural environment in which it constitutes meaningful action.

My objective is to examine the daycare setting as a place of work, although it undeniably is other things to other participants, and by so doing contribute to our knowledge about workplace communication. Taylor and Van Every (2000) refute the position that communication is something that happens *in* organizations, arguing rather that communication is the stuff out of which organizations are made. Similarly, I take the position that interaction is not something that happens *at* work, but rather for many occupations (and childcare is surely one of them) it is only through interaction that work happens at all.

Other studies have examined interaction among adults and young children in the childcare setting and some of those employ microanalytic methods similar to those I use (many will be reviewed below). Ultimately, however, because of their focus—be it on

language socialization, peer interaction, or the emergence of sociality in very young children—they contribute only tangentially to an understanding of the work practices of caregivers. By framing childcare as work, I adopt a particular perspective in this study: that of the adult childcare worker. I do so consciously and purposefully because I believe this is necessary in order to adequately describe the caregivers' moment-to-moment experience of interacting with children, and the practices they enlist in doing this. Yet this description must rest on an interactional analysis that takes the children into account as full participants in the activities of the daycare; one that takes seriously their agency, as do the caregivers. Thus this study may, in one sense, actually adopt a child's perspective in a greater way than do studies of child-caregiver interaction that take an advocacy approach and thus see the children primarily as objects of adult action, rather than actors themselves.

Further, by studying this environment as a place of *collaborative* work, this project will contribute to the larger understanding of how local and cultural resources of an environment are utilized and made relevant for the purposes of coordinated action. The childcare environment has not been studied as a context for workplace collaboration. The particular features of this environment, especially the central involvement of children as both resources for action and actors who may not share the functional goals of the organization, offer great potential for enhancing our understanding of what it means to work together in a variety of human environments.

Through my analysis, I identify interactional practices of childcare professionals that are currently not well acknowledged or understood in the professional literature.

This effort can contribute to thinking about the nature of childcare as a profession, but it also reflects back on our understanding of interaction in general. The practices that will be described bear a resemblance to everyday conversational competencies but appear to be heightened versions of them. This relationship allows us to consider the ways in which conventional means of communication can be refined and reshaped to suit the particular contingencies with which they are called upon to deal.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I will provide a more detailed review of the literature on socially coordinated action in which this study is grounded. First, however, I will sketch brief descriptions of some of the many areas of study from which I draw for the purposes of this research and to which I believe this project can make a contribution.

### 1.1. ADULT-CHILD INTERACTION

In the literature on linguistic, emotional and social aspects of children's development there has been a great deal of research on interaction between infants and parents, particularly mothers. Such studies would seem to have thoroughly examined adult-child interaction in the early years. Researchers have found that parents use a specialized form of talking with children, which one may find referred to as baby talk register (Ferguson, 1977), motherese (Newport, 1977) or caregiverese, and more recently, child-directed speech. In this study, I adopt the term *baby talk register* due to its close correlation with the descriptive lay term ("baby talk"), and because I find the alternatives to be somewhat problematic. (For example, the terms 'motherese' or 'caregiverese' presuppose that all mothers or caregivers speak this way to the children in their care. Similarly, using 'child-directed speech' in this sense assumes that all speech directed to

children has these features; this term would be better used to refer to speech that is directed to children, regardless of form). The characteristics of this register, such as simplification, wide pitch variation, and short utterances, are believed to be adapted to support infants' language acquisition (Doupe & Kuhl, 1999; Gopnik *et al.*, 1999; Liu *et al.*, 2003). As such, they are seen as universal and instinctual—biologically inherited forms of behavior. Researchers claim that similar patterns are found across cultures (e.g., Kuhl & Andruski, 1997).

Another body of research on mother-infant interaction focuses on synchrony and coordination. Mothers and preverbal children engage in “proto-conversations” (Bateson, 1993; Bullowa & McGlannan, 1979) in which the child is treated as a competent interactant. These conversations are characterized by gaze coordination between children and adults (Bullowa & McGlannan, 1979) and very young infants seem to time their body movements to correspond with adult speech (Condon & Sander, 1974).

Such research has been foundational in the fields of child development and language acquisition; furthermore, the idea that the use of baby talk register in protoconversations with preverbal children promotes language acquisition is presented as fact in popular parenting literature (e.g., A. Eisenberg *et al.*, 1996). There is, however, a powerful critique that comes from researchers who regard interaction with children as more than mere “input” for children's language acquisition—as rather a means of organizing social interactions in ways that socialize children into certain forms of language use as well as certain cultural ideologies of mind, emotion, personhood, and social responsibility. First, the claim that the picture of mother-child interaction

presented above is universal has been countered with evidence from cultures in which mothers do not tend to speak directly to their infants or treat their infant's vocalizations as utterances in a conversational exchange (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin, 1990). Further, the very reliance on data from mother-child interactions has been criticized as reflective of Western assumptions; in other cultures, multi-participant communication settings that include siblings and other adults are more typical than the mother-child dyad in the lives of young children (Field, 2001; Ochs, 1982; Schieffelin, 1990).

It is hard to say whether the prevalence of research on the mother-infant dyad results from culture-bound assumptions about children's early language experience, or whether it is a byproduct of experimental methodology in which dyads are lifted out of their natural environment (or perhaps a combination of the two). It seems to have resulted in a certain form of dialogic interaction becoming enshrined as the one most beneficial to child development (Selby & Bradley, 2003). This bias is then extended to sites in which dyadic interaction is not the norm, i.e., childcare centers (see, e.g., Warren, 2000).

My research looks at interaction between infants, toddlers and caregivers in a multi-party setting and focuses on the ways in which all parties collaborate in activities. To the literature on interaction between adults and young children it offers a corrective to the disproportionate representation of research on mother-child dyads and it does so not with reference to another culture, but another situation within Western culture—and hardly an unusual one. Children have always engaged with adults in formats other than the dyad; whether or not we consider it to be a good thing, the current need for double

incomes among most families ensure that children will continue to spend a great deal of their time in the types of social arrangements found in daycare centers.

## 1.2. INTERACTIONAL SKILLS OF CHILDCARE WORKERS

There is a body of empirical research on interaction between children and caregivers in childcare centers; however, I argue that these studies, which focus on either child development or child welfare (or both), provide us with an incomplete picture of the job of caregivers. They are unable to describe the moment-to-moment experience of being a childcare worker, and thus the real practices and skills that are involved in childcare work. Because of the particular nature of interaction with children, I will argue that this is precisely the type of description that is needed in order to understand the demands of childcare work.

Research on caregiver skills tends to focus on knowledge of child development, especially language and literacy development, gained in formal education or training (Burchinal *et al.*, 2002; Mroz & Hall, 2003). That which focuses on interaction tends to utilize pre-formulated measures of interaction quality, in which caregiver interactions with individual children are coded using broad categories, such as “redirects,” “informs,” “praises,” etc. (e.g., de Kruif *et al.*, 2000; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002). These codes (while, of course, making generalization over larger corpora possible) allow for very little specificity with respect to either vocal or nonvocal aspects of child-caregiver interactions. Further, they force observers to focus primarily on interaction between single children and caregivers, which gives a very unrealistic picture of what a childcare worker does, because childcare workers are always in charge of and shifting their attention between

multiple children. Finally, this body of research completely ignores another important aspect of what goes on in the childcare center: the interaction and collaboration between the caregivers as they work together to care for the children.

The fact that measures of interaction quality are based on a notion of responsiveness developed with regard to mother-child interaction is highly problematic. If recommendations for caregiver-child interaction in the daycare setting are based on this model, and they appear to be (see Girolametto *et al.*, 2003; Warren, 2000), they are likely to be unrealistic, thus contributing to the already stressful nature of this job. In addition, they overlook some of the fundamental interactional competencies that caregivers bring to their work.

My approach, on the other hand, reveals the ways in which caregivers shift their attention between multiple children and manage the interaction of children in groups. Furthermore, my analysis recognizes the importance of collaboration with other caregivers in this work, and identifies micro-practices through which such collaboration is accomplished.

### 1.3. CHILDCARE AS A PROFESSION

Childcare as it stands today is aptly classified as a service occupation.<sup>1</sup> According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, pay rates are “very low” (median hourly wages were \$7.86 in 2002), minimum qualifications are also low, and there is little opportunity for

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<sup>1</sup> More precisely, childcare is classified by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as a “personal care and service occupation.” This category includes some semi-professional occupations, such as personal trainers, cosmetologists, flight attendants and animal groomers.

advancement (Bureau of Labor Statistics). Efforts are underway, however, to establish childcare as a profession. The National Association for the Education of Young Children lists as one of its strategic objectives to “provide professional development opportunities and resources for those who work for and with young children.” (“NAEYC Mission and Goals”). Several professional organizations, such as the Association of Professional Child Care Educators and the National Association of Child Care Professionals, have been formed.

Childcare does not fit neatly into traditional definitions of “profession.” MacDonald (1995) for example defines the professions as “occupations based on advanced, or complex, or esoteric, or arcane knowledge” or (citing Murphy, 1988, p. 245) “formally rational abstract utilitarian knowledge” (MacDonald, 1995, p. 1). Traditionally, the label of ‘profession’ was reserved for those occupational groups that train and certify their own members (e.g., law, medicine, and the academic disciplines) (Hochschild, 2003). So far, training for childcare workers is not universally required and usually consists of a certificate or two-year AA degree. However, efforts to professionalize childcare are being modeled on the other professions, and thus formal education is a major element.

The reasons presented for making such professional training more widespread are twofold: bettering conditions for childcare workers and providing higher quality care to children. Enhancing the pay and status of childcare work is itself understood as indirectly working towards the latter goal in that better conditions will likely lead to better retention, which is seen as a benefit to children (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003).

How professionalization leads to better working conditions for caregivers is not entirely clear; some predictions seem unduly optimistic. Morgaine (1999) writes: “It is expected that as early childhood educators are professionalized the quality of their practice will improve and they will increase their ability to articulate the basis for their beliefs and practices. Only then will public understanding and support improve.” (p. 6). However, it is not clear that the lack of support (especially financial support) for early childhood educators today results from a low quality of practices or workers’ inability to articulate the bases for them.

The emphasis on formal education raises the question as to whether such training actually helps workers attain the skills and knowledge needed. Can the skills used by childcare workers be taught? Are they being taught? Some research shows a correlation between caregiver training and quality of care, as conventionally measured (e.g., Burchinal et al., 2002). Others argue, citing the example of social work, that professionalization does not necessarily lead to higher quality of services, and that child and youth care should be conceived of as a craft rather than a profession (Eisikovit & Beker, 2002).<sup>2</sup>

Although resolving those dilemmas is not my goal in this paper, it seems that a detailed empirical description of what childcare workers actually do would be of use in such debates, and that this is absent from the literature. My preliminary analyses suggest that the skills of childcare workers lie not simply in what they know about child

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<sup>2</sup> The label “child and youth care” as used by Eiskovits and Beker refers primarily to employees of residential facilities and after-school programs for older children and teens, but includes daycare workers as well (see Beker, 2001).

development, nor in how they interact with individual children. Rather, they are *managers* of action and interaction; expert at organizing shifting formations of children, maintaining attention on children both as individuals and as a group, and collaborating with one another in this process. These skills should be acknowledged as part of efforts to recognize childcare workers as professionals.

#### 1.4. CARE WORK

In 1983, Arlie Hochschild coined the term “emotional labor” to describe an underacknowledged form of work required by many occupations—the task of not merely displaying but manufacturing in oneself the emotions that are seen as appropriate for one’s job. Hochschild’s original study was of the airline industry, in which flight attendants learned through formal and informal training to use strategies of “deep acting” (or “method acting”) to actually *feel* sympathy, affection, and similar emotions for passengers. Occupations vary in terms of the forms of emotional labor required (and the extent to which it is required).<sup>3</sup> On the whole, however, this requirement disproportionately affects women in both the personal and professional arenas of life.<sup>4</sup> In the afterword to the 20th anniversary edition, Hochschild (2003) notes that as we have converted to a service economy, the relative proportion of jobs requiring emotional labor

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<sup>3</sup> Hochschild also discusses the work of bill collectors as an occupation that requires a wholly different type of emotional labor: hostility and aggression rather than compassion and understanding.

<sup>4</sup> In another well-known book, *The Second Shift*, Hochschild (1989) argues that in addition to their work outside of the home women bear the brunt of responsibilities for managing the home life; these involve both physical work (such as housekeeping and cooking) and the emotional work of caring for children and ailing relatives, as well as being an engaged and supportive spouse and parent.

has only increased. These jobs are still held by primarily by women; the caring professions, including childcare, make up many of them.

Colley (2003) uses the concept of emotional labor in her investigation of the training of nursery nurses (childcare workers in the UK). Colley shows that over the two-year training, the women learned to do emotion work, such as suppressing their feelings of anger towards “cheeky” children (as well as suppressing affectionate feelings when they felt they should be stern). However, when asked what they had learned, the trainees talked about practical procedures and knowledge of health issues and child development. Despite emotional management being arguably one of the most difficult aspects of the job and something that did not come naturally but rather had to be learned, the women did not think of it when asked about their skills.

Others also tend not to see emotional work as skill. For example, MacDonald (1995), who defines professions in terms of specialized bodies of knowledge, allows that practice always plays some part in the definition of a profession. He notes, however, that while most professions emphasize knowledge in their self-definition, in the caring professions it is practice that is emphasized. He contends that doing so devalues these occupations, because the practice of care is something that everyone does in the context of family and friendships and thus it is not a specialized skill (p. 135). While we can argue that there is great variation in the level of skill with which people handle their relationships both inside and outside of the work arena, it is hard to deny his observation that work defined in terms of its emotional component tends to be held in lower esteem than so-called knowledge work.

The skills associated with women's work tend to be undervalued in general (Probert & Wilson, 1993, p. 9). Many gendered jobs, even those that command little pay or status, demand strong interpersonal communication competencies (R. M. Kantor, 1977; Muller, 1999; Poynton, 1993). Interpersonal skills, however, are frequently regarded as mere personality traits such as "patience, consideration, friendliness, supportiveness" (Poynton, 1993, p. 92). They are not thought of as forms of knowledgeable practice that must be learned and developed; but rather as qualities that stem directly from workers' identities as women (Poynton, 1993). Freedburg (1993) discusses these issues in the context of social work professionalization, which some have sought to base in a feminine ethic of care while others argued that the legitimization of the occupation requires that it rest on a bedrock of rational objectivity.

What are the skills, then, of emotion work? The literature on emotional labor would tell us that they consist in the ability to conjure up occupationally appropriate feelings. Hochschild notes that this skill is not always *necessary*—professions vary in the extent to which they demand it and probably none require it for every occupationally-relevant task. I would suggest that neither are skills at summoning emotion *sufficient* for the performance of emotionally appropriate work. It goes without saying that all jobs require labor other than the emotional; I argue, however, that even the emotional part of the emotional labor occupation, i.e., doing one's job in an emotionally appropriate manner, demands more than manufacturing the correct feeling. My analysis suggests, specifically, that interacting with children in a *patient* manner demands more than just

having kindly and affectionate feelings towards the children. It demands, rather, a certain type of interactional competence.

#### 1.5. COLLABORATION AT WORK

In this project, I use microanalytic methods to shed light on the issues raised above. Specifically, I draw on an ethnomethodological and microethnographic tradition of investigating professional practices in terms of their moment-to-moment progression in real work contexts. As will be evident from a more detailed review below, these methods have been primarily used to study complex sociotechnical environments. Although mundane and decidedly low-tech, the environment I study is arguably more complex because it is less rationalized.<sup>5</sup> Within this body of research, there has been to my knowledge no attempt to look at systems of collaborative work in which human beings are both the medium and the purpose of the work being done, and certainly none that deal with systems that have “nodes” as unpredictable as infants and, particularly, toddlers.

While the microanalytic methods I employ have primarily been used to study the practices of highly skilled professionals such as archaeologists, architects, pilots, navigators and the like, similar methods have been used to reveal the skillfulness of seemingly mundane tasks, and thus make visible certain “invisible” forms of

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<sup>5</sup> Kurtz and Snowden (2003; see also Browning & Boudes, 2005) cite a kindergarten play group as an example of a complex system. They make reference to an experiment in which West Point cadets who were given the task of managing the group attempted to implement pre-formed rational plans, which led to a complete loss of control. Experienced teachers, on the other hand, gave children the space to let activity patterns emerge, then acted to maintain desirable behaviors and discontinue undesirable ones.

occupational knowledge (or know-how). In particular, research that investigates practical reasoning in situated human encounters (e.g., Lave, 1980; Scribner, 1992; Suchman, 1987) has demonstrated that human beings make use of their environmental and social contexts in systematic and ingenious ways when engaging in everyday thinking tasks. This research thus reveals skills that are not detectable by standardized tests or traditional cognitive science experiments, such as the highly developed but context-dependent mathematical skills of dairy product assemblers (Scribner, 1992).

These studies align with research in conversation analysis showing that the routine management of conversations in fact involves highly context sensitive and locally adaptive maneuvering (e.g., Sacks *et al.*, 1974). This may suggest, then, that in some sense, all human action involves the strategic and ingenious use of local materials. If so, what makes these skilled workplace actions special? I attempt to show with regard to childcare that caregivers in fact engage in a form of skilled practice that is of a piece with typical competencies of adult interactants, but in a heightened form. Other workplace studies do something similar to this when they reveal how specific interactional, cognitive and perceptual skills are refined in highly rational and technical environments. In the environment I investigate, it is less a refinement of individual skills that is demanded, but rather the development of a highly disciplined flexibility and the kind of focused attention needed to perform continuous, local adaptations to one's plans in the process of carrying out a course of action. Thus it potentially offers itself as a prototype model for any tasks in which human beings must bring about joint activities while attending to moment-to-moment changes in the interaction environment.

In what follows, I outline the foundational research out of which this dissertation project emerges. In Chapter 2, I discuss the significance for theories of language and communication of studying practices of collaboration in the workplace. These revolve primarily around correcting biases that we have inherited from earlier ways of theorizing communication, such as the speaker-hearer dyad as the communication prototype, the assumption that meaning can be encoded in language in a relatively context-free manner, the related assumption that communication can be characterized as information transmission, and the neglect of the human body (other than the voice) and the material environment in the understanding of communication. In this section on collaborative work, I highlight two complementary ways of describing social units of collaboration: communities of practice and functional systems.

Noting that the centrality of children and their actions in my data complicates its characterization as a functional system, in Chapter 3 I turn my attention to research that sheds light on the role of children in cooperative activities, first by looking at studies in which children (or pets) serve as a medium for adult communication and then at studies in which children take a much more active role, i.e., microethnographic research on classroom interaction. This section ends with a review of the ways in which infants and toddlers participate in collaborative activity with peers and adults.

Chapter 4 provides a description of the daycare center I study (“All Aboard Preschool”) and the microethnographic methodology I employ. In Chapter 5, I introduce a particular cultural resource: speaking to children. In that chapter, I provide a detailed description of the multiple ways in which talk addressed to a child can be utilized (by the

speaker or the overhearer) as a resource for collaborative action. In Chapter 6, I focus on two interrelated theoretical implications of the practice of “communicating through children.” First, I discuss its implications for our understanding of the possibilities for participation of co-present individuals in human interaction (Goffman, 1981; C. Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004). I then examine this phenomenon using a particular approach to studying to studying collaboration in the workplace, in which it is seen as the collective accomplishment of group-level intelligent action (Hutchins, 1995; Weick & Roberts, 1993).

In Chapter 7, I shift from a focus on collaboration between caregivers to an examination of the way in which caregivers utilize more local (“ad hoc”) resources to influence children’s actions. I investigate a particular method for guiding children’s action in the daycare classroom in which caregivers, rather than attempting to directly influence children through coercion or persuasion, adopt a strategy of altering aspects of the interactional or physical environment in order to encourage certain actions over others or to reframe the actions that children are already performing. The conclusion of this dissertation will discuss the relevance of these interactional practices of professional childcare workers to the scholarly understanding of human communication. In particular, I note that the two foci of this project are united by their function as tacit means for facilitating the seamless progression (or “flow”) of workplace activities.

## **Chapter 2. The Microanalysis of Collaboration at Work**

This project is grounded in the steadily growing tradition of microanalytic research on collaborative activities in the workplace. While such studies of workplace interaction have yielded practical insights applicable to many specific fields and industries, this should not overshadow the significance of this work to theoretical scholarship on language and communication.

### **2.1. THEORETICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH ON WORKPLACE COLLABORATION**

...[A] primordial site for the analysis of human language, cognition, and action consists of a situation in which multiple participants are attempting to carry out courses of action in concert with each other through talk while attending to both the larger activities that their current actions are embedded within, and relevant phenomena in their surround. (C. Goodwin, 2000, p. 1492)

Studies of collaboration at work are not just practical applications of communication theory, but rather lie at its heart. In what follows I specify some of the ways in which studying workplace practices sheds light on fundamental theoretical issues.

#### **2.1.1. The Embeddedness of Language in Activity**

Wittgenstein (1958) introduced the concept of the language game in order to “bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a

form of life” (p. 11; italics in original). Since Wittgenstein, scholars of language and communication have endeavored to understand the relationship between the meaning of utterances and the human activities in the service of which they are employed. Speech act theory, in its recognition that utterances are interpreted and used by human beings in terms of their function as purposeful actions (rather than their referential content), was a step in this direction (Austin, 1962). Speech act theory, however, is limited to individual actions effected through the use of language. Levinson (1992) points out that Wittgenstein’s examples of language games included activities such as “describing objects, giving measurements, constructing an object from measurements, telling jokes, acting plays, praying, guessing riddles, greeting, and so on” (p. 67), few if any of which can be captured in a speech act theory based on single utterances, and argued that a theory of language needs to account for the ways in which language meaning is embedded in diverse forms of socially coordinated action.

This is sometimes understood to mean simply that words and utterances take on their significance by virtue of being uttered within certain larger activities, such as basketball games, trips to the grocery store, courtroom proceedings, and the like. We could explain this by reference to sociolinguistic registers—language varieties defined by their use in particular social situations. However, the problem with the concept of “register” is precisely that it is imagined as a language variety or code—an abstract set of lexical items and/or grammatical rules that must be learned, rather than a way of speaking that arises in a principled manner out of the structure of the activity itself. The

significance of an utterance is a function of the specific purposes of the activity in which people are engaged and the conditions under which they are pursuing those purposes.

Further, it is not always the larger activity frame that gives an utterance its meaning. On the contrary, many utterances can only be interpreted as situated in the moment at which they are produced. Studies of collaboration in the workplace demonstrate this by illuminating how actions and utterances are designed to be intelligible to particular recipients, with reference to particular constellations of contextual factors, at the particular moment at which they are produced within an ongoing stream of action.

For example, Kleifgen and Frenz-Belkin (1997) analyze an interaction in which a supervisor and subordinate jointly solve a technological problem in a circuit board manufacturing company. They show that the workers' elliptical utterances achieve their meaning by virtue of their timing with respect to the running of the machine and the unfolding of the problem-solving activity. Ford (1999) analyzes interactions in which physics students work together on a task.<sup>6</sup> She points out that one student's potentially ambiguous utterance is understandable because of her nonvocal actions with the common documents, as embedded within the activity as it has progressed to that point. (For example, when a student says simply "two," her collaborators understand this as the initiation of a move to the next step of the task because of their shared knowledge of what

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<sup>6</sup> I include this study although it is set in an educational rather than a work context because it shares the characteristics of the work tasks discussed in this section; further, the author draws from research on collaboration at work in her analysis.

the group has done thus far, as well as their observation of the way she simultaneously handles a recognizable written artifact).

In a similar vein, Heath and Luff (1996) demonstrate that utterances that might seem ambiguous out of context are easily interpreted by participants who are making use of the rich mixture of communication modalities at their disposal. In the line control room of the London Underground, one coworker's request to another ("tell him to go"), in the absence of any previous communication between the two on this topic, achieves its local significance by virtue of the two workers' shared attentional focus at the precise moment at which it is uttered—i.e., the speaker's awareness that the hearer is also looking at a video monitor picturing a train that has been sitting for some time at a station (as well his awareness that the hearer is also aware of their shared focus).

It is not just the meaning of utterances, but also the meaning of absences that must be understood as embedded within activity. The interactional significance of pauses has been well studied (e.g., brief pauses—durations of less than 2/10 of a second—can signal the oncoming disagreement with an assessment (Pomerantz, 1984) or rejection of an offer or invitation, occasioning its retraction (Davidson, 1985)). When parties are working together on a common project, and this project rather than the conversation itself is the primary purpose of their actions and focus of their attention, the significance of a pause is changed (Roth, 2004). Indeed, it is doubtful that a silence should even be construed as a pause when activity continues to take place in the absence of speech.

Childcare workers at the All Aboard Preschool use language that could well be described as a linguistic register—lexical items that cannot be accurately interpreted if

abstracted from the context of this setting. For example, the significance of the phrase “walk away” is both richer and more specific when understood within this context. (“Walk away” is routinely used to direct a child away from an object or other child with which he or she is engaging in an inappropriate manner.) However, understanding it as a lexical item within a register fails to capture its materialization as the sedimented product of repeated use for particular purposes (or its place within an ideology about positive guidance for children). In this study, such phrases are understood not just in terms of their situatedness within All Aboard Preschool as a community, but in terms of how they function in the moment-to-moment progression of daycare activities.

### **2.1.2. Multi-participant, Multi-focused Interaction**

Given the diverse and frequently shifting assemblages of persons with which we interact everyday, dyadic exchanges are overrepresented in research on language and social interaction (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2004; Levinson, 1988). This could result, in part, from methodological choices among scholars of social interaction: in the effort to obtain recorded specimens of naturally occurring conversation there has been some reliance on conversations that can be captured on audio- or videotape with relative ease (e.g., telephone conversations and focused face-to-face interactions such as interviews, therapy sessions and doctor-patient consultations). However, a dyadic bias seems to be present more broadly in conceptions of communication both among laypersons (see Peters, 2000) and other scholars of communication, for example as manifested in our basic models of communication as occurring between two parties: a speaker and a hearer (Berlo, 1960; de Saussure, 1960; Shannon & Weaver, 1949).

Goffman (1981) argues that speaker-hearer model is inadequate as a conceptual basis for the analysis of interaction. In addition to fleshing out the role of speaker to analytically separate the alignments a speaker can take with respect to his or her words, he argues that the notion of hearer should be respecified to distinguish between ratified participants (including addressed and unaddressed recipients) and unrated participants (such as bystanders, who may be either overhearers or eavesdroppers), as well as to allow for different patterns of “subordinated communication” between participants, such as byplay (side talk between ratified participants), side play (between bystanders), and cross play (between ratified participants and bystanders).

Kerbrat-Otecchioni (2004) introduces the term “polylogue” to describe the particular features of talk involving more than two participants. These include aspects of turn-taking organization, such as relatively less balance between participants in holding the floor, as well as more intrusions (speaker not selected takes the floor), interruptions and overlap. (The extent to which these are experienced as violations differs from two-party conversations as well.) Other elements include the fact that conversational moves can be constructed out of contributions by multiple parties and that groups of participants can form coalitions within the interaction. Overall, the principle of recipient design (Sacks et al., 1974) dictates that the greater the number of participants, “the more delicate conversational activities become. *Speakers must take all their recipients into account to some degree, and the recipients themselves are intrinsically heterogeneous* due to differences in status, knowledge, expectations, objectives, etc.” (Kerbrat-Otecchioni, 2004, p. 6, italics in original). Kerbrat-Otecchioni outlines a set of conceptual tools useful

for the study of polylogal interactions, central within which are more thoroughly worked out versions of Goffman's participation framework (1981, described in the previous paragraph) and his typology of forms of involvement (Goffman, 1963), which include shared focused encounters (such as an interview), unfocused gatherings (such as a waiting room) and multi-focused gatherings (such as a cocktail party).

Multi-participant, multi-focused gatherings are typical of offices and workshops, within which individuals work separately in a common environment (Grosjean, 2004; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2004). There often exists an "open state of talk," into which contributions may be made from time to time but are not required (Goffman, 1981, p. 134). Focused encounters, such as meetings or more transitory configurations of focused talk in an otherwise multi-focused environment, are also typical of the workplace. Grosjean (2004) looks at how fluctuations between these different forms of involvement are achieved during nurses' shift change briefing sessions at a hospital. She examines meetings that take place in two different settings: one is a focused interaction in which all participants abandon other types of work and gather together until the meeting is over; the other is a multi-focused interaction in which focused interaction takes place between only the departing and arriving nurses and other participants may come and go and do other types of work during the meeting. Due to the distribution of knowledge and professional roles of the participants, *both* types of meeting tend to be dominated by dialogues (Grosjean uses the term 'dilogue' to clarify the etymology) between the arriving and departing nurses; however, there is always the potential of a genuine

polylogue emerging. This happens primarily in connection with emotional or humorous topics.

Despite the difficulties they present for video-based data collection methods, there have recently been more studies that look at multifocused interaction structures at work. Studies conducted in transportation control rooms and news editing centers by Heath and Luff (1996, 2000) demonstrate how an “open state of talk” can serve the purposes of collaboration. Suchman (1996) looks at how employees in an airline operations room move between focused and unfocused interaction through the way in which they activate various aspects of the physical space in which they work, a room that affords both joint work and a division of labor marked by spatial positions. She shows that reaching a solution to a routine problem is not simply a matter of individual cognition, or even talk between the participants, but involves establishing an appropriate space for collaborative interaction.

The daycare setting is characterized by multi-participant interaction, which may be focused or multi-focused. Dyadic interaction occurs, of course, but it always occurs in a context in which participants (both children and caregivers) are attending to others present, and oftentimes readying themselves for other engagements. Despite this, research on caregiver-child interaction assumes a model of focused, dyadic interaction (see Kidwell (2003) for a notable exception), and caregivers are often evaluated on the basis of whether they achieve the “responsiveness” typical of mother-infant dialogic talk. My study, on the other hand, takes as central the ways in which caregivers and children

interact in groups and, especially, how caregivers maintain ongoing interactions with multiple children.

### **2.1.3. Communication as Coordination**

Packaged along with the speaker-hearer dyad has come a particular assumption about communication, namely that it consists of the transmission of information between speakers and hearers. Some argue that this is a wholly inaccurate way of characterizing communication (e.g., Maturana & Varela, 1998, p. 196). At best it is partial: we not only convey information about the world through our talk, but also bring about worlds, such as the elaborate forms of social organization within which we live and work (Giddens, 1984; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). On a smaller scale, when people adjust their bodies with respect to one another and a common project (whether it be line dancing or cardiac surgery), they are clearly communicating and yet it is hard to identify any message or information that is being conveyed. It is of course possible to make the reductionist argument that coordination itself transmits information (e.g., by mirroring your actions I *send the message* that I am attracted to you), but in doing so one inevitably loses sight of the means by which such coordination is effected in the first place. Specifying such strategies and resources for coordination is one way in which studies of collaboration at work are contributing to emerging understandings of language and communication.

Heath and Luff (2000, ch. 5), for example, analyze work practices in the control room of the Docklands Light Railway. This is a highly technological environment. An automatic system routes the trains, thus much of the work done by the control room employees consists of dealing with problems and crises that the system cannot adequately

handle. Making such changes consists of entering commands into the automatic system. While control room tasks are assigned by virtue of a strict division of labor, the entering of commands in moments of crisis turns out to be a highly collaborative activity. The entry of commands is occasioned by the activities of other operators and timed to correspond with the sequential demands of surrounding talk and the stream of activities in which the task is embedded. The authors argue that the entering of commands is co-produced; “it relies on the two controllers co-ordinating their actions with each other (and related co-present and distributed parties) in order to accomplish timely and sequential actions which serve to maintain a safe and reliable service,” the overall goal of the control room (p. 154).

As in conversational interaction, mutual monitoring (M. H. Goodwin, 1980) is a crucial component of coordination in task activity. In their study of the Line Control Rooms of the London Underground, Heath and Luff (1996; C. Heath & Luff, 2000) observe that while co-present employees rarely provide explicit information to one another, they in fact need to be aware of what one another are doing in order to perform their jobs. For example, the Division Information Assistant (DIA), whose job it is to broadcast public announcements to the stations about the status of various trains, obtains the information he then broadcasts by “overhearing” radio conversations between Controllers and Drivers about emerging problems (and their solutions). They demonstrate that this is not accomplished entirely by the DIA; rather, controllers (and other control room staff) work to make their doings visible and hearable to the DIA in

order for this to happen. This phenomenon will be further explored below in Section 2.2.1 of this chapter.

I investigate the ways in which caregivers coordinate their actions with one another in the daycare environment. In this low-tech setting, as in the high-tech settings described above, the physical environment plays a central role in how collaboration occurs. In this context, however, a prominent feature of the environment is its population with small people who behave differently from adults. Coordination, therefore, must occur not just between adult workers within their environment, but with and among children, as well. The complexities of examining coordinated work in this setting will be discussed in later sections.

#### **2.1.4. Multimodality**

Finally, the microanalysis of workplace communication can help correct another bias in the study of social interaction: the overemphasis on language. Human beings make use of a vast array of resources in interconnecting with one another: vocal, gestural, postural, artifactual and environmental (see Finnegan, 2002). When researchers use videotape to examine micro-behaviors of coordination in the workplace, the ways in which various resources are pressed into service as communication modalities become particularly evident (e.g., Streeck & Kallmeyer, 2001).

Some studies of collaborative action at work highlight the ways in which the human body is employed for purposes of communication. For example, M.H. Goodwin (1996b) looks at language in terms of its vocal production (rather than its lexical and grammatical properties) in her study of the prosodic features of informings and

announcements in an airline operations room. She finds that employees use formulaic intonation contours to produce utterances that will be intelligible in the “sonic soup” of this noisy environment (p. 453). The prosodic features of the talk set it apart from other simultaneous talk and signal its import to those for whom it is intended.

Other studies look at the ways in which gesture is used in collaborative environments. LeBaron (1998) provides a case study of how a shared gesture is taken up and refined over the course of architectural negotiations. C. Goodwin (2003) analyzes pointing gestures in the work environments of archaeologists, where “participants must establish for each other how a relevant space should be construed in order to perform the tasks that make up the work of their setting.” (p. 220). Murphy (2005) examines imagination as a shared practice, analyzing architects’ use of talk and gesture to augment design drawings.

Often, as in the last two studies cited, the human body is considered in terms of how its movements articulate with aspects of the physical surround, particularly artifacts and the built environment. For example, Kleifgen (2001) focuses on how social positioning is achieved in and through talk and actions with a machine in the context of collaboration. In a study of archaeologists’ color classifications, C. Goodwin (1994) looks at how an artifact (the Munsell chart) is used to organize and align the visual perceptions of participants in a cooperative task. The act of producing cognitive artifacts can also be examined for its role in cooperative endeavors. Streeck & Kallmeyer (2001) point out that the instrumental act of writing (or, more generally, inscription) involves performing gestures that can themselves be recruited for interactional purposes, such as

turn-construction. These movements have a special character in comparison to other gestures, however, in that they leave marks that “remain on the scene after the moment they are produced, [thus they] can become the targets or components of further symbolic acts.” (p. 488).

Other studies look at how representations mediate between individuals and the physical environment. Forms, such as the ‘complex sheet’ that helps baggage handlers identify the correct plane to load, facilitate collaboration between coworkers across time and space, in effect serving as a link between the micro-actions of a single worker (i.e., her glances at airplanes) and the organizational structure as a whole (C. Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996, p. 65). It is not always the case that collaboration involves the achievement of a shared representation of the environment. In fact, C. Goodwin (1995) shows that cooperative work on an oceanographic research vessel can occur through differently positioned participants attending to different technological representations of the same thing.

The physical environment itself is not merely a static context for the performance of collaborative action. Rather, as with other aspects of context (e.g., Duranti & Goodwin, 1992), conceptions of ‘space’ are selectively made relevant and thus constituted through language and interaction (Keating, 2003). Suchman (1996), in her analysis of an occurrence of routine trouble in an airline operations room (described above), shows that physical space—i.e., a “workspace”—is not pregiven but is rather interactionally constituted to suit the demands of the current moment. In the same setting, C. Goodwin (1996a) and C. Goodwin and Goodwin (1996), reveal the complex

array of actions and representations that must be brought into juxtaposition just to “see” an object in the work environment (e.g., an airplane) appropriately for task purposes.

It may be evident from the brief survey I have provided, but it is worth highlighting, that increased attention to embodied action, tools and the physical surround has not for the most part meant examining and classifying any particular “semiotic field” (C. Goodwin, 2000) in isolation from the others. Rather, the activity is taken as the central unit of analysis and various modalities are examined in terms of how they contribute to its construction (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992).

Roth (2004), for instance, focuses on how “perceptual gestalts” are utilized in coordinated work – these are ways of seeing, and thereby classifying, aspects of the material surround that “resist verbal and gestural articulation” (p. 1040) and are therefore relatively autonomous from other modalities. (Examples from his data gathered at a salmon hatchery include the visual cues that workers use to determine when coho salmon fry are too small to be marked or when a pond of fish is ready to be released from the hatchery.) Still, he argues that perceptual gestalts must be analyzed in terms of how and whether they combine with words and gestures.

In some cases, it is in fact the central aim of the research to examine how multiple modalities are brought into alignment with one another in the process of coordinated work activity (Ford, 1999; C. Goodwin, 2000; Streeck & Kallmeyer, 2001). These studies build on a rich tradition of research in embodied interaction that has challenged the binary categorization of communicative acts into “verbal” and “nonverbal” by demonstrating how spoken language and other modalities are jointly employed in the

production of utterances (Kendon, 2004; Schegloff, 1984; Streeck, 1993; Streeck & Knapp, 1992).

My investigation of interaction among caregivers and preverbal children in the childcare center clearly must take into account modalities other than language. The built environment of the daycare classroom, prosodic and rhythmic routines (ranging from “baby talk” to nursery rhymes to songs), formulaic and improvised gestures, gaze and body positioning are all considered in terms of how they contribute to the activities underway. Language use is central to my analysis in that I focus on specific practices of speaking to children; however, talk is seen as only one of the multiple simultaneous means by which communicative action is accomplished. I benefit from earlier studies that made it their purpose to establish the multimodal character of human communication in that I, and others of my scholarly “generation,” can re-focus on the activities in the service of which such multiple modalities are being mobilized (see C. Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992).

I have reviewed some of the theoretical issues on which studies of collaborative work can shed light. To these arguments might be added one that picks up on Charles Goodwin’s use of the term “primordial” in the quotation at the beginning of this section: coordination of action towards a common purpose was likely the principal context in which language evolved (Donald, 1991; Tomasello, 1999). Thus, when we investigate the interaction of people engaged in a task together, we are looking at a central form of human experience, perhaps even more so than face-to-face interpersonal conversation. From this evolutionary perspective the lack of research on childcare as collaborative

work—without doubt an early context of human sociality—seems a particularly glaring absence.

Having mounted an argument for the theoretical significance of research on collaboration at work, I would now like to focus on some key insights that have been gained from such studies—key in terms of their relevance for my project. First I will discuss two ways of thinking about the organization of persons (and other actors) at work: communities of practices and ecologies of cognition. I will then expand on the concept of situation awareness (already touched on in the studies above) as one of central relevance for my project. Finally, I raise questions about who (and what) can be considered to be a participant in such collaborative systems.

## 2.2. COLLECTIVITIES: COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND SYSTEMS OF DISTRIBUTED COGNITION

Within the literature on coordinated action at work, a few researchers have gone beyond descriptions of particular forms of collaboration and worked out detailed models of the collective structures within which collaboration happens. *Communities of practice* and *systems of distributed cognition* are two complementary ways of describing these configurations of actors united by common purposes. These concepts arose side by side: both are influenced by Lev Vygotsky's ideas about language, thought and social interaction and are committed to locating cognition not partially but wholly within social worlds.

Communities of practice are groups defined by their shared pursuit of a common purpose (Wenger, 1998). As such, some may be formal groups explicitly labeled by their

members (e.g., Girl Scouts of America), but most are informal and unnamed (e.g., families, donut shop co-workers, congregants at dog parks). The insight of this concept comes not just from understanding communities as defined by practice, but also from understanding practices as situated within communities.

The concept of practice connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself.

It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. ... Such a concept of practice includes both the explicit and the tacit. It includes what is said and what is left unsaid; what is represented and what is assumed. It includes the language, the tools, the documents, the images, the symbols, the well-defined roles, the specified criteria, the codified procedures, the regulations, and the contracts that various practices make explicit for a variety of purposes. But it also includes all the implicit relations, the tacit conventions, the subtle cues, the untold rules of thumb, the recognizable intuitions, the specific perceptions, the well-tuned sensitivities, the embodied understandings, the underlying assumptions, the shared worldviews, which may never be articulated, though they are unmistakable signs of membership in communities of practice and are crucial to the success of their enterprises. (Wenger, 1998, p. 47)

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) introduce the concept of communities of practice in order to explore how learning is accomplished within such communities through apprenticeship, which they label “legitimate peripheral participation.” They show

how novices begin by engaging in simple tasks that are nonetheless important for the overall accomplishment of the work and gradually take over more central tasks. Learning is guided not by authoritative pedagogy but by the “embodied telos” of becoming “a master such as those” (p. 85).

Research on socially distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1991, 1995; Weick & Roberts, 1993) is also characterized by its location of cognitive events within social interaction. In this approach thinking is understood to be a function of complex systems that include multiple persons as well as the artifacts that groups use to do their work.

The foundational text in distributed cognition is Edwin Hutchins’ 1995 book *Cognition in the Wild*. In this ethnography of team navigation on a large ship, Hutchins treats the group, along with its artifacts and practices, as the unit of analysis. He focuses on the ways in which computational tasks are distributed across the different members of a team, as well as technologies that incorporate the knowledge of previous generations of navigators. While Hutchins’ approach departs in many ways from the mainstream of cognitive science, he retains its notion of cognition as computation. He sets out to describe navigation as “computation realized through the creation, transformation and propagation of representational states” (p. 49). Hutchins clarifies that solving a problem is essentially the process of manipulating its representation such that the answer to the problem becomes transparent. Thus, computation involves gathering, arranging and transmitting representations, such that information becomes available to the person who needs it in a form that can be readily understood and acted upon. Computation does not

take place within individual minds but within cognitive systems – individual minds in their interaction with environment, artifacts, and other people.

Weick and Roberts (1993) similarly describe the collective intelligence exhibited by high-reliability organizations (such as an aircraft carrier) as the product of “heedful interrelating.” Cooren (2004) applies this concept to the turn-by-turn analysis of meeting interactions, arguing that socially distributed cognition is also evident in such mundane contexts (and adopts the term “collective minding” in order to highlight its processual aspects). This concept is gaining currency in contemporary organizational communication theory as a way of connecting micro-moments of organizational life to organizations as larger structures (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999; Taylor, 1999; Taylor & Van Every, 2000).

### **2.2.1. Situation Awareness**

In order for communities of practice to function as learning environments, they must exhibit the property of “transparency” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 103). In other words, it is not enough for novices to engage in important but peripheral “grunt work,” they must also have access (visual or otherwise) to experts on which they can model their growing proficiency.

Hutchins calls the “outer boundary of the portion of the task that can be seen by each team member ... that person’s *horizon of observation*.” (1995, p. 268). Hutchins describes this as being not just a function of the environment – that it is possible to see and hear other people – but also of the tools used. “The design of tools can affect their suitability for joint use or for demonstration and may thereby constrain the possibility for

knowledge acquisition” (p. 270). “Open tools” are those that afford to co-present others the ability to see how they are being used to solve a problem. Hutchins discusses the horizon of observation in the context of error detection and learning. When workers have open access to one another’s tasks, this increases the likelihood that errors will be detected. Furthermore, having errors detected and corrected “in public” provides a tacit learning experience for all present.

This feature of collaborative work environments is often called *situation awareness* (Adams *et al.*, 1995; Norman, 1993). It is also referred to as peripheral awareness because individuals typically remain focused on a primary activity while simultaneously maintaining awareness of other goings-on (Heath & Luff, 2000). In some cases, this may literally depend upon the ability to see others’ actions in peripheral vision.

As described above, Hutchins conceives of situation awareness in terms of how it is afforded by the tools used or the work environment. The daycare setting provides a simple example of this. The rooms in the childcare center I studied were furnished so as to allow maximum visibility. Large furniture is kept to the sides of the room, barriers between sections of the room are low, and diaper-changing tables are placed to allow caregivers visual access to the rest of the room while changing the diaper of one child. The primary purpose of this is to ensure that children cannot escape the caregivers’ gaze. However, it also makes visible the other caregiver and his or her interactions with the children, thus facilitating caregivers’ coordination of actions.

Seeing situation awareness as an affordance shifts the locus of perceiving and knowing from the individual mind to the interaction between an individual and the

material world, thus bringing to light the ways in which it is aided or impeded by the design of particular artifacts and spaces (Norman, 1993). However, situation awareness should not be construed as a static property of particular technologies or environments, but rather as an accomplishment of human actors (C. Heath & Luff, 2000; Neville, 2004).

For example, employees in the control rooms of the London Underground must organize their work with respect to the demands of collaborating with others (Heath & Luff, 1996; 2000, ch. 4). “Individuals are assumed to have an ability to monitor aspects of the physical and behavioural environment outside the focus or direct line of their regard” (Heath & Luff, 2000, p. 90). The authors argue that awareness should be seen as an interactional achievement, as opposed to an ability possessed by human beings and either promoted or blocked by environmental conditions. Specifically, they show that the workers at the London Underground not only have to attend to the activities of others, but also systematically make visible their own activities, actively working toward both their own and others’ peripheral awareness.

While labels for situation awareness tend to highlight the visual, it can also be achieved through the auditory modality, whether vocal or nonvocal. (One can imagine that it could also occur through other senses such as smell and touch (e.g., vibration), but I am not aware of studies that show this.) Heath and Luff (2000, ch. 3) show how news editors for Reuters who seem to be, and for the most part are, working individually at their computers also manage to share information about the stories they are editing with others who may need it. An ongoing problem is presented by the fact that stories appear to individual editors on screens that cannot be easily viewed by anyone else in the room,

yet other editors may also need to know about such stories. Rather than developing a high-tech solution for this problem, the editors do this sharing work through informal interactional means. Specifically, information about stories is conveyed in a “light-hearted” manner – in the form of jokes, comments, and quips about the story. Occasionally, an editor simply “gives voice to” some part of the story (p. 73). This strategy makes the information available to other editors without demanding an immediate response. This is an enormous advantage in a situation in which all employees are working under tight deadlines and may resent an interruption or direct approach that forces them to consider and respond to the information they are being presented with. Frequently, such a comment will be met with only minimal uptake at the time it is issued but some time later (seconds, minute or even hours) another editor will seek additional information about it. This means of informally handling the situation has advantages that would be difficult to build into a technological solution.

My preliminary analysis of the daycare reveals that situation awareness is achieved through both visual and vocal/auditory means. In particular, I will demonstrate that caregivers’ interactions with children in the room can serve the purpose of making audible states of affairs to co-present others. The means by which this is accomplished will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 below.

### **2.2.2. Modes of Participation in Collaborative Systems**

A central element of Hutchins’ 1995 cognitive ethnography consists of describing how the task activities of individual members of the navigational team are coordinated in the performance of the overall job of establishing the position of the ship (the “fix

cycle”). While the assignment of component tasks may occasionally be emergent and ad hoc, it is usually determined by aspects of social structure that are already set (such as the formal military hierarchy). However, while attention is given to social and interactional connections between human beings within the cognitive ecology, there is *in principle* no difference between human and artifactual nodes in the system. After all, tools are the sedimented result of many years of human work; thus they display a certain agency tied to their designed-in affordances for purposeful use within the sanctioned activity. While some have criticized this aspect of distributed cognition as dehumanizing (Nardi, 1996) it follows naturally from a reconceptualization of cognition as located as neither in human nor object, but in the system as a whole.

It is unclear, however, how to conceive of participants who are in fact human but who, unlike the tools designed to accomplish some part of the fix cycle, may be less than fully competent, knowledgeable, or oriented to the common goal. The children in the daycare I examine seem to be more analogous to the wind and the tides than any part of the navigational system Hutchins describes. And yet children are central participants in the interactions through which caregivers accomplish their work. It may be that the difficulty of theorizing the role of such parties accounts for the fact that distributed cognition and related ways of thinking about workplace collaboration have yet to be utilized to any great extent to study such sites in which some participants in the activity are not a part of the goal-oriented team. An exception is M.H. Goodwin (1996), who describes how gate agents in a frontstage environment (Goffman, 1959) use elliptical language to create a backstage for their collaborative work. Hindmarsh and Pilnick

(2002) analyze a similar phenomenon in more detail; they look at the means by which an anesthesia team brings off a seamless cooperative performance in the presence of a patient (described in more detail below). In both of these studies, however, the client is treated as outside of the system of collaborative work. Describing the system of collaborative work operating within a childcare center, on the other hand, demands that the role of the children be taken into consideration. In the following chapter, I survey research that will ground my investigation of this very question: What role do children play in the collaborative accomplishment of childcare?

### **Chapter 3. Children in Systems of Coordinated Activity**

In this chapter, I survey research that will provide a framework for understanding the ways in which children can participate in the activities that constitute the *raison d'être* of a daycare center: caring for children.

#### 3.1. CHILDREN AS RESOURCES FOR ACTION

One way in which children play a role in the collaborative work of the daycare is as a means of mediating adult interaction. In the discussion of situation awareness in Chapter 2, it was noted that a way of implicitly providing information about one's activities to co-present others is through the production of utterances that can be overheard by them (e.g., comments and quips designed uttered in reaction to a story that can be heard by other news editors (Heath & Luff, 2000)). In the case of the news editors, the utterances were spoken "into the air" – to no addressee in particular. However, when an utterance is addressed to a particular other, but that party is not capable of responding to (or perhaps even understanding) the utterance so directed, this may serve as an invitation to others present to hear the utterance as in some sense intended for them.

Young children are particularly likely to serve in such a role. Pets seem to provide this interactional resource, as well. Research on the use of pets as mediational objects in adult conversations provide an extreme case in which it is relatively clear that communication with co-present humans, rather than the pets themselves, is the primary

function of the talk.<sup>7</sup> Some studies that look at the ways in which pets can serve as resources in conversation are reviewed below; the picture is then complicated when we look at research on the ways in which infants and children are similarly used. The insights gained from these studies ground my investigation of how interaction with children facilitates collaborative work among childcare workers.

Talk to children and talk to pets are often thought to be similar. In fact, talk to pets and other non-competent interactants (other than infants) has been called “secondary baby talk” (Ferguson, 1977). Mitchell (2001), however, found significant differences between utterances addressed to pets and to children. He points out that the commonalities (such as the use of simple, action oriented lexical items; pitch fluctuations; and short utterances) all have to do with the requirements of communication with an addressee who has limited capabilities of concentration and understanding. The differences (for example, tutoring is absent in talk to dogs and there is little effort to maintain a pretense that the other is a competent interactant) “have to do with the future position of infants as conversants—a position no one expects dogs to attain.” (p. 204). As noted in the discussion of meaning as embedded in activity above, different ways of speaking have to be considered in terms of the particularities of the interactional structures within which they are employed, which include crucially the qualities and potentialities that we assign to different types of recipient.

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<sup>7</sup> But see Laurer, Maze and Lundin (n.d.) and Horowitz (2002) for discussions of communication between dogs and humans and among dogs. It is not entirely safe to assume that talk addressed to pets is not in fact intended to communicate with the pets. Indeed, it is likely that exploiting this possibility is precisely what makes talk to pets and infants attractive as an interactional strategy.

Tannen (2004) examines instances of what might be called "speaking through" pets. She studies the ways in which treating the pet as a participant in the interaction serves as a resource for family members' communication with one another. Tannen refers to this as "ventriloquizing"; although she defines this term more narrowly as "the discursive strategy by which a participant speaks in the voice of a nonverbal third party in the presence of that party" (p. 402; see also Tannen, 2003), her examples of this phenomenon also include cases in which a family member speaks in her own voice but addresses her utterance to a dog as though it were a competent interactant. Precise identification of the role taken by the speaker is not Tannen's focus; rather she is interested in what is achieved by using the dog as an interactional resource. She culls from her data (self-recorded audio tapes from two middle class families with children and pet dogs) several examples in which family members use talk to the dogs to achieve interpersonal ends, e.g., buffering criticism and complaints, occasioning apologies, introducing humor, as well as enacting a construction of the family in which the pet is a central member. She sees this as a valuable strategy because "talking through pets allows speakers to distance themselves figuratively from their own utterances." (p. 417).

Roberts' (2004) study of talk to pets in a veterinary clinic is of greater relevance here due to its location within a place of work and an interactional analysis that yields greater insights as to why speaking to pets should be a useful resource for interactants. Roberts distinguishes between talk directed at pets and on behalf of pets (in the animal's "voice," p. 421), and finds talk to pets is used to serve both task-specific actions and more general interactional functions. For example, it is used to bring up problems with the

client's caretaking, to diffuse tension during a difficult exam, to display expertise and professional knowledge, as well to enter into interaction and deny the need for an apology.

Roberts points out that a particular interactional affordance of utterances to pets is that they make possible a response from other participants but do not require it. "The fascinating duality of pet (or infant or toy) directed talk is that the owner/guardian can either take up such talk on the "recipient's" behalf *because* it is incapable of providing some information (e.g., when a dog "is asked" its name) or the owner can reasonably disattend the animal directed talk because in fact, it is the pet that is being addressed." (p. 423). Note the commonality here with the comments and quips made by Reuters news editors (C. Heath & Luff, 2000). There, however, the display of information without corresponding requirement of interactional engagement served to save time and preserve workers' focus; here it seems to serve interpersonal functions, primarily avoiding conflict.

Both Tannen and Roberts (Tannen in a footnote, Roberts as a "brief aside," p. 423) note that we cannot assume that communication with an intended overhearer (or "target" (Levinson, 1988)) is the only function of talk to pets—there may be other benefits to either the pets or the speaking humans. In these articles, however, the pets are treated purely as mediational objects. This clearly differentiates talk to pets from talk to children, even very young infants. The multifunctionality Tannen and Roberts suggest as a possibility in talk to pets must be considered always a reality in talk to children, particularly in American culture (and even more particularly in the daycare setting).

Among middle class Americans, it is overwhelmingly expected that caregivers address children as interactants and interpret their actions as attempts at communication (which often means voicing utterances for them) (Ochs, 1992; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). These language socialization practices are supported in scientific discourse addressed to laypersons (especially parents) as being important for children's language acquisition (e.g., Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2000; Gopnik *et al.*, 1999).<sup>8</sup> Further, these ways of speaking, sometimes termed "responsive interaction style," are advocated and even specifically taught to professional caregivers (Warren, 2000). Therefore, even when an utterance to a child in daycare seems to serve no discernible local purpose, it still must be regarded as an instantiation of a global mandate to interact in an active way with children. Of course, it is still possible to examine the local factors that influence how and when children are spoken to, as I do in the daycare setting. As I investigate the sequential implications and systemic functions of such talk to children in the context of childcare, it is important to recognize that it also has a different type of purposefulness due its place in a cultural ideology of language socialization.

A related complicating feature of to talk to children (versus pets) is that children gradually become capable of understanding and responding to the utterances addressed to them. None of this means that talk to children cannot serve the purpose of communicating with overhearers; it does however mean that this function must be

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<sup>8</sup> As discussed above, the necessity of such practices for language acquisition is cast into doubt because of their lack of universality (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). They do, however, appear to be key in socializing children into certain interactional patterns important for success in later life, particular within educational settings (S. B. Heath, 1983).

contextualized within a complex array of other possible functions. Further, it requires considering the ways in which children may become active participants in these interactions. For my research, this has important implications when considering how children of different ages are employed as resources for caregivers' collaborative work.

Tannen (2003), in a chapter based on the corpus of data described earlier, examines exchanges in which adults "ventriloquize" both dogs and children. Tannen uses these to advance her thesis that power and solidarity work in tandem and that asymmetries can result from gender differences in interactional style. Though she remains, for the most part, focused on how children function as a resource for interaction among adults, the examples and her analysis reveal the complexity to which I referred above.

For example, Tannen describes an interaction among a mother, father and two-year-old daughter. When the father (Sam) comes home, the daughter (Sophie) enthusiastically greets him and tries to climb in his lap. Sam, however, is tired and snaps at Sophie, at which point Sophie begins to cry and continues to do so despite Sam's attempts to soothe her. The mother (Kathy) says:

- (4) Kathy: She got her feelings hurt.  
 . . .  
 I think she just wanted  
 some Daddy's attention.  
 You were missing Daddy today, weren't you  
 You were missing Daddy, weren't you?  
 Can you say,  
**"I was just missing you Daddy,  
 that was all?"**  
 Sophie: [*cries*] Nnno.  
 Kathy: And I don't really feel too good.  
 Sophie: [*cries*] No.  
 Kathy: No, she doesn't feel too good either.

Tannen notes that Kathy's talk serves to indirectly criticize the father and to align with Sophie. At the same time, Kathy "explains Sophie's own feelings to her and suggests how she might, when she learns to talk, use words rather than tears to express those feelings and get her way." (p. 59). This socializing function depends upon Sophie's being able to understand, at least to some degree, the words that her mother addresses to her.

Tannen does not discuss the fact that Sophie is in fact an active participant in the conversation in which she gets ventriloquized. On the whole, Kathy is engaged in providing an account for her daughter's ongoing conduct (crying). But Sophie also participates in this endeavor, by interspersing cries of "No" between her mother's utterances. Thus a child capable of social action produces responses that can themselves serve as interactional resources (or can potentially disrupt an adult's attempt to "use" the child in a particular way). Here, Sophie's cries of "no" could be taken to negate the account that her mother is constructing, but Kathy does not construe them that way. Rather, she responds to them with negatively phrased constructions to which the child's

“no” can then be retrospectively cast as agreement. Note in particular the recycle of Sophie’s “no” in the last line, which frames it as negative concord with the proposition “she doesn’t feel too good.”

One practice of ‘speaking through children’ that makes decided use of older children’s ability to act and respond are Navajo “triadic directives” (Field, 2001). These are comparable to the prompting strategies Ochs & Schieffelin (1984) claim are typical of Samoan and Kaluli caregivers: rather than issuing a directive to a child, an adult tells an older child to issue it. For example, when a child falls down on the playground, the teacher says to another child, “Kenny, help her. Help her up ... Tell her ‘be tough.’” (p. 256). As I have argued is necessary for any analysis of ‘speaking to’ children in Western society, Fields shows how this strategy is embedded in both particular situations and larger cultural beliefs about authority, self-determinacy and responsibility.

Scollon (2001), in a study of how two infants develop competency in the social practice of “handing” (or object transfer), specifically considers how children’s developing agency figures into the way they are talked to and talked about by adults. He lays out a typology of footings adult speakers can take with respect to infants through the use of baby talk.

- WI [Without baby talk]. Talk that is irrelevant to the baby – marked by ‘baseline’ features. In a sense all talk is this, but it is only an alignment when it occurs as the marked exception within a conversation centering on the presence of an infant.
- TO Talk to the baby – marked primarily by gaze, body orientation, pronouns and empathy for the infant’s position.
- FO Talk on behalf of the baby, speaking *for* the baby – marked by taking up the point of view of the infant and speaking as if the

utterance is addressed to another present participant (including the speaker her/himself).

- LI Talk like the baby – marked by third person descriptive statements made about the baby or her behavior.
- AB Talk about the baby – marked by third person descriptive statements made about the baby or her behavior.
- AR Talk around the baby – marked by using some features of baby talk but in conversational sequences with other participants.
- TH Talk through the baby – talk between other participants which is marked as being either TO or FO the baby. That is, the baby is a foil to mediate a conversation between other participants. (Scollon, 2001, p. 94)

He claims that within these there is a range of positions between treating the baby entirely as an object (WI, AB and FO) to treating her as a fully competent social actor (TO). From his inspection of longitudinal data—audiotapes made of talk to and around one of the infants between 12-14 months and after 17 months—he finds there to be clear changes in how adults use these forms of baby talk. While in the child’s infancy they fluctuate from moment to moment between treating her as an object (WI) or as a social actor (TO), as the child grows older there are clearer demarcations between WI and TO talk. After 17 months TO talk often received a response from the child (as opposed to a response in the form of FO from another adult). FO talk is rare. He does not discuss how TH talk changes over this period, but it follows from his other observations that when adults speak “through” an older child, they are more likely to do so in a way that involves simultaneously talking “to” that child as a full-fledged social actor.

Of course, this last type of “speaking through” is possible not just in talk to children, but in talk to adults as well, and at least one other study has found it used as a resource for collaboration in the workplace. As mentioned above, Hindmarsh and Pilnick

(2002) investigate the ways in which members of an anesthesia team coordinate their actions in the presence of a patient (who then drifts into unconsciousness and becomes interactionally absent). They find that inexplicit means of coordination are preferred by the team in order to display a sense of effortlessness and expertise to the patient. As such, one of the ways in which they communicate to one another is through talk addressed to the patient. “[T]he practice of telling patients what they are about to experience or what will be done to them simultaneously makes features of an individual’s work visible and available to their colleagues. Thus, the talk to the patient can be used as a resource by colleagues to coordinate their own actions and activities.” (p. 148).

In the daycare that I study, talk to infants and young children similarly serves as a resource for the collaborative work of adult caregivers. In Chapter 5, I lay out some of the ways in which this occurs. Thus, I identify one powerful and pervasive way in which children “participate” in the coordinated activity system of the childcare rooms. We are left, however, with the question of whether children are merely “foils” (Scollon, 2001, p. 94) for communication among adults, or do they participate in the collaborative activity as actors in their own right?

### 3.2. CHILDREN AS PARTICIPANTS IN COORDINATED ACTION

Research on children’s peer interaction has demonstrated the extent to which young children can capably construct joint activities, such as fantasy play (Corsaro, 1986; Sawyer, 1997). Studies such as these demonstrate that by the age of three children are developing sophisticated interactional competencies that rival—in some senses even

surpass—those of adults (see Corsaro’s preface to Sawyer, 1997). Even infants are capable of certain forms of coordinated action (e.g., Bullowa, 1979).

The question most relevant to my investigation, however, is whether children can be seen as active participants in doing the work of the daycare. Addressing it involves considering how children’s actions, along with those of co-participating adults, function within an activity system designed towards a goal that they may not fully understand or be aligned with. It is for insight into this question that I now turn to microethnographic studies of classroom interaction.

### **3.2.1. Microethnographies of Classroom Interaction**

Microethnography (Mehan, 1998; Streeck & Mehus, 2005), also labeled ethnographic microanalysis (Erickson, 1995) and constitutive ethnography (Mehan, 1979), denotes a loose collection of studies and researchers that employ fine-grained sequential analysis (akin to that of conversation analysis (Drew, 2005; Sacks, 1992; Sacks et al., 1974)) to examine interaction as constitutive of particular settings and activities (e.g., classrooms and lessons). Influenced by Gregory Bateson’s natural history approach (McQuown, 1971) and context analysis (Kendon, 1990; Scheflen, 1973), from its inception microethnographic research has used videorecording technology to investigate talk as it is integrated with other modalities, particularly body motion. Early

microethnographic studies focused extensively, though not exclusively, on classroom settings.<sup>9</sup> It is that tradition that I draw from here.

A guiding objective of these studies was to account for asymmetries in educational, and subsequently, occupational achievement along lines of ethnicity and social class. These researchers rejected explanations based on cultural deprivation, inherent intellectual inferiority or poor parenting, and they also questioned whether such inequality should be seen as a form of oppression actively perpetrated by persons in positions of authority in children's lives. Recognizing that teachers were usually well-meaning individuals who sincerely sought to help all the children in their classes,<sup>10</sup> but failed to do so, microethnographers tried to understand how the social practice of schooling itself gave rise to broad social imbalances. This involved looking at both students' and teachers' concerted efforts to deal with the contingencies of the classroom situation (in contrast to earlier studies of classroom interaction that were decidedly teacher-centered such as Flanders (1970) and Sinclair & Coulthard (1975)).

McDermott and Gospodinoff (1979), for example, analyzed interaction in a low level reading group in order to work out a model of how the academic failure of minority children (and the ethnic borders that are drawn between minorities and whites, more generally) is constructed through the arrangement of children's bodies in classrooms. Schoolchildren in the classroom they studied were tracked into three reading groups.

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<sup>9</sup> Those that did not often focused on other educational contexts, such as testing sessions (Cicourel *et al.*, 1974) or counseling interviews (Erickson & Schultz, 1982; Fiksdal, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> The teacher in one major microethnographic study was herself an educational researcher (Cazden, 1976; Mehan, 1979).

McDermott and Gospodinoff show that because the bottom reading group is unable to function independently of the teacher, they spend much of their time waiting for her attention. When they are in this stage they can be interrupted by members of the other reading groups. Furthermore, the bottom reading group members develop means of getting the teacher's attention that disrupt the class and draw punishment from the teacher. This behavior both reinforces the social boundaries between the ethnic groups in the classroom and ensures that the minority children fall behind in their reading skills each year they are in school.

Microanalysis thus reveals that students and teachers jointly achieve classroom activities and the inequalities that arise from them. Obviously, the parties do not derive the same benefit from their efforts. Nor are their actions entirely free; they are, rather, shaped by social, physical and interactional aspects of the environment. This is a situation in which children are "constrained consistently to produce displays ... for which they are immediately rewarded, but in the long run degraded." (McDermott & Roth, 1978, p. 337). It should also be noted that the actions through which students collaborate in their constitution of the classroom are not necessarily compliant ones. In this model, so-called "disruptive" activities are shown to be actually constructive of the classroom as a system of activity. It is, after all, through such behavior that persistent patterns of disciplinary action are put into motion.

Mehan (1979; Mehan, 1997) examined a year of videotapes from educational researcher Courtney Cazden's elementary school classroom. He was initially motivated to look for instances of students' differential treatment, but found himself more interested

in how classroom activities were structured through sequentially and hierarchically organized interactional practices (Mehan, 1998). Specifically, he described as the basic interactional unit the IRE exchange, which consists of teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation. These IRE exchanges make up topically related sets, which in turn make up the lesson. Mehan shows that knowledge of these interactional patterns is necessary both to be a member of the classroom community and to display mastery of curriculum (Mehan, 1979).

Being a competent student is not solely a matter of learning when not to speak and how to respond when called upon. Rather, competent students also learn how to exploit “seams in the fabric of this predominantly teacher-directed activity.” (1997, p. 238). For example, they found that it was possible, when a teacher turned around to write on the board or was otherwise not visually attending to the group, to insert contributions without fitting them into the standard IRE sequence. Mehan also looked at student-run learning situations, allowing him to compare peer interactions with those between teachers and students. While all students engage in roughly similar amounts of inappropriate activity, “good students” appear to be those who are able to fine tune their behavior to the situation – keeping their inappropriate conduct out of the teacher’s gaze (Mehan, 1997). Mehan’s focus throughout is on the deployment of local means for maintaining social order, including teacher’s improvisational strategies for dealing with unexpected situations (i.e., “getting through”) (Mehan, 1979).

A slightly different tack is taken by Frederick Erickson (1982), who claims that “talk among teachers and students in lessons—talk that is not only intelligible but

situationally appropriate and effective—can be seen as the collective improvisation of meaning and social organization from moment to moment.” (Erickson, 1982, p. 153). In other words, while lessons may have a normative structure, nearly all instantiations will deviate from that general model in some way. Erickson sees these discrepancies not as random error, but as variation that is adaptive to the practical contingencies of the moment. He shows how the teacher and one of the students exploit the rhythmic structure of the classroom interaction to construct improvisational moves.

Streeck (1983) examines the peer-teaching interactions videotaped by Mehan and Cazden; the method of analysis, however, is closer to that employed by McDermott and Gospodinoff (1979, discussed above). Specifically, he looks at the ways in which children use talk, gaze, posture and hand movements to constitute a set of social relations, while simultaneously engaging in the instructional activity dictated by the classroom situation. This study reinforces what we know about the sophisticated interactional competencies children employ in the construction of their social worlds; here, however, children’s peer-oriented actions are also constrained by and constitutive of the institutional structure of the classroom within which they are situated.

As such, this study bears a resemblance to many microanalyses of preschool interaction, in that such research tends to focus on smaller groupings that arise in the context of play, as opposed to whole class formations.<sup>11</sup> One exception is provided by Kantor, Elgas and Fernie (1989), who examine a preschool circle time (a focused group

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<sup>11</sup> My study would not fall under the category of preschool microethnography. Although the childcare center I study uses the word ‘preschool’ in its name, the children in the rooms I videotaped were not of preschool age, but were infants and toddlers (24 months and younger). ‘Preschool age’ generally means 3 to 5 years old.

interaction that involves reading stories, singing songs and engaging in conversation).

Kantor et al. are interested in this rather structured event in the lives of young children as a site for the early development of students' interactional and academic competence.

They describe the event in terms of its "social action rules" (p. 438), which dictate how to produce "the look" (physical formation of circle time) and "the sound" (the collaborative conversation that happens within it). The authors support their argument that teachers scaffold children's participation in circle time with video data gathered over three 9-week sessions showing the development of students' competency.

Other preschool microethnographies focus less on the acquisition of rules and more on creative, joint productions of smaller, more ephemeral forms of social organization (as well as joint productions of imaginary worlds). Corsaro (1986), for example, describes how children initiate and join into play routines. Sawyer (1997), like Erickson above, employs the concept of improvisation in his investigation of fantasy play among 3-5 year olds. He draws on the analogy of improvisational comedy, in particular, to look at how these children create scenes using one another's utterances. Each child acts on the entailments of previous utterances to create something larger that he calls "the emergent" (from G.H. Mead). Danby and Baker (2000) look at the construction of social order among little boys in the chaotic environment of a preschool "block area," unraveling it by examining segments from the perspectives of multiple participants. They find that "[f]or these people in the block area in free-play time at preschool, there seems to be no normal or base-line state of play to which they revert, or stable individual positions that they can merely assume. ... While the elements of the play routine can remain the same, the

individual positions of power are never safe and can never be taken for granted by the participants. ... Social orders are always in the process of being constructed and maintained.” (p. 139).

Thus, a central theme of microethnographies of both elementary classrooms and preschools is children’s active collaboration in activities and the constitution of social structures. With regard to the preschool ethnographies, it is not always clear in what ways children’s engagements in immediate arenas of concern contribute to the working of the preschool room as a whole (undoubtedly they do, but the link is not made). In other words, to what extent are teachers and children engaged in the same project?

### **3.2.2. Modes of Participation Among Infants and Toddlers**

While my intent in this study is not to document children’s development, different levels of competency must be taken into consideration in thinking about how children participate in the activities of the daycare. The children I videotaped were between 3-24 months, and thus can all be classified as “preverbal.” By labeling them “preverbal” I mean that none was producing long streams of intelligible talk or participating in multi-turn conversations; there is, of course, a great deal of variation in the degree of linguistic competency between young infants and toddlers (as well as a great deal of individual variation between children of similar ages). While it is primarily preverbal children who are “spoken through” in the studies cited in Section 3.1 above, the degree of competency they have (or more precisely, that other participants construe them as having) affects the way in which such mediation works (as discussed above). It also affects the way in which they can be said to be participants or collaborators in the larger activity. At the

same time, their competency is not an objectively existing fact, but is always subject to construction (by adults) and negotiation (between children and adults or among peers) (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998). In what follows, I review some research that shows the ways in which very young children participate actively in collaborative activities with others.

Research on interaction between mothers and children has shown that even very young infants coordinate their actions with the rhythmic structure of their mothers' talk and actions (Bateson, 1993; Bullowa & McGlannan, 1979). Infants orient to human faces, demonstrating much of the coordination of gaze direction with their interlocutors that is typical of adult interaction (Bullowa & McGlannan, 1979). According to Condon and Sander (1974) frame-by-frame analyses of neonates' movements show synchronization with adult speech, and thus at birth infants immediately become participants in a "complex interactional 'system'" (p. 461).<sup>12</sup> Infants are highly sensitive to rhythms of repetition and to others' efforts to time their responses to infants' actions and vocalizations (Stern, 2000; Trevarthen, 2003).

These proto-conversations in early infancy are like games, but informal ones. By the second half of the first year of life, children are able to actively take part in more conventional games (e.g., peekaboo, patty cake, and pointing and naming). This means that they produce actions that are appropriate for a particular role within the activity. These games, then, are joint constructions of caregivers and infants (Camioni, 1986).

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<sup>12</sup> These findings have been questioned by Dowd & Tronick (1986), who, using a different method, did not find evidence of synchronization between newborn infants' movements and phoneme boundaries in adult speech. They acknowledge, however, that other forms of coordination are evident.

Jones and Zimmerman (2003) look at how 12-month old children accomplish intentional actions with the help of caregivers. Specifically, they examine interactional sequences in which a child's pointing gesture sets off a caregiver's attempt to locate the object at which the child is pointing, and thus the purpose of the point. They argue that the caregiver and child jointly construct the child's intentionality. This paper is a contribution to research in situated and socially distributed cognition described earlier in that an aspect of mind usually treated as a private mental affair is located in the public, interactional domain.

Budwig, Strage and Bamberg (1986) examine the ways in which children transition during toddlerhood into being able to sustain joint play. This is a sophisticated form of peer interaction where children engage in relatively elaborated joint activities. They show how children learn how to initiate, join into and sustain such activities. Caregivers provide explicit scaffolding, but children also gradually become aware of their common base of knowledge (and aware of what knowledge is not shared) and use this to take the perspective of the other into account during play. As this happens, caregivers reduce scaffolding actions.

While this ability to cooperatively engage in extended play sessions may develop with adult assistance after the age of two, other research indicates that even younger children engage in certain kinds of social activities with peers. For example, Lerner and Zimmerman (2003) examine sequences in which preverbal children "trick" others (or attempt to) through their actions. In one case a little girl offers a toy, then withdraws it; in another a little boy throws a hammer into a basket in an attempt to get another child to

relinquish hers (he fails in this). They argue that these instances demonstrate that very young children are able to understand how their actions will be recognized by others, "thus revealing an orientation to their own body behavior as social action" (p. 456). Kidwell (2003) similarly finds emerging social awareness in the actions of infants and toddlers. She focuses on the ways in which children avoid caregiver interventions by carefully monitoring caregivers for shifts in their attentional focus (i.e., "looking to see if someone is looking at you").

Note, however, that the agentive actions these children engage in are small-scale and in line with their own local purposes, rather than the grander schemes of adults. Left unclear is the extent to which these interactional competencies of children contribute to the accomplishment of childcare—the overarching goal with respect to which the activities of the childcare classroom are organized.

## Chapter 4. Microethnography of a Daycare

This study is based upon 25 hours of videotaped interaction in two infant and two toddler rooms of a child care center. It is supplemented with interviews of the site director and caregivers, as well as informal observations made over a period of a year and half, during which time my primary role was not that of a researcher, but a parent.

### 4.1. THE ALL ABOARD PRESCHOOL

There are three All Aboard sites, all located in the central metropolitan area of a medium-sized Southwestern city. I conducted my research at the East location. All Aboard is run by a nonprofit organization; in addition to the tuition and fees received from families, the schools are partially funded by the city and county and also receive charitable contributions (e.g., from United Way). Approximately 30% of All Aboard families receive tuition subsidies. The school is also a childcare provider for the state's welfare-to-work program.

According to the school's publications, the first All Aboard preschool resulted from a family's unsuccessful attempt in the 1970s to find a child care program in which they could enroll their two children, one of whom had Down Syndrome and the other of whom was typically developing. The primary goal, then, of All Aboard, and the logic behind its name,<sup>13</sup> is the integration of students of diverse abilities into a single high quality childcare program. Approximately 25% of the children who attend All Aboard are either "developmentally challenged" or "high risk."

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<sup>13</sup> "All Aboard" is a pseudonym, as are the names of all individuals included herein.

All Aboard's commitment to inclusion extends beyond the issue of ability, in both theory and practice. At the time of taping, the East school was racially balanced, with Black, White and Hispanic groups all well represented. (These are the primary ethnic groups in the city where the research was conducted). In addition, I learned from staff that All Aboard strives to be an environment to which same sex couples feel comfortable bringing their children (and I was acquainted with several such families).

This is but part of what makes All Aboard special in the eyes of parents, ex-parents, staff and board members. All Aboard espouses an educational philosophy that emphasizes the development of self-esteem and social skills in the context of play (as opposed to a focus on academics, although pre-literacy skills are certainly attended to at All Aboard in a number of ways). This is a typical philosophy of contemporary childcare and early learning centers, and yet it is treated as something that makes All Aboard special. (For example, the site director claims that All Aboard children are easy to identify when they start at the local elementary school because they have already gained skills at managing social relations and emotions.) Staff also seem to see these ideals as shaping their lived practice of childcare. This perhaps can be seen most clearly in invocations of a named cultural resource: "All Aboard language." All Aboard language was mentioned to me in informal conversations and in all of the interviews I conducted (either without solicitation or in response to questions about specific phrases used). This 'language' is in fact a set of lexical items (words and idiomatic phrases) most of which are preferred alternatives to more standard directives used to get children to cease undesired behaviors. Examples range from phrases that are used widely in the general

population, such as “use your words” (cf. Tannen, 2004), to those that may be unique to All Aboard, such as telling children to “walk away” from inappropriate engagements with objects or other children. Staff say that the use of this language has become habitual and filtered into other aspects of their lives, especially among those who socialize together outside of work. (This is exemplified by an anecdote in which a staff member told a clerk that an ice cream shop’s change of flavors was “not okay.”)

Although ‘preschool’ is a part of its name, All Aboard would generally be classified as a daycare center rather than a preschool (or a combination daycare and preschool). It offers full-time care for children while their primary caregivers are at work; a typical preschool, on the other hand, is attended less than half-time and operates exclusively for the purpose of providing education and enrichment to the children (rather than basic care). All Aboard does provide education as part of its services; this is fairly typical for contemporary daycare centers. Further, All Aboard serves children (infants and toddlers) who have not reached preschool age (3-5 years). The inclusion of ‘preschool’ in the name is in line with a broader contemporary tendency to stress the educational aspects of childcare services.

#### **4.1.1. Physical Environment**

The East location, where I conducted my research, is housed in the Sunday school building of a Methodist church. The preschool has no affiliation with the church, however, and there is no religious content to its curriculum. The preschool uses seven rooms for classrooms and another three for offices and storage. In addition, an out-

building on one of the playgrounds was completed and beginning to be used as a classroom during the period I was videotaping.

Most of the rooms are located on the first floor and are next to one another in a row. They each have windows that face the driveway to the side of the building, a door that opens to a walkway and/or the courtyard and side doors that open into adjoining classroom. These doors both ensure compliance with the fire code and facilitate communication between caregivers in other rooms. Many of the doors are split, allowing caregivers to open the top and poke their heads through to talk without letting the children escape.

The rooms I videotaped were all adjacent to one another at the end of this row. They included the Bumblebee Room (18-24 months), the Guppy Room (2-12 months), the Bunny Room (2-12 months) and the Teddy Room (12-18 months).

The daycare is not a technology-rich environment. In fact, one of its most persistent problems—giving workers bathroom breaks while maintaining teacher-student ratios—could be solved with a simple intercom system, but the school cannot afford this. (And so it is dealt with in other ways: scheduled breaks, cell phone calls to the main office, and of course the side doors through which messages can be relayed. Walkie-talkies were tried at one point but abandoned, although I do not know why.) Despite this, each room was well-equipped with artifacts that make the job of childcare possible. For example, the tools and equipment in one of the baby rooms included:

- a diaper table, waist high with railings to keep the babies from falling off, with wastebasket and wipes nearby and baskets on shelves underneath to hold each child's diapers;
- low shelves that serve as both a barrier and a place for babies to practice pulling themselves up;
- a gate between two of the low shelves, keeping the children from the entry area;
- a low table with tiny chairs;
- a sink, refrigerator, microwave and bottle warmer;
- a higher table;
- cribs and mats;
- a rocking chair;
- bouncy seats;
- many types of toys and books;
- cubbies (shelves with slots for each child);
- floor pad for play area and padded climbing equipment;
- and a fire extinguisher

The room also contained numerous artifacts designed for communication between supervisors, caregivers, children and parents, such as labels and pictures on the walls, announcements and a monthly schedule posted on and near the door, a sign-in sheet on the large table, and daily sheets tacked to a bulletin board (these were forms that caregivers filled out for each child throughout the day indicating diaper changes, what and how much the child ate, and some information about demeanor and activities). In

addition, memos, notes and children's artwork were sometimes placed in the children's cubbies for parents to take home.

The environment was laid out so as to facilitate the childcare work done within it. For example, the low shelves and gate kept the infants in a child-proof area away from the door. It also allowed the workers a relatively child-free area from meal preparation and diaper changing (older infants were allowed into the kitchen area for feeding in groups of no more than three). As described earlier, the diaper changing table was placed so as to give caregivers visual access to the entire room while changing diapers (as well as ensuring that everything needed for the task was within reaching distance).

The room I have described is typical, but each room was slightly different and there were particular differences between the infant rooms and the toddler rooms. The toddler rooms, for instance, had no cribs; toddlers napped on mats or cots. In addition, there were no barriers in the toddler rooms and both had tables at which all children could be seated at once for meals or projects. This gave them a more classroom-like appearance. At the same time, the toddler rooms also included a living room space (with couches and chairs) where circle time was conducted, which the infant rooms did not have.

The children also spent time outside everyday, even during the hot mid-summer weeks when I was videotaping. The toddlers were greeted in the morning by caregivers in a cement courtyard outside the rooms (see diagram above) called "the bicycle area". Across the alley there was a large playground, fenced into two areas. One was used by infants and toddlers up to 18 months; the other was used by toddlers 18-30 months.

Older children used another playground on the other side of the parking lot. Infants were often taken for rides around the church in the “bye-bye buggy,” a well-worn six-seat wagon.

#### **4.1.2. Participants**

The participants in this study include staff, volunteers, children and parents. Most caregivers at the center carry the title of ‘teacher,’ with the exception of a few who are not assigned to a particular room (called ‘floaters’). Each room has a lead teacher, who is primarily responsible for designing the curriculum and coordinating the day’s activities; most also have a co-teacher who assists him or her. However, because the daycare is open from 7:00 to 5:30, longer than a single worker’s shift, there usually is at least one other worker assigned to each room. A typical arrangement would be the lead teacher opening, a co-teacher coming in mid-morning and staying until closing, and another co-teacher (perhaps a floater or part-time employee) coming in when the lead teacher leaves and also staying until closing. In one of the rooms I videotaped (the “Bumblebee Room,” ages 18-24 months), there was only one teacher present at any given time. This was partly because the student-teacher ratio for children this age allowed it; and partly because there was a reliable and knowledgeable volunteer present in that room for half of the day.

This volunteer, addressed by the All Aboard community as “Grandma Cooper,” was part of the foster grandmother program. During the time of my research (summer) all of the rooms I videotaped had a foster grandmother assigned. The other grandmothers were only there for the summer, but Grandma Cooper is there year round. Foster

grandmothers are not technically volunteers; they are paid a small sum for their work, which involves mentoring particular children that they identify as needing additional help. Thus foster grandmothers are not responsible for the primary work of running the preschool classroom. That said, Grandma Cooper often did take on some of those responsibilities (although her role still differed from that of a teacher or floater).

The site director also is a participant in this study. She frequently stopped into the rooms to check on scheduling and deliver snacks. She was the author of the memos and announcements distributed to staff and parents. She left All Aboard approximately one month after I videotaped. I conducted an interview with her at her new work site.

My data also include interactions between caregivers, children and parents. Parents were present primarily when picking up and dropping off their children; although some parents of infants came in to feed their children at mid-day, and other parents stayed to converse with teachers at the end of the day.

The children are central to my analysis. The complexity of accounting for the ways in which they participate has been discussed above. The children are roughly segregated into rooms by age, but within each room there is great variation in terms of their competencies and styles of interacting. As mentioned above, racial groups are represented in this population of children in a balanced way; gender is also fairly balanced. Though I have no details about the social class or economic background of individual children, they appear to be from both working class and middle class families. Though a significant percentage (25%) of the center's children are developmentally disabled or "high risk," these children are not segregated or treated differentially; for the

most part, I do not even know who they were. Where I do, this has not become an issue for the kind of analysis I am conducting.

## 4.2. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In my data gathering strategies I drew from the tradition of microethnography in both its ‘old school’ and ‘new school’ incarnations (Streeck & Mehus, 2005). Thus, my techniques are those used both by earlier microanalyses of classroom interaction (e.g., Erickson, 1977; Mehan, 1979; Streeck, 1983) and more recent microanalyses of workplace talk and embodied action. These include methods used in research conducted under the banner of “workplace studies” (C. Heath & Hindmarsh, 2002; C. Heath & Luff, 2000) and “interaction analysis” (Jordan & Henderson, 1995).

### 4.2.1. Videotaping

Videorecording technology is an essential tool for this research. The microbehaviors investigated (e.g., shifts in gaze, pauses, hand movements, postural shifts) are often so small, fleeting, and taken-for-granted that they go unnoticed by participants and observers in the “real time” of conversation, notwithstanding their importance for the organization of interaction (Streeck, 1983). As an observer, one has an awareness of “what happened” or even “what was said,” but the fine details of “how” an interactional event occurred are not noticed (even if they were, the necessity of attending to the ongoing flow of events would leave no time to write them down.) My particular aim of describing the moment-to-moment experience of caregivers working with children requires recording; it must be possible to slow, and periodically stop, the

activity in progress in order to sort out the way in which one action unfolds from another. Take a simple example of a child obtaining a toy. First viewing of the videotape (similar to what a participant or observer) leaves this impression of events: “The caregiver set the toy telephone down on the table, then the child picked it up.” Viewing the videotape frame-by-frame, however, reveals that the child fixed his gaze on the caregiver when she was taking the toy away from another child, and that he initiated his movement towards the table well before the toy reached it. The chronology of the account is thus altered; the two movement trajectories occur concurrently, and a fine coordination of action is achieved between caregiver and child. (The importance of videotape is indicated in a more obvious way with respect to this incident, in that I did not even notice it when I was present in the room.)

Videotape also provides a form of “replicability” for microanalytic research. Although the experiment can never be run again—the naturally-occurring moment of interaction cannot be recreated—videotape allows it to be shared with other members of the academic community. This offers both a source of insight and a check on idiosyncratic readings of the data (Heath & Hindmarsh, 2002).

I began the videorecording process in July of 2004, after discussing my project with the director, site director and other staff at All Aboard, explaining the project in a note to the parents, and obtaining written consent from all staff at the center and parents of the children in the rooms I would videotape. Over a two-week period I videotaped at the center as often as I was able. I moved between the four rooms, videotaping for approximately two days in each. I attempted to capture different caregiver teams.

Whenever possible, I attempted to capture a “day in the life” of a room. This was not always possible, as there were a few children for whom I was not able to obtain parental consent for videotaping and therefore had to avoid; I also had to avoid activities in which the classes mixed with classes for whom I had not obtained consent. I generally did not videotape during naptimes (although this was difficult in the infant rooms, due to their frequency). At the end of two weeks I had approximately 25 hours of videotaped interactions between caregivers, supervisors, children and parents.

I found that the layout of the rooms and the need to stay out of the way of young children and caregivers constrained the possibilities for videotaping. For the most part, it was necessary for me to stay near the camera in order to prevent inquiring hands from damaging the equipment or endangering themselves. This meant that I could not set up the camera and leave the scene (as advocated by Heath & Hindmarsh (2002) as a way of minimizing the researcher’s effect on the participants). It also meant that I could not set up two cameras. This was a real problem in an environment characterized by multi-focused interaction, in that I frequently could not capture all participants relevant to an interaction on camera. (Obtaining a wide-angle lens, however, helped me capture more of the room within the video frame.) As such, there are instances in which my analysis will be limited because of these constraints. For the most part, this does not mean that analysis cannot proceed. In these cases, I will specify what it is possible for me to claim and what it is not along with my justifications for making this determination. (See Kidwell (2003) for a similar way of dealing with these problems of videotaping in a childcare center).

Researchers must always consider the possibility that the presence of the video camera may have led participants to alter their behavior. Here, this concern is lessened to some extent by the fact that the childcare center has an open door policy—parents and other observers are present with some frequency and caregivers are accustomed to this. This does not mean, however, that caregivers are not sensitive to the specific configuration of parties present in any particular moment of interaction—to claim that they are not would belie the substance of my analysis. In addition, being observed had a special significance at the time of my videotaping as they were preparing to be evaluated for accreditation by the NAEYC. (This occurred during the month after I finished videotaping.) While I had made sure to speak individually to all of the teachers I would videotape and explain my purposes to them, the site director had also sent out well meaning requests for the teachers to “cooperate” with me, which may have caused them to identify my purposes as serving her (the site director) or the management more generally. There are instances in which caregivers lower their voices and it does seem that they are attempting to evade detection by the microphone. The children also were aware of my presence and occasionally initiated interaction with me or attempted to play with the equipment.

On the other hand, it is generally the case that people become less conscious of the presence of a camera over time, and the participants in this setting were no exception. It is a busy environment: both the teachers and the children have pressing interests and demands on their attention and are not likely to focus on the camera for long.

Since it is not possible to control for the presence of the camera, I endeavor to be sensitive to the possibility of its influence and account for it in my analysis. Usually, it can be demonstrated empirically whether or not participants are orienting to the presence of a researcher (using the same methods of interaction analysis that allow us to see how participants orient to other aspects of their environment). The purposes of my research make a difference here, as well. The influence of an observer is a much greater problem for research that investigates behaviors that are regarded to be within the conscious control of the subjects, especially measures of “quality” of which research subjects are likely to be aware. Even if my data consisted primarily of caregivers “on their best behavior,” which is exceedingly unlikely, this would not invalidate my research. They are still drawing from their repertoire of possible ways of interacting with children. Either way, what we get is a partial picture of how caregivers in this site interact with children and one another; it is my responsibility as a researcher to present an argument for the significance of the particular picture my analysis displays. Finally, since my purpose is not to make an argument about the distribution of practices—selection in this type of study is not random in the first place—it does not necessarily present a problem if the caregivers do more or less of some practice than they would if not being videotaped.

#### **4.2.2. Fieldwork: Observation and Interviews**

One of the ways microethnography differs from conversation analysis, which is also grounded in the fine-grained, sequential analysis of how action unfolds in conversation, is the centrality accorded by microethnographers to aspects of bodily communication such as gaze, gesture, postural configurations and interactions with

artifacts and the built environment. However, while attention to embodied action is not typical of conversation analytic research across the board, it is not in principle a deviation from its tenets (see Lerner & Zimmerman, 2003; Sacks & Schegloff, 2002; Schegloff, 1984). A more important distinction is the focus in microethnography on case studies rather than collections of instances from multiple interactions (Streeck & Mehus, 2005). Microethnographers seek not just to describe interactional practices, but also how particular situated activities, indeed situations, are constituted through interaction by participants.

As such, the more traditional forms of ethnographic fieldwork (observation and interviewing) can be useful tools in addition to videorecording (Heath & Hindmarsh, 2002; Jordan & Henderson, 1996). Goodwin (2000) notes that extensive fieldwork is often necessary when studying workplace conduct in order to gain an understanding of opaque technology and practices. In my fieldwork I did not encounter the sense (that Goodwin describes) of being in an unfamiliar and incomprehensible environment; rather fieldwork served the purpose of ensuring that aspects of the environment and community members' behavior that seemed transparent were not in fact misunderstood. My fieldwork was largely informal; my greatest source of information was doubtlessly the experience I had already gained as the parent of a child at the school. This experience included dropping off and picking up my child, attending school events, occasionally staying to observe class activities (e.g., when my daughter moved to a new classroom I would often stay for a while in the new room to ease her transition), sitting in the room while nursing at mid-day, and so on. I draw on ethnographic methods to a greater extent

than do some microethnographers, particularly that of participant-observation. I do not hesitate to use my intuitions as a peripheral member of this community to provide direction or enhance my analyses. This is balanced, however, by a microanalytic methodology in which claims about the interaction are rigorously grounded in their demonstrable relevance to participants (Heritage, 1984b, ch. 8).

I also made more formal observations during the time I was videotaping. Jordan and Henderson (1996) note the utility of taking field notes while videotaping in order to mark interactions that may be of interest for further analysis and to note aspects of the environment that might prevent erroneous interpretations of the videotape (for example, what participants are gazing at off-camera). In general, I had the video camera on a tripod and was thus able to simultaneously take field notes. When on the playground or in the courtyard, the camera was handheld, and I could not take notes. (There were also times that I experimented with holding the camera in the rooms, in order to try to move around and better capture the interactions.) My notes included both descriptions of the events that occurred while I was taping (e.g., snacks, lunch-time, pick ups and drop offs), as well as preliminary observations about the interaction. I used them to compile a videotape log with information about the participants and events captured within each hour of videotape.

Another source of data were interviews conducted with the site director and four teachers. These all took place several months after the videotapes were made. The purpose of the interviews was twofold: first, to obtain workers' perspectives on working at All Aboard and on the profession more generally; and second, to ask workers to reflect

on more specific classroom experiences. Because I had already begun the process of data analysis (as described below) I was able to ask fairly targeted questions about particular work practices or events. Two of these interviews included viewing sessions (Erickson & Schultz, 1982), in which I showed a segment of video in which I was interested (approximately three minutes long in each case) and asked the teacher for general comments, as well as asking more specific questions about the events that occurred.

#### **4.2.3. Identification of Instances, Transcription and Analysis**

Following Erickson (1997) and C. Goodwin (1993), I viewed each of the videotapes and took notes, which I used to complete a log specifying the participants and events captured on each videotape. I typed my field notes and supplemented them with notes taken while watching the videotapes. As I watched I began to develop an interest in certain categories of practice, which I then noted, such as various ways of speaking for and to infants, and certain types of specialized language used at the daycare (“All Aboard language”). I created a single document that included both the log (which registered larger activities) and my notes (which registered smaller scale actions and practices) in order to have a searchable database for events and practices of interest. I also created two tables on which I listed all the events and practices that I had noted. In the process of doing this I identified several segments of interest, which I transcribed and shared with colleagues during data sessions.

In the spirit of making the activity the unit of analysis (C. Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992b) my next step was to choose an interactional event and describe how it is constituted as such by all participants. I chose to analyze a relatively focused gathering

called “Circle Time,” during which children and teachers gather together in a circle (or semi-circle) to sing songs and read books. As a spatially and temporally bounded activity it provided a clear starting point. In addition, I felt that it exemplified childcare workers’ practices of managing children’s interaction and participation in class activities, including (1) how they collaborate (or fail to) in doing this, and (2) how they make use of and build on culturally and situationally available resources. My ultimate goal, however, was not to arrive at a comprehensive description of this event, but rather, in the process, to identify some of the communicative practices by which it is initiated, sustained (and disrupted) by caregivers and children, such that I could then look for these practices across my data.

Based on my transcription and analysis of the Circle Time activity, along with the observation and transcription of segments that I had already performed, I identified two related foci for the project. The first involves looking at how culturally available ways of interacting with children provide resources for collaborative work among caregivers in this site. Specifically, by addressing utterances to preverbal infants, caregivers accomplish their work in conformance with professional and organizational ideologies of language socialization. Through these same practices, caregivers facilitate one another’s awareness of goings-on with the children and collaboratively construct a frame for interpreting infants’ actions and vocalizations, allowing for the coordination of caregiver actions. The second area of study identified has to do with the ways in which caregivers adapt to children’s mode of interaction by making use of local resources—that which offers itself up in the interactional moment—in order to achieve their objectives. I specifically look at a practice for guiding children’s behavior by altering their

interactional and physical environments for action. In each case, I collected instances of these phenomena across the corpus of data, divided them into categories, transcribed them and subjected them to sequential analysis, as displayed in the chapters that follow.

The talk has been transcribed using the system developed by Gail Jefferson (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). Selected descriptions of embodied action are included in Times Roman italic print on the line below the corresponding talk. I use textual description to convey how events unfold and the relationships between actions in more detail. Within the transcript, italics in the talk line indicate the presence of one or more acoustic features of “baby talk register” (Ferguson, 1977), such as high pitch, slow pace, breathy phonation, or exaggerated intonation contours.

The transcription of children’s vocalizations presents a particular difficulty. Standard orthographic conventions do not allow me to render them with much accuracy. IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols would be more precise, but would still require heavy use of diacritics to describe the nonstandard features of these sounds. More importantly, using IPA would make the transcript unnecessarily difficult for readers to understand. Furthermore, it is not always possible or desirable to transcribe every sound being made in the room. Not only would this task be quite onerous, it would also result in an impossibly dense transcript in which sequential relationships between utterances (or the lack thereof) would be quite difficult for the reader to recognize.

## **Chapter 5. Achieving Caregiver Collaboration through Talk Addressed to Children:**

### 5.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PHENOMENON

In the next two chapters, I consider how conventional ways of talking to children in the daycare classroom can serve as resources for collaborative work between the adult caregivers. Specifically, I will show that through utterances addressed to children, caregivers make available to others their understandings of “what’s going on” in the classroom, which can lead to the coordination of caregiver actions and/or the construction of shared frames for interpreting children’s conduct. Fine-grained analysis of the ways in which such events unfold affords a richer and more complex understanding of the possibilities for participation in social interaction; in particular, fleshing out the role of the overhearer as an active participant in multi-focused encounters. Further, I examine this practice as embedded within and supportive of a system of distributed cognition and action, analyzing its particular affordances as a resource for achieving the collective work of tending to children’s needs and making sense of their actions.

I examine the phenomenon of communicating through children across different age groups. In the infant rooms, speaking to children is ubiquitous, although most of the infants are incapable of understanding and none are capable of verbal response. Here, talk to infants can act in the service of solving immediate problems (e.g., alerting another caregiver that a child has fallen over and must be righted); it also provides all present with a passive awareness of the course of events in the room, information that may or may not be picked up on and used. However, these utterances to children do not merely

provide information on which caregivers act, they also create a space for the construction of joint understandings, as caregivers account for their own and children's actions and build on one another's accounts.

In the toddler rooms, the children are still largely pre-verbal in terms of their productive capabilities as manifested in the videotaped interaction. However, their receptive abilities may be more developed and in fact caregivers orient to them as being capable of understanding much of the talk that is addressed to them. Specifically, they frequently issue directives (requests and commands) and commissives (invitations, offers and promises) designed to initiate courses of action in which the children will participate. Children often respond appropriately to such utterances, although it is also common that they do not. In comparison to interaction in the infant rooms, these exchanges offer different possibilities for the strategy of communicating with other caregivers through talk to a child, and analysis of how this occurs must take the child's central role in the interaction into consideration.

As might be expected, talk to children is a constant both in the infant rooms and in the toddler rooms. I do not claim that all or even most utterances addressed to children are designed to communicate with other adults. There are many other functions of talk to children, even when directed to preverbal infants who cannot be expected to understand or respond to it.

I also do not preclude the possibility that talk to children, when produced for an overhearing adult, may serve communicative purposes other than those of enabling collaboration. There is an extensive body of lay and scholarly commentary on what

Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004, p. 15) terms the *trope communicationnel* (“communicational trope”), i.e., talk in which the intended recipient is someone other than the ostensive addressee. For example, Plant (2002, p. 49) describes “stage-phoning,” a vehicle for self-presentation afforded by mobile telephone use in which users strategically engage in conversations designed to highlight desirable attributes to overhearers (even to the point of manufacturing entire conversations exclusively for this purpose). Others have analyzed the interactional and interpersonal functions of talk to addressed to pets (Roberts, 2004; Tannen, 2004) and preverbal infants (Scollon, 2001; Tannen, 2003) (as reviewed in Chapter 2 and further discussed in Chapter 6). Another manifestation of this phenomenon is “loud-talking,” an African-American discourse practice that “occurs in the presence of an audience or overhearers when someone talks about someone else at a volume which is either louder than necessary for the addressed target to hear or markedly different in volume... from utterances which precede or follow.” (Morgan, 2002, p. 54). This comports with Morgan’s general claim that African American language use is characterized by the use of intermediaries in conversation; “pointed indirection,” which occurs when a speaker’s utterance to a mock receiver is meant for another, and recognized by others present as such, would seem to be another example of this (Morgan, 1998). Such an indirect strategy is often used to criticize or ridicule a target in the presence of an overhearing audience.

This latter is perhaps the understanding of this phenomenon most active in the popular imagination, particularly when it occurs in talk addressed to infants. The

following quotation from a “baby diary” on a pregnancy and parenting website provides a clearly articulated example of this take on the phenomenon.

Case in point, my mother and my mother-in-law barely even talk to me anymore and instead, address all passive-aggressive questions and comments to Jonah instead. For example: "What did your mom dress you in today?" Translation: "Why in the world are you wearing that getup instead of that adorable sailor outfit I bought last week?"

Or the eternal favorite, "When is your mom going to let you eat solids?" Translation: "When is your mom going to stop monopolizing you with all this breastfeeding and let me have a turn at feeding you?" (Park, n.d.)

The label of “passive aggressive” stigmatizes such talk as being an unhealthy or unproductive communication tactic.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, I found that talk to children served as a cooperative and effective means of getting the job done in the daycare classroom. While it may certainly be used for the purpose of indirect criticism, I found no clear instances of this in my videotaped data. Rather, I found talk to children overwhelmingly used as a resource for informing others and maintaining one’s own knowledge about states of affairs in the room, and for organizing temporary divisions of labor and coordinated actions based on this information.

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<sup>14</sup> When I have discussed my dissertation research with friends and family, the most common comment by far is that the practices I am examining strike them as being “passive aggressive.”

In this chapter, I adopt the term “communicating through children” to refer to these phenomena in which collaboration between caregivers is achieved through talk to children. (“Speaking through children” is also used, although “communicating” is preferable in that it reflects the fact that hearers are as responsible as speakers for the effects that arise from such talk.) It should be noted that “through” is merely a shorthand for the complex mediating function that children play in such activities—there is no sense in which the children serve as conduits for the flow of information between caregivers.

## 5.2. TALK TO CHILDREN AS A RESOURCE FOR COLLABORATIVE WORK: A TYPOLOGY

In this section I attempt to provide a “guided tour” of the various ways in which practices of speaking to children can serve purposes of collaboration among caregivers in the daycare center. For some of these instances I will provide detailed analysis; others will be described more briefly for purposes of contrast or providing a fuller picture of the way in which talk to children can be a resource for caregivers in this setting.

All of the exchanges I describe are ones in which a collaborative activity is *triggered* by talk to a child. It is also possible for utterances addressed to children to be used for the purpose of communicating with another caregiver *in the process* of coordinated action. For example, two caregivers engaged in handing a crying infant from one to the other may smooth this transfer by telling the child (and thus each other) exactly what they are doing at each step of the way. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I am exclusively focusing on exchanges in which an utterance addressed to a child is the initiating action (or one of them) in a cooperative activity.

This chapter is organized to first make a broad distinction between two types of collaboration that result from communicating through children. The most basic type involves “real-time” coordination of actions, i.e., talk to a child makes noticeable some sort of problem with which another caregiver offers immediate assistance (which may be either physical or verbal). The other type of collaboration occurs when talk to a child occasions commentary from another caregiver that does not assist with an immediate problem but rather offers a perspective on some matter of lasting importance in the daycare classroom, such as a child’s disposition or developmental stage. In Section 5.2, I explore instances of the former category, dividing them by the type of utterance to a child that initiates the collaborative activity. These include (1) utterances that simply display one caregiver’s observation and/or interpretation of some event or state in the classroom (such as noticings, acknowledgements, accounts and assessments), and (2) utterances designed to enlist a child’s participation in a course of action (such as requests, commands, invitations and promises). In Section 5.3, I describe exchanges in which one caregiver’s talk to a child gives rise to the construction and negotiation of shared understandings of children’s preferences and abilities.

While the phenomenon upon which I am focusing may seem to be a linguistic one, the analysis below will reveal that understanding how such talk gives rise to collaborative action requires taking into consideration all of the communication modalities available for caregivers’ and children’s use in the daycare classroom. These episodes of coordinated action are not achieved through language alone, but through prosodically marked speech, in combination with gaze and other bodily conduct (of both

speakers and hearers), produced and received with reference to a specific physical and social environment.

### **5.2.1. Coordinating Caregiver Action**

A central example of cooperation between caregivers in the daycare classroom occurs when one caregiver becomes aware of the activities of another caregiver and seamlessly, often without words being exchanged, performs some act that assists with the work of caring for a child. In this section, I outline some of the ways in which caregivers' talk to children can occasion such collaborative actions. One of the factors that influences how this comes about is the type of talk to a child that initially triggers the collaborative episode. I start by describing collaborative sequences that are triggered by utterances to children that present some state of affairs, such as noticing, acknowledgements and accounts. I then describe some that are triggered by utterances designed to initiate or alter courses of action, such as directives, corrections, redirections, offers and invitations.

I refer to these verbal forms by using terminology that relates to the job they conventionally do in interaction. At times, these terms coincide with those used by conversation analysts. It is not clear, however, whether the acts identified here should be thought of as the same as those found in conversational exchanges between competent adults, in that they do not seem to carry the same implications for response. For example, in talk between adults verbally noticing something that is already apparent to all present is usually treated as a request for an explanation or an account (Antaki, 1994), but though stating the obvious is frequent in talk to children, accounts are not expected from them,

nor are they necessarily supplied by other participants. Similarly, talk to infants frequently takes interrogative form, but these questions do not generally call forth answers, from children or others.

Much has been made about the ways in which adults create dyadic conversation out of the actions and vocalizations of preverbal infants and young children, particularly in American, white, middle-class communities (Ochs, 1992; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). One of the ways in which this is achieved is by addressing talk to them; in addition, adult caregivers may treat infants' actions as responses in a conversational exchange or, alternatively, create responses *for* the infants (Goffman, 1981, pp. 150-51; Scollon, 2001; Stern, 1977). In the daycare setting, one can find examples in which this occurs, but just as often it does not. What is more striking is the opposite: the degree to which the presence of young children makes possible talk that is non-conversational, i.e., in which one utterance does not sequentially implicate another.

This is particularly evident in the baby rooms. Talk addressed to infants does not necessitate a response and therefore participants are free to speak and monitor the speech of others without attending to what type of next action is implicated for a listener. While Goffman (1981) has noted a number of ways in which speakers occasionally produce talk that does not call for a response from others present (e.g., "out-louds" and response cries), the situation in the daycare classroom is unusual because of the prevalence of such unilateral utterances. There exists in the room a near-constant buzz of talk that is akin to that issued from the radio on the shelf, except, of course, that it responds to local matters in its content and is produced with awareness of the particular identities and current

situations of potential (over)hearers. Because it occurs among co-present participants, response is always a possibility; but since it is not required, respondents can choose whether or not to perform such subsequent actions *as responses*.

Among the slightly older children in the toddler rooms, the situation is somewhat different. There much talk is issued with the goal of eliciting a response, but without a firm expectation that such will occur. A lack of appropriate response is not oriented to as a breach. In this environment, talk designed to be understood and acted upon by its addressee is interspersed with talk that is probably meaningless to its addressee. In both settings, while adults may treat children as competent interactants to some extent, it is *the ways in which they do not* that give the talk its distinctive character and give rise to the phenomenon investigated in this chapter.

### **5.2.2. Displaying States of Affairs in the Daycare Classroom**

One of the basic means by which talk to children leads to collaboration between caregivers is the issuing of some talk that informs the other caregiver or calls their attention to an actionable state of affairs in the classroom. In what follows, I examine instances in which cooperation between the caregivers is triggered by noticings, acknowledgements, talk that otherwise displays a problem, accounts, and assessments addressed to children.

#### **5.2.2.1. Noticings**

I start with examples in which one caregiver addresses to a child an utterance in which she observes something about the environment or that child, and which is followed

by another caregiver either providing information or performing an action relevant to this noticing.

In Excerpt (1), below, one of the caregivers (Monica) is changing a child's diaper. The other caregiver (Robert) is sitting at a table with the other children, who are having their snack. Monica addresses a noticing in line 3 to the child, Shante (and repeats it with a slight change in line 4).

**(1) “You have one diaper”**

1 Monica: .hh  
2 Shante, Shante ( )  
→ 3 You have one diaper.  
→ 4 >You only have< one: diaper.  
|  
Robert shifts gaze to Monica  
5 Can you hold this for me?  
Monica hands diaper to Shante  
6 (1.9)  
Robert stands  
7 Robert: I think she's got more in her: her (.) cubby.  
walks towards cubbies, |  
gazing at Monica shifts gaze to cubbies  
8 Monica: Karim what's so funny?

In line 1, Monica produces a sharp inbreath, or gasp. Characteristically associated with surprise, this can be seen as a change-of-state token (Heritage, 1984a) through which she enacts having a realization, the content of which will be conveyed presently.<sup>15</sup> As Monica says “Shante Shante” she turns to the shelf behind her. She then follows up “You have one diaper” as she turns back towards Shante. As Monica clarifies in the next

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<sup>15</sup> While this gasp seems to relate to the observation that will be introduced next, close examination of the videotape casts doubt on whether Monica has actually had the opportunity to notice it yet: her gaze has remained on Shante, but moves to the shelf immediately after the gasp. It is possible that she is remembering something noticed earlier, rather than discovering it now, or the gasp may simply be a manifestation of baby talk register (in which such devices are used as a ploy to obtain and keep children's attention).

line, the problem here is that Shante has *only* one diaper, which is not enough to get her through the rest of the day.

Robert, on the other side of the room, is at first not monitoring Monica's talk to Shante. His gaze is directed towards other children and he has been singing and clapping his hands. However, at "diaper," in line 4, Robert shifts his gaze to Monica. Throughout Monica's talk in lines 4 and 5 Robert continues to look towards Monica. When Monica finishes her turn, he lifts himself from the tiny chair on which he is sitting. From a standing position he speaks (line 7) and begins to walk towards the corner of room in which there are stacks of lockers in which parents put spare clothes, diapers and the like. Monica engages in an exchange with another child (not transcribed), after which Robert returns with a stack of diapers and places them on the shelf, saying, "These are for Shante."

Monica's talk to Shante triggers collaboration between the two caregivers. However, we cannot assume that it was issued for such a purpose. Strategic action is more evident on the part of Robert, the overhearer. It is he who monitors Monica's talk, finds that he has knowledge that can be used to solve the problem she has revealed, and acts to do so. Further, with his verbal accompaniment to his retrieval of the diapers, Robert marks his action as responsive to her observation. Monica, however, provides no uptake; she has no immediate use for the extra diapers and does not register their receipt.

The following is another example in which one caregiver's noticing leads to another's caregiver's action. In this case, the caregiver's noticing is uttered in the form

of an interrogative. Questions to infants do not require answers, but they do provide a means of airing observations and candidate explanations of children's behavior.

**(2) "You falling over?"**

- 1 Natalie: *O↑kay guys I'm going on ↑brea:k,*  
 2 *I'll be back in a ↑little bit.*
- 3 Patrice: °(Can you look over here)° Caroline? Caroline? (.) right here  
*William falls*
- 4 *over*  
 (1.3)  
*Natalie stands up and looks at William*
- 5 Natalie: Uh oh William you falling over?  
| |  
*Patrice sets* *Patrice looks at William.*  
*toy down*
- 6 William: ((cries))  
*Patrice crawls over to William*
- 7 Don: °>meow meow ↑meow ↓meow< (.) he heh he° (.) Watch out it's  
 8 *wrapped around your ↑toes*

Natalie publicly notices William's falling over (line 5) with a question directed to the child. Patrice is sitting very close to William but is interacting intently with another child and has not noticed that he has rolled onto his back from a sitting position. (Her view of William may also be partially blocked by an empty bouncy chair.) Natalie's question alerts her to his fall and she immediately moves to him and helps him up.

This simple example demonstrates how talk to children can amplify caregivers' situation awareness (Norman, 1993) in the daycare classroom. While the room is set up for maximum visibility, one of the limits of the visual modality is that in order to see things one must look at them. Here, Patrice is looking at something else. Information conveyed through the auditory modality prompts Patrice to direct her visual attention towards William.

Natalie’s utterance is particularly well designed for the purpose of communicating with Patrice. The first full morpheme, “Uh oh” is uttered with high volume and high pitch and immediately serves to orient everyone in the room to the nature of what is to come: some sort of problem will be announced. Further, the recognizable baby talk register in which “Uh oh” is uttered projects that this utterance will be addressed towards a child, and thus likely deals with a child’s problem. Patrice, because of the responsibilities inherent in her caregiver role, is thus already alerted that this may be a situation in which action on her part is required. Patrice sets down the toy she has been playing with as Natalie finishes “Uh oh”. Without pause, Natalie utters “William” (so that the entire unit is “Uh oh William”). This serves to locate the trouble for Patrice. As Natalie begins the second part of her turn (“You falling over?”), Patrice shifts her gaze to William and almost immediately moves toward him. At this point, William begins to cry.



Figure 1: “Uh” – Patrice is shaking toy.



Figure 2: “Oh” – Patrice sets toy down.



Figure 3: After “William” Patrice shifts gaze.

Figure 4: During “over” Patrice starts to move.

In some instances that will be examined in this chapter, it is difficult to determine whether the second caregiver responds to a signal emanating directly from the child or from another caregiver’s response to that signal (delivered in talk to child), and oftentimes it might be a combination (for example, the caregiver may supplement the child’s vocal signal with additional information about the nature of the problem). In this case, however, frame-by-frame examination reveals that Patrice turns her gaze to William directly following Natalie’s utterance of his name and before William begins to cry. It is still possible that Patrice notices his movement in her peripheral vision; however, the close timing of her action in relation to Natalie’s utterance, and the very loose relationship between her action and William’s movement, make this unlikely.

The difficulty with assuming that such talk to children is intended for an overhearing caregiver and understood as such is clearly shown by examples in which a noticing appears to be well designed (if not timed) to occasion another caregiver’s action, but no action is forthcoming. In the following example, a caregiver’s talk to a child does

not give rise to collaborative action, although it could have, and there appear to be no consequences to this failure whatsoever.

At the beginning of excerpt (3), one of the caregivers (Karen) is preparing bottles in the kitchen area and the other (Patrice) is sitting on the floor feeding an infant in a bouncy seat, while holding another child on her lap.

### (3) “We can get you one”

1 Karen: Justine’s is on her way. On its way.  
2 Patrice: Ready for your bottle?  
3 ((toy sound))  
4 Patrice: *What is that?* ((breathy))  
5 (3.5)  
6 Patrice: ((whistles along with toy melody))  
7 *Ready for another bottle?*  
8 *Yes?*  
9 (2.8)  
10 Patrice?: ((whistles along with toy melody))  
11 Karen: ((laughs)) Tom is just so content with Caroline over there.  
*Justine pulls herself up on Patrice*  
12 Patrice: ((laughs))  
→ 13 *Oh you need a Kleenex. (.)*  
→ 14 *We can git you one, okay?*  
15 (.5)  
*Patrice touches her forehead to Justine’s forehead.*  
16 Karen: Justine’s eight?  
17 Patrice: Uh huh.

In line 13 Patrice notices that Justine has a runny nose, a problem that she verbalizes in terms of the action necessary to remedy it (“you need a Kleenex”). In the next line, she goes further and makes a promise of sorts to Justine: that a Kleenex will be obtained for her. She makes no effort, however, to get a Kleenex; she is not able to because she is holding a bottle for an infant too young to hold it himself. Nor did she commit herself to doing so in her utterance: the “we” in line 14 could refer to either herself or the other member of her “team”—Karen. Karen, however, does not pick up on this. She does produce an utterance directed to Patrice immediately following Patrice’s; however, it is on a different topic and therefore cannot be construed as a response.

(“Justine’s eight?” in line 16 is a request for confirmation of the amount of formula Karen should prepare for her—8 ounces.) Neither Karen nor Patrice follows through with the promise. There appears to be no upshot to Karen’s lack of action. Patrice does not follow up with a direct request (an example in which this does occur is examined below, excerpt (5)). Nor is Karen “called out” for not responding to Patrice’s utterance. In this instance, indeed in all of the instances I have identified, responding to another caregiver’s talk to a child is treated as optional. This is ensured by the inherent ambiguity of talk to preverbal children—it is quite possible that the talk is produced purely for the benefit of the child, but it is also possible that the utterance is intended to be overheard and acted upon.

#### **5.2.2.2. Acknowledgments**

Another way of giving voice to some state of affairs in the room occurs when a caregiver *acknowledges* a child’s action or vocalization in some way. This seems to be a way of assuring a child that she has been heard or observed, and thus that her expressed needs will soon be met (and, of course, it also serves to inform anyone else present of this). In the following segment, a child has been crying in his crib for several minutes. Patrice has already tried to comfort him with a pacifier, to no avail.

#### (4) “I hear you”

1 Nolan: ((cries loudly in crib))  
2 Natalie: ((inaudible: speaking softly into ear of child in lap))  
→ 3 I hear you Nolan:  
| |  
*Nat. glances at Nolan drops gaze to child on lap*  
*Patrice glances in Nolan's direction*  
→ 4 ↑Hang on::  
5 ((loud crying))  
*Patrice crawls to Nolan's crib, adjusts blankets and gives Nolan pacifier*  
*Natalie watches Patrice*  
6 Natalie: That's a good burp.  
*Nolan stops crying*  
*Natalie looks at child on lap, looks back at Patrice*  
7 Natalie: Hi::  
*Turns toward Justine*  
8 Child: e bu eh bu bu bu  
9 Natalie: Ah ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba.  
10 Child: BA BA  
11 Natalie: Ai ba ba ba ba  
12 Yeah you said a ( ) didn't you ((smile voice))  
13 Natalie: Ai bai bai ba  
14 ((Nolan starts to cry loudly))  
*Natalie shifts her gaze to Patrice and Nolan*  
15 (8.6)  
*Patrice pats Nolan's back*  
→ 16 Natalie: NO:LAN::  
→ 17 You're not gonna settle down ( time)?  
| |  
*Patrice lifts blanket Natalie looks down*  
18 (2.0)  
*Patrice shakes blanket out twice and sets it down*  
*Natalie glances at Patrice and Nolan and looks back down*  
19 Intern: Oh::[:  
20 Natalie: [Usually he does (he like that)  
21 Intern: ((laughs))  
*Natalie glances at Patrice*  
22 (He'll have one of them twice a day)=  
23 |  
*Patrice glances at Natalie*  
24 Intern: =↑Hey: Hi:: ((cocks head towards Caroline))  
25 How are ↑you doin  
26 ( )  
*Patrice lifts Nolan out of crib*  
27 Natalie: We usually have a foster grandparent here too,  
28 ( arms) (.) go to sleep.  
29 Intern: Oh:::

Natalie is currently on the floor feeding one child in a bouncy seat and holding another in her lap, while still another pulls up on her back and climbs around her. Natalie responds to Nolan's ongoing cry with “I hear you Nolan. Hang on.” The first unit of her turn acknowledges the child's vocalization. The second, while phrased as a directive for

him to wait, is conventionally understood as a promise that whatever he is waiting for will be forthcoming. Thus, Natalie's utterance constitutes Nolan's cry as not just a complaint, but a request, and further projects some relevant action to be undertaken towards him in the future.<sup>16</sup> However, she makes no move towards him herself. (Note that while the first part of her utterance, the acknowledgement, includes a reference to herself, the abbreviated second unit leaves open the question of whose action he should "hang on" for.)

Natalie moves her gaze to Nolan for the first unit of her utterance, then returns it to the child she is feeding during the second unit. As Natalie says "hear," Patrice lifts her head and flips her bangs out of her eyes. She then follows Natalie's gaze to Nolan, just as Natalie is dropping her gaze again. Patrice's look towards Nolan is only a brief glance and she immediately turns back to the task she is working on (laying out sheets and a mat for another child), but then turns back and crawls toward Nolan's crib. From her knees, Patrice reaches through the crib slats and moves Nolan's blanket, which is lying at his side. She appears to put a pacifier in his mouth, while also bunching up a blanket to prop up his head and body. (The room is darkened for naptime and it is somewhat difficult to see her movements in the crib.) Natalie monitors Patrice's activities with Nolan.

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<sup>16</sup> In a later section, I consider directives and promises issued to children as initial utterances that occasion collaborative activities between caregivers. There, however, I focus on instances in which these are addressed to children who are old enough to understand them and participate in the course of action they initiate. In most of the cases I have found in which they are addressed to pre-verbal infants, they follow some other form (such as a noticing or acknowledgement) that displays to the other caregiver what the actionable state of affairs is (but see excerpt (15)). Even here, though, they seem to play an important role in explicitly setting forth a prospective action to be taken by a caregiver.

At line 6 Nolan stops crying. At the same time, Natalie looks down at the child in her lap and says, “that’s a good burp”. She then looks briefly back at Nolan and Patrice before turning her head to coincide with her greeting to a child who is climbing around her back. Natalie then engages in exchanges with two children, in which she mimics the string of syllables produced by one of the children, and then another child mimics her. When Nolan starts to cry again, Natalie shifts her gaze in that direction (line 14). After a sustained period of gazing at Patrice, she addresses herself to the child in the crib at line 16.

“Nolan” in line 16 functions as an address term, orienting all present as to the intended recipient of the following question. Further, responding to his cry by emphatically uttering his name frames Nolan’s behavior as problematic and in need of being stopped.

The question that Natalie delivers in line 17 also has relevance for Patrice’s action. In this case, however, it is far more than an acknowledgment; rather it uses Nolan’s current and immediately past behavior as a basis for a projection into the future: that he will not settle down. However, the utterance is produced as a response to his cry and it is thus tied to the situation as it exists currently, and therefore suggests that were this situation changed, the prediction might be changed. This could be taken as advice to try another strategy and Patrice seems to do that: as Natalie finishes her utterance to Nolan, Patrice lifts the blanket, waves it twice and puts it back down beside Nolan.

Nolan continues to cry and Patrice pats him a few times and tries to put the pacifier in his mouth. Natalie glances at Patrice once (at line 21). Patrice stands and

glances at Natalie as she does so; at that point Natalie is looking in the other direction at a child who is hanging on her arm (which, perhaps conveniently, displays how busy she is to Patrice). Patrice looks back at Nolan as she reaches a standing position; at this point Natalie shifts her gaze in that direction. Patrice leans over the crib and Natalie looks back toward the baby she is feeding. She lifts Nolan into her arms (in line 26) and he quiets immediately. While this seems to solve the problem, Patrice's troubles have hardly ended because she must now get one older, active child to go down for a nap while holding Nolan in her arms. Natalie glances at Patrice and Nolan one more time as she talks to the intern about the foster grandmother who is able to quiet him down, drawing the intern's gaze in their direction, as well.

In this instance, neither of Natalie's utterances to the child (the acknowledgement in line 3 or the noticing in line 17) inform Patrice of anything that she didn't already know. Patrice was doubtlessly aware of Nolan's crying, and would have been easily able to determine that the responsibility of tending to him would fall to her. She may have been already planning to. However, when Natalie spoke, Patrice acted. Natalie's talk to Nolan in both lines 3 and 17 is closely followed by Patrice's actions to him, further Natalie's utterances prefigure and comment on Patrice's actions. Interestingly, though, as in excerpt (2) above, both Natalie and Patrice avoid actively construing Patrice's actions as responsive to Natalie's talk.

The collaborative action in the previous segment started with an acknowledgment delivered to a child. However, such an acknowledgment does not always trigger another

caregiver's action. For example, in the following excerpt Natalie's initial utterance (lines 2 and 3) is very similar to lines 3 and 4 of Excerpt (4) above.

**(5) "You wanna grab William"**

1 William: ((cries))  
→ 2 Natalie: *Oh: there you are Mr. William*  
→ 3 *I hear you:*  
4 William: ((cries))  
5 Natalie: Maureen.  
6 Maureen: Huh?  
7 Natalie: You wanna grab William  
8 Maureen: Okay: ( ) go get William.  
9 Gonna go get William.

As this segment begins, Natalie is in the kitchen area feeding two children a meal. The other caregiver, Maureen, is sitting on the floor playing with another child. Maureen is the site director of the center, and is merely filling in while the other regular teacher takes a break.

In this case, Maureen does not respond to Natalie's initial utterance. After a brief pause (during which William lets out another cry), Natalie follows up. She does not, however, immediately issue a direct request. Rather, by uttering only the address term "Maureen" and pausing, she draws Maureen's attention to the situation and provides another space for Maureen to determine what is needed and act. Maureen does not take that opportunity: in fact, her answer specifically displays her lack of relevant understanding. Only when Natalie delivers the relatively direct request in line 8 does Maureen respond, first by verbally indicating her willingness to comply and then by standing and walking over to William's crib.

We cannot assume *a priori* that Natalie's initial utterance is intended to communicate with Maureen. In fact, there is nothing about the talk itself to make us

believe that it is anything other than communication with a child. Given the likelihood that William (a child of 6+ months) is able to recognize his own name, Natalie's utterance functions to assure him that he has gained the attention of one of the caregivers and thus that his needs will be tended to soon. However, there are aspects of the situation that suggest it would have been reasonable for Natalie to expect Maureen to act. Natalie's talk calls attention to a situation that requires action—a child waking up and crying in a crib must be tended to immediately.<sup>17</sup> At that moment both caregivers are involved in some activity, but while Natalie is feeding two children, Maureen is merely playing with one. Natalie's job is thus less interruptible and it is reasonable for her to expect Maureen to conclude that she should be the one to act. However, Maureen does not do so.

Further evidence that Natalie's utterance to William may have been intended for Maureen is retrospectively provided by Natalie's ensuing talk. As described above, she first merely draws Maureen's attention with an address term (line 5); it is only when Maureen responds with a display of ignorance (or in any case an openness to being further informed) that Natalie follows up with a request. This gradual ratcheting up of the directness of the request positions Natalie's initial utterance as merely the earliest and least explicit manifestation of the endeavor Natalie appears to be working toward all along.

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<sup>17</sup> This is of course not an inevitable or universal rule, but there is a great deal of evidence that the caregivers take it to be a norm organizing their conduct in this setting (such evidence consists of interactions like this one, in which action is taken to ensure that a waking and crying child is tended to immediately, as well as other sequences in which caregivers account for their failure to do so.)

Even here, where some evidence can be rallied to support the notion that an utterance to a child is designed to communicate with another caregiver, it is not evident that there are negative consequences to the hearer for missing or ignoring that attempt at communication.<sup>18</sup> When the speaker's off-record strategy fails, the problem is remedied by going on the record. This example points up the advantages and disadvantages for both speakers and hearers of the ambiguity inherent in such talk—it may be intended to communicate, and hearers may in fact treat it as communicative, but they are not required by the structure of the talk exchange to do so.

### **5.2.2.3. Problem Display**

In the examples above, routine talk to children in which a caregiver notices and/or acknowledges a child's action or some other feature of the environment occasions cooperative action on the part of another caregiver. In each case, we might say that the talk presents a state of affairs that is problematic and therefore actionable. However, the speaking caregiver does not make explicit the nature of the problem. When, for example, Monica observes that Shante has only one diaper, Robert's practical knowledge about the ongoing cycles of activity in the daycare room makes it clear to him that this will become a problem the next time Shante needs her diaper changed. However, in the following examples, speakers do more than simply give verbal form to some potentially

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<sup>18</sup> There may well be negative consequences that do not become evident in the moment of interaction. Since in this case Natalie's utterance to William is retrospectively constituted as making relevant an action from Maureen, the follow-up can thus be construed as a correction to her failure to act, and Maureen may experience some loss of face for being so corrected. Further, given her organizational status as Natalie's superior, there may be some face loss involved in being issued an explicit request rather than having the opportunity to perform her action as though it were self-directed.

problematic but easily apparent aspect of the situation. Rather, they actively construct the problematic nature of the situation by juxtaposing two propositions that stand in opposition to one another.

In Excerpt (6) below, Patrice is trying to engage Jason in playing with a toy. The camera then moves towards Natalie who is feeding a child in the kitchen area, so that Patrice and Jason are out of frame. Presumably, Jason is not interested in the toy that Patrice presents, because she asks Natalie about another toy.

**(6) “Take that off”<sup>19</sup>**

- 1 Patrice: Did they take tha- the music ball: back  
*Natalie looks at Patrice*
- 2 Natalie: I- they must have.  
*Shakes head*
- 3 I don't see it.
- 4 (1.2) ((child cries, patting sounds))  
*Natalie drops gaze*
- 5 Patrice: So this is what you want to play with?  
*Natalie looks at Patrice Looks back down at child she's feeding*
- 6 *But this is what ↑Caroline's playing with °(right now)°*
- 7 (2.0)
- 8 Natalie: You know you can take that off if (.) >you need to<  
*Natalie looks up at Patrice*
- 9 Patrice: She lo:ves it.=
- 10 Natalie: =Yeah, but if it's- I see you *Ry:an::*

In line 5, Patrice produces an observation in the form of a question to Jason, “So this is what you want to play with?” She then immediately follows it with a noticing that presents a dilemma—the toy he wants to play with is already being used by another child. Natalie responds to this by providing Patrice with information that may help her resolve the problem—she can separate the toy from Caroline’s bouncy chair and thus allow other children to play with it (and perhaps prevent other children from bothering Caroline).

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<sup>19</sup> The camera was directed toward Natalie and the children in the kitchen area during this segment; Patrice and the other children were out of frame and thus their movements are not described.

Patrice does not immediately take this advice; rather she offers a reason for *not* doing so (“she (Caroline) loves it”). It appears in line 10 that Natalie will defend her original proposal, however she breaks off this turn in order to acknowledge Dylan who is crawling towards her.

A notable aspect of this example is the way in which Natalie becomes engaged in it in the first place. The other caregiver, Patrice, rarely is in the role of triggering collaboration through her talk to children. A simple reason for this is that she generally speaks quietly and intimately with children, rather than producing loud talk that can easily be heard by all others present in the room. (It is quite possible that there are other reasons, possibly having to do with a lack of authority or inclination to direct other caregivers’ actions.) In this case, however, she has just addressed a question to Natalie to which Natalie responded (lines 1-3). Her next utterance (after a lapse of only 1.2 seconds) is delivered at the same volume as the previous one and begins with “so,” which is often used to bring up new business in an interaction already underway (e.g., Bolden, 2005). Natalie in fact lifts her gaze and her eyebrows as though to ready herself as a recipient. However, as Patrice’s utterance progresses the lexical content and prosodic shape reveal that it is directed to a child and not to Natalie (furthermore, when Natalie looks at Patrice she probably sees that Patrice’s gaze is directed at Jason, not at her). Natalie briefly fixes her gaze on two spots (perhaps Patrice, then the objects of Patrice’s gaze—Jason and the toy) and then drops her gaze back to the spoon in her hand, which is approaching Lucy’s mouth. It seems that by mistaking Patrice’s utterance for one

addressed to her, her attention has been drawn to what's going on with Patrice, Jason and Caroline.

In this case, Natalie's assistance with the childcare project Patrice is engaged in consists not of a physical action but rather a suggestion. While it is delivered as a contribution to the immediate problem Patrice has encountered, it does not result in immediate action, but rather triggers a brief debate. However, Natalie withdraws from this debate by breaking off her utterance-in-progress in order to acknowledge a child. While it may be socially desirable in this environment to greet a child in such a situation, it is surely not necessary and would not seem to require that one immediately cease other verbal action in order to do so. Rather, Dylan presents Natalie with an opportunity to abort her utterance and abandon (or at least reduce her display of commitment to) the stance it represents.

In what sense has collaboration been accomplished? A problem and a possible solution to it have been presented, along with one argument against its implementation. Natalie's truncated utterance in line 10 averts any conflict that could arise from this exchange; not before suggesting, however, that the solution's benefits may outweigh its disadvantages.

Once again, it is possible to find counterexamples to show that displaying a problem in this way does not always gain assistance from another caregiver, at least not immediately. For instance, after similarly addressing to a child two opposing propositions (in this case, conjoined with "but"), Karen must engage in further work

before securing from Patrice a commitment that she will perform a task Karen does not want (or does not know how) to do.

**(7) “You need a nap”**

1 Patrice: *Oh my goodness gracious.*  
2 *Oh my goodness.*  
3 Karen: °(What's wrong)°  
4 Patrice: *Oh::.*  
5 Karen: >Y' okay?<  
6 Patrice: Yeah  
7 Karen: ( )  
8 Patrice: ( )  
9 Karen: *Oh::: ↑Oh:::*  
→ 10 *Jason you need a nap but I'm not sure how to give it to you.*  
11 Patrice: Mm hm.  
12 *That was a [big bottle.*  
13 Karen: *[This is the third bottle I've taken away from you*  
14 *[(I'm) (.) sorry*  
15 Patrice: *[That was ano:ther big bo:ttle*  
16 Karen: *sorry*  
17 Patrice: *Yeah*  
18 Patrice: *Ye:ah*

((58 second segment not transcribed: Patrice puts infant in bouncy seat and pats on chest; Karen picks up Justine, puts away pillows, takes bottle to kitchen; both Karen and Patrice exchange babble with children; Karen starts to take out a broom as Patrice walks into the kitchen.))

19 Karen: Do you know if y- I wonder if we can get a mat, like may- I  
*Patrice shifts gaze to Karen*  
*Karen's gaze remains on broom and floor throughout utterance*  
20 don't even know which sheets are Jason's or anything.  
21 Patrice: Oh (.) we can (.) get some.  
*Patrice looks up and to right, starts to walk away*  
22 Karen: I'm not sure (.) I know how ta y'know pat him down or anything.  
23 Patrice: I'll try

In line 10 Karen reveals a dilemma with which she is struggling: Jason needs a nap. Though Jason is in the Guppy Room for the day, it is not his usual room. Therefore, these teachers are unfamiliar with his naptime routine and Karen is uncertain about whether she will be able to get him to go to sleep. In many of the examples analyzed so far, the talk as addressed could serve some function for the child, even if he or she is not capable of discerning its precise linguistic significance. (For example, when Natalie utters “William, I hear you” she can reasonably expect that he will know that he

is being spoken to and that he may even have some sense of the illocutionary force, if not the semantic content, of this simple, oft-repeated phrase.) However, though she uses the address term, Karen's talk does not appear to be produced for Jason in any way. It is not clearly occasioned by any particular action of his, it is too complex for him to be able to understand (and there would be no benefit to having him understand it), and she turns away and is walking in the opposite direction from him while she utters it. It functions, then, more like an out-loud (a form of "self-talk," per Goffman, 1981) than an utterance embedded in an exchange with another interactant.

Karen's utterance displays a difficulty she is having and gives Patrice an opportunity to provide advice or offer to help. Patrice does not take that opportunity. Thereafter, Karen presents her difficulties two more times, except now she does so in talk addressed to Patrice (lines 19-20 and 22). If these are requests, they are highly indirect, but they do elicit an offer from Patrice (line 23).<sup>20</sup> Patrice and Karen then, without speaking to one another, work together to ready Jason for his nap.

Once again, although talk to a child does not necessarily elicit assistance from another caregiver, we can find evidence that it may have been produced with hopes that it would. Here, that consists of Karen's repeated attempts to solicit such assistance after receiving no uptake from the utterance addressed to Jason. Neither we nor Karen can know whether Patrice understood the force of her utterance and ignored it, or if she simply regarded it as talk addressed to Jason and therefore as not her concern. It is quite

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<sup>20</sup> "Try" is uttered with an intonation contour that starts high and then drops, which seems to highlight Patrice's uncertainty with regard to whether she will succeed in her efforts (i.e., all she can do is try).

possible that both speaker and hearer in this case were making use of the ambiguity that exists in talk addressed to children.

#### **5.2.2.4. Accounts**

In the instances I have examined thus far one caregiver's talk to a child implies or makes possible some action that can be undertaken by another caregiver. In all cases, this initiating utterance provides some information about a caregiver's understanding of a situation. In this section, I will examine examples in which the initiating utterances go further in explaining, or providing accounts for the actions of children or caregivers. These accounts then prod another caregiver to act so as to remedy the problem that the first caregiver has identified in her account.

I use the term 'accounts' in line with the ethnomethodological tradition, a basic premise of which is that sustaining the apparent orderliness of everyday life requires that members of a society make their actions recognizable and intelligible—i.e., accountable—to one another (Garfinkel, 1967). While some actions reveal their own purposefulness, others do not and thus require that an account be produced through verbal or symbolic means. Such an account may be demanded by an interlocutor, or provided by the actor in anticipation of such a request.

Many of the vocalizations and embodied actions of infants are opaque in this sense. While caregivers do not regard them as unnatural or deviant, they do treat them as in need of explanation. However, young children are not expected to make their conduct intelligible to others. Rather, childcare workers do this by producing accounts in which children's actions and vocalizations are labeled and assigned causes; very often these

accounts are addressed to the children themselves. Thus, in contrast with much of the literature on the subject of accounts (e.g., Buttny, 1993; Scott & Lyman, 1968), the accounts that will be examined in this chapter do not primarily excuse or justify the behavior of the *speaker*, although this occurs, but rather make sense of the behavior of *others* (specifically, the children).

Much, if not most, of infants' and young children's behavior fails to meet the test of being unambiguously sensible to adults. This does not mean, however, that an account will be supplied for every such action. In the cases I examine, accounts are produced where action is required (e.g., in response to a sign that a child needs help, such as a child's cry); these accounts advance an explanation of what the problem is and therefore what action should be taken.

To an even greater extent than the noticings and acknowledgements discussed above, accounts provide to others present the caregiver's interpretation of some aspect of the child's behavior or situation. They do not merely name the phenomenon observed, rather, they explain it, often in terms that implicate some action that can be taken by a caregiver. For this reason, they provide particularly fertile soil for the type of collaboration being discussed in this section.

For example, in Excerpt (8) Karen is changing a child's diaper while Patrice is sitting on the floor feeding a young infant (who must be held while being fed). Older babies are propped up near Patrice drinking from their bottles. One of them, Dylan, drops his bottle. He starts to wave his arms and issues a scream.

(8) “Are you stuck?”<sup>21</sup>

1 Patrice: ((whistles along with music))  
2 Tom: bla bla:::  
*Tom waves arm*  
3 Patrice: ((laughs))  
4 Child: ((whimper))  
5 Dylan: ba ba. ba.  
*Dylan drops his bottle.*  
6 A:: AH.  
*Dylan waves arms*  
*Patrice turns head to Dylan*  
→ 9 Patrice: Are you stuck?  
10 (1.5)  
*Patrice holds gaze; Dylan waves one arm*  
→ 11 Or are you just laid back? (.)  
→ 12 *You got some milk on your fa:ce. (.)*  
13 Dylan: A:: [ya ya  
14 Patrice: [Ye:ah. (.)  
15 *Is it good?*  
16 (2.0)  
*Dylan waves arms*  
*Patrice looks back at child on lap.*  
18 Karen: You wanna come play with Dylan?  
19 [I think he's done.  
20 Dylan: [a::: A:: A:  
*Dylan waves arms*  
21 Patrice: hn hn [hn:  
⇒ 22 Karen: [(h)you say ↑I'm done. Let me up.  
*Karen walks past Dylan with Jason in her arms, sets Jason down behind Dylan*  
24 Dylan: A::[::  
⇒ 24 Karen: [Let me up.

An account is first issued in the form of a question directed to Dylan in line 9. Patrice pauses after her question and holds her gaze towards Dylan, as though waiting for Dylan's answer. Dylan's arms are relatively still at this point and he does not make any sound (due to the camera angle his face is not visible so I cannot describe his facial expression.) Patrice appears to treat this absence of sound or movement as disconfirmation (as evidence that he is not stuck), in that she then offers up an opposing characterization of his state: “Are you just laid back?” (He is, literally, laid back on a pillow.) There are two possible interpretations of Patrice's questions: she may be asking

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<sup>21</sup> Double arrows (⇒) set off lines in which a caregiver “speaks for” (on behalf of) a child.

whether or not he is able to get up, or she may be asking whether or not he is content in his current position. Patrice then verbally notices that Dylan has some milk on his face. Dylan yells and waves his arms again. Patrice seems to respond to this, but in a way that does not commit her to any particular interpretation of Dylan's action (line 14). In fact, her "yeah" could be simply affirming her own previous observation, which is still topical for her as indicated by the anaphoric reference in line 15.

During this series of utterances to Dylan, Patrice offers at least three characterizations of Dylan's state: that he is stuck, that he is simply "laid back," and that he has some milk on his face. The first of these demands action; the second does not. The third also provides grounds for action, though the need is less pressing (especially if Dylan is enjoying the milk on his face, as Patrice suggests). Patrice thus leaves open the question of whether Dylan needs to be tended to or not. Karen, however, immediately takes the position that Dylan is "done" and needs to be helped up from his supine position on the pillow. Her first utterance, directed to Jason, is somewhat equivocal ("I think he's done." (line 19)). Dylan overlaps that utterance with a somewhat more insistent scream, to which both caregivers respond: Patrice with laughter and Karen with a first-person characterization of the communicative intent of his vocalization as an announcement ("I'm done") and a command ("Let me up"). This is pronounced with high pitch and strong, equal stress on each syllable—the voice being animated is seemingly a young child that can speak, rather than either a baby or an adult. (I have also found such "little kid talk" used in other occasions when caregivers at this center "speak for" children.)

This utterance expresses his current state in terms of the action that should be taken to help him.

In this case, Patrice offers several candidate interpretations, Karen picks up on one of them, and Patrice signals her alignment with the course Karen has taken by her laughter in line 21: a working consensus is thus reached. This is accomplished entirely through talk addressed to children, and the child whose actions are being so interpreted takes part in this dialogue through his cry-like vocalizations (although he may not know what project it is that he is participating in). Note that the caregivers further collude in rendering Dylan's complaint as something amusing and therefore not particularly problematic. This is done through laughter, smiling, and Karen's playful voicing of Dylan's complaint in "little kid talk." Their interpretation portends a solution, and Karen takes action (although she does not immediately pick him up but rather treats the situation as a pedagogical opportunity to help Dylan work on rolling over).

An explanation of a child's action may also account for or assess an action of the speaker. This is much more like the version of accounts found in some of the literature, in which accounts are seen as ways of aligning speakers with a moral order and/or with the expectations of others (e.g., Stokes & Hewitt, 1976).

For example, at the beginning of Excerpt (9) Natalie is changing a child named Lucy's diaper. She then puts her down on the floor near Caroline (an infant in a bouncy seat), Patrice, who is holding Dan, and the foster grandmother who is sitting on a bench. (Another child, Jason, crawls over during the exchange transcribed below.) Lucy starts to wave her arms and reach towards Caroline's bouncy seat.

### (9) “Caroline’s Toys”

1 Natalie: But William shou- the [( ) (.)] those are for William.  
2 Grandma: [( ) ]  
3 Grandma: [(No:)]  
4 Natalie: [(Givin him that bo:ttle before he goes to sleep) (.7)  
*Natalie sets Lucy on the floor*

5 Natalie: O:kay.  
7 Grandma: Well good after↑noon (Lucy)=  
8 Natalie: =Let me fin- let me wash my hands and clean the table.  
9 (1.2)  
*Lucy waves arms and reaches toward Caroline;  
Caroline waves arms and feet*

10 Grandma: ( )  
→ 11 Natalie: She’s trying to reach (.) ↑Caroli:ne and Caroline’s toys  
→ 12 *Cuz I didn’t put you where there were any toys*  
→ 13 *I’m sorry Lucy Loo.*  
*Patrice shakes toy.*  
*Lucy looks at toy Patrice is shaking*

14 Patrice: How bout this one.  
15 How ↑bout it  
*Caroline waves arms and feet, Lucy looks back at Caroline*  
(3.0)  
*Patrice scoots on the floor towards Lucy*

16 Lucy: hh hh hh  
17 Patrice: (Right here)  
*Patrice tosses toy to Lucy*

18 Grandma: (oh) she likes thi:s  
| |  
*Lucy looks down at toy Grandma points at Caroline’s toys*  
*Patrice has tossed*

19 Patrice: Yeah.  
20 (4.0)  
*Lucy picks up toy and brings it to her mouth*

In line 11 Natalie produces an explanation for Lucy’s actions. Unlike the triggering utterances discussed thus far, it is not addressed to Lucy, at least not at first. Lucy is referred to with a third-person pronoun; further, the utterance does not have any features of baby talk. By the end of Natalie’s multi-unit turn, however, she has shifted to Lucy as addressee.

At what point does this shift occur? It is apparent that Lucy is the addressee in line 13, when Natalie says “Cuz I didn’t put **you** where there were any toys”. However, a shift to baby talk register has already occurred in line 12. While the pitch of “she’s tryin to reach” is quite flat, it rises dramatically with the first syllable of “Caroline,” after the

micropause, which is followed by several wide intonational swings. It appears that shortly after embarking upon a course of action in line 12, Natalie reshapes it so that it will no longer be informational talk *about* Lucy, but will rather be playful talk *to* Lucy.

While Patrice and the foster grandmother were also in a position to observe Lucy's hand-waving and reaching, they do not seem to treat it as a source of trouble or action. (The foster grandmother does utter something inaudible, perhaps to Lucy.) It is only after Natalie has construed Lucy's hand waving and embodied display of interest in Caroline as a problem stemming from an absence of toys that Patrice reacts to this problem.

Weick's (1995) distinction between sensemaking and interpretation is instructive here.

The act of interpreting implies that something is there, a text in the world, waiting to be discovered or approximated. Sensemaking, however, is less about discovery than it is about invention. To engage in sensemaking is to construct, filter, frame, create facticity, and render the subjective into something more tangible. (Weick, 1995, p. 14; citations omitted).

Natalie does not merely interpret Lucy's conduct. Rather, she creates an object—a problem, a threat to Caroline—while simultaneously providing a causal explanation (account) and a remedy.

Grandma looks steadily at Lucy from the moment Natalie sets her down. Patrice also gazes in Lucy's direction (though the hair in her face prevents us from being able to determine the precise direction of her gaze). Thus in this instance it is not Patrice's

situation awareness, in the usual sense of the term, that is aided by Natalie's talk. She does not inform her of something that is happening in the room, rather she offers an alternative frame for understanding something that Patrice can already see. Suddenly, the situation implies an action for Patrice to perform. At "put" in line 12, Patrice drops her hand, picks up a toy at her side, and shakes it towards Lucy. This gains Lucy's attention. When Patrice brings the toy towards her body, Lucy looks back at Caroline. Patrice scoots on the floor towards Lucy and then throws the toy so that it lands directly in front of her. Lucy then looks at the toy and puts it in her mouth. Patrice grabs another toy and throws that to her, as well.

As in excerpt (2) above (in which William falls over and Patrice helps him up), the timing and efficiency of this exchange make it appear to be a joint project of speaker and hearer, rather than simply Patrice as hearer detecting an opportunity to be helpful and taking it up. In addition, we see that Natalie begins the utterance as addressed to another adult and then switches to addressing the child. Speaking to Lucy allows Natalie to avoid the appearance that she is directing Patrice to do anything. In fact, she further mitigates any possible face threat with the self-deprecating action of finding fault with herself for not putting Lucy in a better place. At the same time, her utterance specifies what is wrong with the current situation, and thus what needs to be fixed.

Accounts, of course, do not always elicit action on the part of another caregiver. However, even where they do not, they may still perform collaborative work. For example, in the following instance, Natalie's talk to a child—which consists of both acknowledgements and accounts—offers up interpretations of the child's vocalizations

and a course for action, while also making it clear that Natalie will be the one to take such action. In this case, Natalie's stream of talk to the child can be seen as preventing another caregiver from acting, while also acknowledging the child and assuring her that her needs will be met soon. As the segment begins, Natalie has just finished changing Jason's diaper and is setting him down on the floor.

### (10) "I turned my back"

- 1 Natalie: °I think our friend Lucy's waking up. (.)
- 2 Yes I think our friend Lucy's waking up.°
- 3 Hang ↑on Lucy loo:.

((24 second segment not transcribed: Patrice and Natalie discuss another child's (Dan's) habit of crying after waking. As they speak, Lucy continues to let out small cries. Natalie sprays and wipes the diaper table.))

- 4 Natalie: I gotta wash my hands Lucy loo and I'll get up there and git chu=  
Natalie turns and walks toward sink
- 5 =Just a minute mama."
- 6 (1.0)
- Natalie washes hands (off-screen)
- 7 Lucy: ((crie[s])
- 8 Natalie: |Oh I hear you:.. I turned my ba::ck.
- 9 Patrice: ((chuckles))=
- 10 Natalie: =And that made you upse::t.
- 11 Lucy: ((short cry))
- 12 Natalie: Yes. Here I come.
- 13 Patrice: °What is tha::t.°
- 14 (2.8)
- 15 Natalie: He:re I come to save the day::: ((singing))  
Natalie walks toward Lucy's crib

In lines 1 and 2 Natalie verbally notices Lucy's cries and offers a simple explanation for them: that Lucy has woken up. She addresses these comments to the child she is currently dealing with, Jason, but then shifts to addressing Lucy herself in line 3 with what is essentially a promise (directing someone to wait being a conventional way of signaling that whatever they are to wait for will soon be delivered). Note that Natalie does not at this point commit to delivering it herself. It seems that right now there is the possibility that someone else might act. The likelihood of others acting, however, is

lessened by the fact that Natalie is visibly at a transition between activities. She is unable to help Lucy immediately, because she is currently engaged in setting a child down and then wiping off the diaper table, but anyone who could potentially help would know that these are tasks completed at the end of a larger activity and that Natalie will soon be free to tend to Lucy's needs.

At that point, Patrice makes a comment to Natalie about Dan, the child she is currently engaged with. Patrice and Natalie engage in a short discussion about him, during which time Lucy continues to intermittently emit weak cries. Natalie is simultaneously wiping down the diaper table (although she briefly ceases what she is doing in order to accompany her talk to Patrice with gesture).

There is a 3 second pause after Natalie and Patrice's discussion, after which Lucy gives another short whine. In lines 4 and 5, Natalie produces an account, which embeds an interpretation of Lucy's vocalizations in an excuse for Natalie's delay in getting to her. In other words, as in Excerpt (10) above, she accounts for her own actions (or lack thereof) as well as those of the child. This account is forward-looking, it explains not (just) the fact that Natalie has not yet tended to the child, but also that she will not attend to her immediately. It is also at this point that Natalie specifically commits that she will be the one to tend to Lucy.

As Natalie turns to wash her hands at the sink, Lucy cries again. Natalie issues another acknowledgment and account (line 8). This one explains the immediately preceding cry as a specific event (rather than another in a stream of cries coming from Lucy), constituting it as directly responsive to Natalie's action. As it is unlikely that

Lucy would be able to understand such an utterance or have any sense of what it is intended to do, the possibility that it is designed to be overheard by other adults in the room must be considered. As such, it would conceivably function as a justification for further upsetting Lucy by attributing the delay to the unavoidable fact of having to wash her hands. It further constitutes a display of Natalie's professional expertise: her ability to diagnose a child's cry, as well as her knowledge of the ways in which children's expectations differ from those of adults. Patrice's chuckle in line 9 provides some evidence that she hears the comment as produced for her.<sup>22</sup>

Though this series of noticings, acknowledgements and accounts addressed to a child does not elicit direct action from another caregiver, it still gives rise to a form of cooperation. Through it, Natalie displays a problem, proposes a course of action, and commits herself to acting upon it. The other caregiver is alerted to a state of affairs in the room but are relieved from having to act. Another form of collaboration provided by Natalie's talk in this segment consists of constructing and displaying an elaborate model of childcare practice. By diagnosing the child's problem, narrating her own actions and accounting for discrepancies between her practices and the ideal, Natalie provides much information to anyone else in the room as to how childcare is, or should be, performed in this environment.

In Excerpts (8) and (9), accounts occasioned responses from other caregivers in which they took direct action upon a child. After having examined an instance in which similar accounts do not lead to such action (Excerpt (10)), we return to examples in

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<sup>22</sup> However, we cannot be sure whether Patrice is chuckling in response to Natalie's observation, or directed at the baby she is playing with, whom she addresses in line 13.

which accounts provoke responses from other caregivers. However, these cases demonstrate that assistance need not come in the form of immediate physical action undertaken towards a child, but can also come in the form of an informative utterance directed to the caregiver. In the next two excerpts, accounts addressed to children in the form of questions bring forth “answers” from another caregiver.

In Excerpt 11, Alicia is playing with Tom and Annie (the foster grandmother in the room) is singing to another child in a bouncy seat. Jason is sitting beside Alicia and Jon, but then crawls across the room and pulls himself on the bench near the kitchen, while emitting weak cries.

**(11) “Time for a bottle”**

1 Annie: ha ha [(a h : : m y : : ) b a : ] by ((singing))  
2 Alicia: [Wanna see the world Tom?]  
3 Annie: (cry cry [cry  
4 Alicia: [Oh Miss Annie I think Tom wants to watch you/walk  
5 t'[you.  
6 Annie: [Cry my ba:by ((singing))  
*Baby starts to kick legs*  
7 Ah:: Ah:::::  
8 Alicia: Baby baloo:ga  
9 Annie: ((makes babbling sounds to Tom))  
10 Jason: ((w[hines loudly))  
11 Annie: [Ah :::::  
→ 12 Alicia: Ja:son? (.)  
*Annie glances at Jason*  
→ 13 Is it time for a bottle  
*Annie glances at Jason; Alicia glances at Annie*  
14 Jason: He he heh: heh:[: ((whimpering))  
→ 15 Alicia: [I thought maybe you woulda had one alrea:dy.  
16 Jason: He [he (.) h e h : ] hm hm hm:: hm ((crying))  
17 Annie: [No::I don't think so.]  
*Alicia starts to look at Annie then looks down to left*  
*Annie looks at Jason, holds gaze*  
18 Alicia: No? Okay.  
19 (1.0)  
*Annie looks away from Jason, back at infant in seat*  
*Alicia lifts Tom to her knee*  
20 Alicia: Tom I'll put you down sweetie so I can get (.) Big Boy a  
21 bottle.  
*Alicia lays Tom down on play mat*

In line 12 Alicia addresses Jason by name and, after a brief pause, asks him a question (line 13). Embedded within this question is a candidate interpretation of his actions, seemingly offered up for him to confirm or disconfirm. The extent to which Jason is able to do so, however, is open to question. Even if he can understand what he hears, whatever he produces in response will be open to a great degree of interpretive instability, as were his preceding vocalizations. While Jason does in fact produce some vocal sound following her question, Alicia does not appear to treat that as an answer. Rather, after glancing at Annie, she addresses to Jason (line 15) an utterance that reveals that her question is still open and represents further her state of mind—noting that his not having had a bottle at this time is something that seems unlikely to her (or would have seemed unlikely, were he not behaving in this way).

Alicia's question is thus not the first pair part of an adjacency pair—it is not treated as calling for an answer. This does not mean that a question doesn't still present an opportunity for another adult to answer. However, Annie does not take that opportunity, despite the fact that her eye movement towards Jason indicates that she is attending to him and probably to Alicia's engagement with him. (Contrast this to the complete lack of response to Alicia's utterance, addressed *to* Annie, in line 4.) Annie does respond to Alicia's next utterance, disconfirming her assumption that Jason would have had a bottle. (This is information that she has access to because she has been in the room all morning, while Alicia has been off relieving caregivers in other rooms during their breaks). Though Alicia's question and follow-up statement were addressed to Jason, Annie's utterance is constructed as responsive to them—the 'no' serves to directly

negate the previous proposition and is thus addressed to Alicia. “I don’t think so” perhaps mitigates the “no,” but in any case indexes the fact that she is providing personal knowledge. Further, it is produced as *from* Annie—the “I” in Annie’s response is Annie, not Jason, although Jason was the party originally addressed (in Goffman’s (1981) terms, Annie is both principal and animator of her response). Thus, neither Alicia nor Annie makes any particular effort to construct this as an exchange between Alicia and Jason. Rather, Alicia’s utterance makes available an opportunity for Annie to share what she knows about the last hour or so of Jason’s life, in such a way that will help Alicia make sense of Jason’s immediate vocalizations and enable her to take action accordingly.

Why does a caregiver treat an utterance as deserving a response when its being addressed to a child provides the option not to? Annie does not respond to an earlier utterance that is clearly addressed to her. The difference here may be that which is described in the preceding paragraph. Annie, engaged in singing to another child, does not respond to an earlier utterance (although directly addressed to her) when its purpose appears to be simply play. Here Annie is visibly attending to the purposefulness of Alicia’s talk—e.g., glancing at Jason as though to check the accuracy of Alicia’s interpretation of his conduct (line 14)—and she responds to this talk with information relevant to that purpose.

In the following example, a caregiver similarly offers verbal assistance in a currently active project in response to another caregiver’s talk to a child. In Excerpt (12) below, one child has begun to cry while both caregivers were in the kitchen area and occupied with other tasks. His cries escalate and they both turn their attention to him.

## (12) “Too Close?”

((Tom is crying; Karen, holding Jason, turns to toward him and begins to walk in his direction))

- 1 Patrice: *Oh: what happened.*  
2 Karen: *What ↑happened.*  
*What ↑happened.*  
3 (2.0)  
*Tom continues to cry; Patrice walks over to him, shaking bottle*  
→ 4 Patrice: *Too close?*  
5 Karen: *I think so:. I think [( ).*  
*Patrice kneels and begins to move other child away from Tom*  
6 Tom: |((loud cry))  
7 Karen: *He gets overstimulated very easily.*  
8 (5.0)  
*Patrice slides William away from Tom.*  
*Karen sets Jason down and moves Justine.*  
9 Patrice: *Tom? Tom?*  
10 Tom: ((continues to cry.))  
11 Karen: *Here I'll get Tom. (.7) if you'll get Jason.*

Karen and Patrice both speak to Tom, questioning him about why he is crying.

As in the example above, Patrice advances a candidate explanation in the form of a question to Tom: “Too close?” That it is addressed to Tom is evident from its baby talk features (especially its high pitch). (“Too close” apparently refers to another child who is sitting close to him.)

As in the immediately preceding example (Excerpt (11)), Karen responds to Patrice’s talk to a child with an utterance that serves to assist Patrice in determining how best to care for the child, specifically by filling in information that is called for in the utterance to the child. In this case, this consists of a confirmation of Patrice’s hypothesis, supported with general information about the child’s disposition. Once again, this is addressed directly to the other caregiver, rather than to the child, and is voiced by a caregiver, not by the child. Here, this is evidenced by an abrupt lowering of pitch, effecting a shift from baby talk register to standard adult talk.

Note that in this case, the collaboration consists not only of solving an immediate problem, but also in sharing attributions about a child's general disposition that can continue to serve as a basis for action in the future—in other words, contributing to the intelligence of the daycare classroom as a cognitive ecology.

Thus accounts differ from noticing, acknowledgements and other types of utterances to children that display problems in that they also advance interpretations of children's conduct that can serve as the basis for negotiating shared understandings that persist beyond the immediate moment. Caregivers account for children's actions, and often, sometimes simultaneously, account for their own (or their own failures to act). As such, this form of talk to children is useful for supporting coordinated action between the caregivers, but also can play an important role in the socialization of novice childcare workers because of the way they paint a picture of preferred caregiver practice.

#### **5.2.2.5. Assessments**

Finally, I consider a single example of another way in which talk to children can assist caregivers in coordinating their efforts towards delivering care. This example is quite a bit different from those examined so far, however, in both the nature of the triggering talk and the type of activity that it initiates. In this case, collaboration occurs by way of evaluative statements delivered to a child, i.e., assessments. But these statements do not display any particular problem for another caregiver to act upon; rather, it is a different part of the caregiver's job that it is called for. In the following example, Daneesha is in the process of singing a song to two children and Alicia is organizing toys

into containers in the kitchen area when Annie (the foster grandmother in the room) notices and positively evaluates another child's actions (line 2).

### (13) "Scootin Symon"

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1 Daneesha: ((singing)) Out came the sun and dried up all the rain and=  
→ 2 Annie:    =Goo:d Sy[↑mon  
3 Daneesha:    [Oh my go:sh that's ↑great Sy(h)mon  
4              ((2.0))  
5 Alicia:    [Are you scootin Symon?=  
6 Child:    [((cries))  
7 Daneesha: =Every ↑day you're just goin farther and ↑farther  
8 Child:    ((cries))  
9 Daneesha: ((singing)) Down came the rain and washed the spider out.
```

It is hard to tell whether Annie's comment draws Daneesha's gaze towards Symon—her head is already turned in that direction towards another child and her hair blocks any close look at the movement of her eyes—but it clearly draws Daneesha's verbal attention. Daneesha overlaps with an assessment that is upgraded in several respects: the volume is slightly louder; the pitch slightly higher; the utterance is longer; it starts with an expression of astonishment; and the term "good" is replaced with "great". At "great" in line 3 Alicia, in the midst of walking from one end of the room to the other, briefly shifts her gaze to Symon and adds her own contribution "Are you scootin Symon?". Daneesha latches to her question with a more global observation—one that pertains not just to Symon's immediate accomplishment but the course of her development more generally (line 7). This utterance, indeed all of them except perhaps for Alicia's, are affectively loaded with paralinguistic features that make plain the caregivers' positive stance towards Symon's physical achievements. The exchange as a whole includes many of the features (such as overlap and prosodic and lexical displays of affect) through which assessments can become a site for the "interactive organization of

co-experience” (C. Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992a, p. 155). However, in this case, the utterances that constitute this activity are not exchanged between the “co-experiencers,” rather they are all addressed to the child, Symon.

In the other cases I have described thus far, one caregiver’s talk to a child occasions complementary action or talk from another caregiver. In other words, the caregiver who hears the child-directed utterance provides some service other than that being provided by the initial speaker. Here, however, each of the caregivers’ individual contributions is of the same kind (if not identical in form) and delivered, in part, at the same time.

Furthermore, lest it seem from the previous examples that the analysis in this chapter is solely concerned with the physical aspects of caring for children, this example shows that strategies of speaking to children also serve the purposes of collaboration on less tangible but equally important projects of caregiving, such as tracking and encouraging children’s development. This is only one of many examples in which collaboration is accomplished primarily or wholly through communicative means (as opposed to instrumental actions).

This segment reminds us that caregivers do more than simply tend to crying children, though they do a lot of that. Monitoring and cheering on children’s development is also an important part of the caregiver’s job. Here, they work together to produce an unambiguously positive message to Symon. At the same time, they jointly construct an official version of events by labeling Symon’s current actions and linking them with others enacted over time.

In this Section 5.2.2, I have described multiple instances in which talk to a child displays a caregiver's understanding of some aspect of a child's behavior or event taking place in the room. For purposes of exposition they have been organized according to the type of verbal action to a child through which they are initially triggered, but it is apparent that this is but one of many environmental and communicative factors that influence the way in which the ensuing collaborative activities proceed. Through close examination of these episodes, it becomes evident that it cannot be assumed *a priori* that talk to children is intended to communicate with overhearers. It is, however, possible to amass evidence that it is or is not in a particular case. Taking seriously the possibility that such talk is a strategic move on behalf of the speaker allows us to consider the purposes for which it is employed. However, communicative effects can be achieved even when not intended by the speaker through the ensuing actions of the overhearing caregiver.

In fact, the communicative effects of talk to children always hinge on the overhearing caregiver as much or even more than on the speaker. Because, as repeatedly shown above, it is possible but not required for another caregiver to respond to talk addressed to a child, the hearer wields a great deal of control over how and whether cooperation occurs on the basis of such talk. Furthermore, the hearer can choose whether or not to render any actions she undertakes as responsive to the talk to the child, and the speaker can either cooperate with or resist the hearer's efforts in this regard.

Finally, the excerpts above reveal at least three different types of collaborative action that occur as a result of talk to children, sometimes simultaneously. Most

prevalent are segments in which there emerges a clear division of labor, in which the overhearing caregiver undertakes some action (whether verbal or purely physical) that complements the action being undertaken by the original speaking caregiver. However, the analysis of the assessment segment above shows that speaking to children can also engender a form of coordination in which each participant performs the same task (thus potentially elevating its significance and enhancing its effect). That example also reveals a third type of collaboration also found in the analysis of account sequences, in which caregivers work together to construct or negotiate shared understanding that can serve as the basis for future action in the daycare classroom.

### **5.2.3. Initiating Courses of Action with Children**

Most of the interactions analyzed thus far occurred in the infant rooms, in which children of 2-12 months are cared for. In these segments, the caregivers speak to children who are assumed to have little ability to understand them. Even where there may be some comprehension (for example, in interaction with children who are nearly a year), the talk addressed to the children did not require verbal responses. (While in some cases an infant's nonverbal action is treated as a response, the absence of such an action is not treated either as either a violation of conversational norms or a communicative move, as it might be in talk among adults.) This is what makes the talk seem merely playful, and may be part of what makes it such a useful vehicle in which to convey information to other caregivers (or spur their action) in a diplomatic manner.

Talk addressed to children in the toddler classrooms (12-18 and 18-24 months) is different in several respects. It is still the case that children are spoken to in language

they are unlikely to understand, as in Excerpt (1) (in which Monica informs Shante that she has only one diaper), but this is no longer the primary mode of interaction with children. Rather, simple directives, commissives and other types of utterance designed to engage children in a course of action come to the forefront. Children may not be expected to respond verbally to these utterances, but they are expected to act in accordance with them (and often do).<sup>23</sup>

When it is possible for children to understand and respond (usually nonverbally) to the utterances directed to them, the ways in which children are *spoken through* are altered. The children themselves take a much more active role in the collaborative activities that result from such forms of talk.

In the examples analyzed in the last section, it was never the case that the primary function of the initial utterance to the child was to directly influence that child's subsequent behavior. The question, rather, was the extent to which it functioned as a general sort of playful socialization, or whether it was designed to play a more instrumental role in the immediate activity through its communication to an overhearing adult. In all of the examples below, however, the talk is designed to elicit a response of some kind from the child to whom it is addressed. In the first segments analyzed, talk addressed primarily to a child is "picked up on" by another caregiver who then assists with the project already underway. It is thus the overhearer who constitutes the initial talk as a prelude to collaborative action. The final two segments analyzed are more complex, however, in that the talk seems to have been designed for two recipients: both

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<sup>23</sup> To be more precise, such directives are issued *in order to* induce children's compliance; caregivers, however, are quite aware that oftentimes that will not occur.

the child and an overhearing adult. In these cases, the project being undertaken by the initial speaker depends on the other caregiver hearing and recognizing the purposefulness of the talk addressed to the child.

#### **5.2.3.1. When a Child is the Intended Recipient**

A simple example occurs in the Bumblebee Room (a classroom for 18-24 month old toddlers). Katherine, the teacher, is changing Rosalita's diaper on the changing table. The other caregiver in the room, a foster grandmother usually referred to as Grandma Cooper, is putting away the unfinished food of children who have already had their lunch.

#### (14) “Let’s go wash your hands”

1 Kath: Miss Katherine’s gonna clean your no- mouth and your face cuz  
*Katherine removes Rosa’s diaper*  
2 it’s dirty.  
*nodding*  
3 Rosa: (mm[hm])  
4 Kath: [Okay?  
*nodding*  
5 Rosa: okay:  
6 Kath: Okay.  
7 (Because) you’re gonna be sad when I start cleaning it  
*Katherine unfolds diaper*  
8 You’re gonna be upset (.) with me.  
*Puts diaper under Rosa.*  
9 (1.0)  
10 Grandma: Oh: °h hm°  
*Grandma puts lid on Tupperware container*  
11 (2.25)  
12 Rosa?: (wipes) (.)  
*Katherine is putting new diaper on Rosa*  
13 (wi:pes)  
14 Grandma: Hm this top (.) about go:ne.  
*Katherine gets out a new wipe and starts to clean Rosa’s face*  
15 (2.0)  
*Katherine continues to wipe*  
16 Kath: Okay. Miss Katherine is cleaning your nose (.) cuz it’s dirty,  
17 I’m sorry  
18 (2.0)  
19 You have lots of sand,  
*Katherine finishes wiping and throws away wipe*  
→ 20 a:nd (.6) let’s go wash your ↑hands  
*Rosa extends her arms to Katherine*  
21 (3.0)  
*Katherine picks up Rosa and pulls up her pants; Grandma moves towards sink; Katherine puts Rosa down in front of Grandma and moves back to diaper table; Grandma helps Rosa wash hands.*

Katherine’s utterance in line 20 is the last of a series in which she verbally informs Rosa of what will be happening to her. Rosa has demonstrated that she is understanding, or at least capable of responding to this information, with her utterances in lines 3 and 5.<sup>24</sup> Arguably, all of this is done not just to inform Rosa, but rather to secure a particular type of behavior from her; i.e., to gain her compliance. In line 20, Katherine uses “let’s” to initiate the next action, indicating that Rosa will take an active part in it.

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<sup>24</sup> If I hear it correctly, Rosa’s talk in lines 12 and 13 further demonstrates her understanding and ability to articulate what is going on.

In fact, despite her use of “let’s,” Katherine ultimately does not participate in the activity that she sets in motion. As Katherine picks Rosa up from the changing table, Grandma Cooper is walking toward the sink. Grandma stops while Katherine sets Rosa down before her. She then immediately starts helping Rosa to wash her hands.

Due to its placement within a series of utterances directed solely to Rosa, and the necessity of engaging Rosa’s participation in the task of washing her own hands, Katherine’s utterance in line 20 must be seen as intended for Rosa as a recipient. There is no evidence that it is in any way directed to Grandma Cooper. However, it functions as a device for orienting Grandma to the nature of the activity that is about to take place. Arguably, Katherine’s setting Rosa down in front of the sink (and Grandma Cooper) also contributes to this understanding. Grandma Cooper’s seamless picking up of the activity, then, should not necessarily be seen as solely in reaction to Katherine’s talk to Rosa. However, Katherine’s talk to Rosa is doubtlessly one of the elements that makes possible this smoothly coordinated event in the life of the daycare.

Contrast this with a moment of coordinated action in one of the infant rooms that also begins with an utterance to a child in which a caregiver initiates a course of action. When this segment begins an infant of approximately 9 months, Jason, is sitting on Patrice’s lap and Natalie is standing near the changing table.

### (15) Puppaluppa

- 1 Natalie: Ja:son can I change your diaper puppa luppa?  
2 (5.5)  
*Patrice pats Jason on the back 12 times, then picks him up, stands, and hands him to Natalie*  
3 Natalie: k(h): Pa(h)trice picked you up because I didn't want [to:  
4 Patrice: [h hm hm  
5 [hm  
6 Natalie: [( ) heavy go:ai.  
*He's a heavy gu:y.*  
*Natalie puts Jason on table*  
*Yes you are:*  
*↑Hi::*

In line 1, Natalie asks Jason whether she can change his diaper. As in the above example, this can probably be seen as an act of informing the child what is about to happen to him. Though it is delivered in interrogative form, there is no evidence that Jason is expected to either respond to it as a question or comply with it as a request. It does, however, spur Patrice to action. Patrice responds by patting Jason on the back several times and then lifting him and handing him to Natalie.<sup>25</sup> Jason is the purpose of the action and an intermediary of the communication, but he plays no active role in the collaboration. Thus while this segment begins with an utterance designed to set an activity in motion, it differs from the others that I will analyze in this section in that it does not actually spur a child's verbal or physical participation.

In the previous section, the episodes analyzed were initiated with utterances that displayed caregivers' understandings of goings-on in the daycare classroom. Talk

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<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Patrice's action here becomes the subject of metacommentary: that Patrice picks Jason up (or that Natalie does not) is deemed by Natalie to necessitate an account. Because Natalie is not captured on videotape until after she takes Jason it is hard to say what she does to communicate to Patrice that she "doesn't want to" pick Jason up. The transfer occurs several feet from where Patrice was sitting, over one of the benches, so it is likely that Natalie, rather than walking all the way over to where Patrice was sitting, merely walked up to the bench and waited, making it necessary for Patrice to lift Jason and carry him a few feet to her.

produced for the purpose of getting children to move to a new activity can also be informative to other caregivers and occasion their collaboration. In this case, caregivers may work together in pursuit of the same larger activity, but interact with different children. For example, in segment 16 below, Monica’s invitations of the children to Circle Time—a group activity in which all gather together in a semi-circle to sing songs and read stories—occasion Robert’s attempts to move the children he is currently engaging with to Circle Time. In this case, they do not collaborate in caring for a single child, but rather in initiating a larger activity involving all of the children. Both caregivers’ utterances serve primarily to move children to the new activity, and secondarily to coordinate a concerted effort in performing this task. The children, for their part, also contribute to creating the new activity.

**(16) Up go to Monica**

1 Robert: I need you guys to sit down coming down the slide,  
2 none of you sit down.  
3 Karim: ((laughs))  
4 Robert: There we go Shante, sittin down. ↑Whee::: Sit down. Sit down  
5 thank you. Shante you need to ↑move. There’s people comin.  
6 [You need to move move. Move.  
→ 7 Monica: [(Lena do you wanna) sit down so we can (read that book)  
8 together?  
9 Child: [(yeah)  
10 Robert: [See? (.) Now Karim’s behind ya.  
→ 11 Monica: ((in falsetto)).hh Rebecca, Curtis, [Karim,=  
12 Robert: [You can  
13 do it.  
→ 14 Monica: =Sha[n]te and Thomas right here ↓please.  
15 Robert: [Up. (.) up up. (.) Up go to [Monica.  
→ 16 Monica: [(Time to) sit down.  
17 Robert: Go sit down. She’s doin stories, go sit [down.  
18 Monica: [Come sit down.  
19 Robert: Go sit. I’m gonna go too, let’s go sit.  
20 Child: ( )  
21 Robert: No:?. You [don’t wanna sit? Come on. Here. Will you sit with me?  
22 Monica: [(Can you get me) that book right there. Give me  
23 that book? [(Get me) that book.  
24 Child: [mm mm mm [(.) ay (.) AA:: ((escalating whine))  
25 Robert: [Come on (.) Come on< OH: (.) OH OH::  
26 OH: >it’s terrible, come on< (.) come on. Uh: ((sound of  
27 effort))

When this segment begins, Robert is engaged in attempting to get several children to use the slide properly. In line 7, Monica asks one child to sit down in the circle area and in lines 11 and 14 loudly summons all of the children in the room, one by one. There has been no discussion in the preceding half hour of Circle Time as a next activity, so Monica's utterances may be informative to him of what is going to happen next.<sup>26</sup> Even if he knows Circle Time is on the agenda, he is informed by Monica's summons that it is happening *now*. Robert immediately transforms an utterance designed to get a child to stand up to one designed to get a child to stand up and go over to the other caregiver. He then continues to prod the children towards Circle Time. Monica and Robert's calls to Circle Time overlap, which may work to produce for the children the sense that the caregivers are united in their efforts to move the whole group towards this new activity.

Many directives to toddlers are negative ones, designed to get them to stop what they are presently doing. In several cases, such utterances engendered collaboration from another caregiver in the form of complementary or parallel utterances also produced to get the child to refrain from his or her current activities. For example, in excerpt 17, Katherine and Grandma Cooper are both sitting at the table with the children while they eat lunch.

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<sup>26</sup> In many classrooms, Circle Time occurs at a set time every day. However, in this classroom of very young toddlers (12-18 months), Circle Time is not on a formal schedule, although it is treated as a well-defined and clearly bounded event.

**(17) “These are his grapes”**

- 1 David: yuh ((reaches over table))  
→ 2 Kath: These are his grapes.  
3 Grandma: Look. You have carrots. °these carrots°  
4 Look. Chew it. Good.  
5 Kath: He doesn't want to try ( ) Grandma?

In a familiar form of logical shorthand, Katherine tries to get David to stop doing what he is doing by explaining why he should not do it—that the grapes he is reaching for belong to someone else (line 2). Grandma Cooper, who is sitting closer to David, tries to achieve the same end by interesting him in his own food. (Note that in both this and the previous example we see “redirection” at work—a popular childcare/parenting strategy in which a caregiver attempts to get a child to abandon an unacceptable activity by directing him or her towards a more acceptable alternative, rather than focusing on what the child should not do.) Katherine’s talk to David provides a cue to Grandma as to how she might help out, and she does so via a complementary verbal strategy.

In segment 18 the roles are switched: Grandma issues the first correction and Katherine chimes in. The group as a whole is coming in from the playground and preparing for lunch. Grandma is helping the children wash their hands while Katherine holds open the door to let children in. When Damon tries to climb up on the footstool on which another child is already standing, Grandma issues a corrective.

**(18) “There’s someone up here”**

- 1 Grandma: Wait a minute Da:mon. Da:mon.  
→ 2 Damon, there’s someone up here.  
3 Kath: Damon wait until David’s done then you can have a turn.

In this case, the semantic content of Grandma’s utterance in line 2 and Katherine’s in line 3 are very similar. Both indicate that the problem with Damon’s

actions stems from the fact that David is still washing his hands. Katherine adds the assurance that Damon will get a turn when David is done, but what she contributes to the project may have more to do with her authoritative role in the classroom than anything added by her utterance.

In Excerpt (19), like (17) above, Grandma Cooper picks up on Katherine's correction to a child and takes a complementary approach to the same project. However, in this case Grandma Cooper acts both verbally and physically to deal with the problem.

At the beginning of the segment transcribed below, Grandma Cooper is sitting with the children across the table from Rosalita, and Katherine is changing another child's diaper at the changing table.

**(19) "You're gonna be all done"**

- 1 Grandma: ((to Damon)) That's her food.  
 2 You have ↑fi:sh. (.) a:nd ↓co:rn (.) and: (.) it look like  
 3 sweet potatoes.  
 → 4 Kath: Rosalita.  
 5 Grandma: Yeah [( [ (still speaking to Damon))  
 → 6 Kath: [You're [gonna be all done.=  
 7 Damon: [ba?  
 → 8 Kath: =I need for you to [sit on your bottom please.  
 9 Grandma: [Uh:: |  
 10 Damon: Yah yah *Grandma looks at Rosa*  
*Rosa climbs onto chair*  
 11 (2.0)  
*Grandma starts to get up*  
*Rosa bounces on her knees in chair*  
 12 Grandma: Rosa look at your chai:r. (.8)  
*Grandma stands up* |  
 13 Rosa's gonna fall:. *Rosa sits on her bottom*  
*Grandma walks around table*  
 14 (2.3)  
*Grandma turns Rosa's chair*  
 15 And you will hurt your body.  
*Grandma tucks Rosa's chair under the table.*

Katherine notices that Rosalita is kneeling sideways on her chair. She has been "fidgeting": repeatedly climbing off of and back onto her chair. Katherine attempts to get

Rosa to sit down by informing her of the consequences of her actions—i.e., that she will be “all done” (she will not be allowed to continue to eat lunch) if she does not sit down on her chair, although this causal connection is not explicitly made (lines 4, 6 and 7). As she speaks, Rosa lowers one leg to the floor. Rosa then responds to Katherine by climbing back up and bouncing on her knees on the chair, but does not sit down “on her bottom.” Grandma Cooper has been conversing with another child about his food and continues to throughout Katherine’s three-part turn. However, towards the end of that turn, Grandma looks at Rosa. She then positions her hands and feet in preparation for getting up (line 11) before producing an utterance that is addressed to Rosa and that draws attention to the position of her chair. As Grandma Cooper stands and begins to walk around the table, Rosa sits down in her chair. Like Katherine, Grandma also utilizes the verbal approach of threatening Rosa with negative consequences (lines 13 and 15) (although those consequences are perhaps more “natural” than what was suggested by Katherine, which required caregiver action).<sup>27</sup> It appears, however, that Grandma’s physical approach has already produced compliance with Katherine’s directive.

This segment exemplifies effective teamwork in action. Rosa shows that she has received and understood Katherine’s directive, but does not go so far as to actually obey it. When Grandma Cooper stands and walks toward her, however, she already knows what she is “supposed” to be doing and immediately does it. Katherine’s utterance not only called Grandma’s attention to the problem, it also went some part of the way

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<sup>27</sup> Grandma’s temporary shift from addressing Rosa to referring to her in line 13 may indicate that these utterances are being produced not just as correction to Rosa but also as a lesson for the other children.

towards solving it. Grandma's movement towards Rosa was enough to finish the job, and the extra step of tucking the chair under the table makes it more difficult for Rosa to get herself in the same position again. Rosa starts to wiggle out as soon as Grandma sits down on the other side of the table, but the position of her chair provides some impediment to her movement.

As in the excerpts analyzed in Section 5.2.2 above, it is the overhearer who creates communication between caregivers out of talk to a child. In this case, Grandma Cooper's well-timed physical movement, combined with her verbal assistance, results in successful caregiver collaboration. However, we can also see that the purposive actions of the child (such as her partial compliance with Katherine's request) are central to the accomplishment of the project on which the caregivers are collaborating.

### **5.2.3.2. When Both Child and Overhearing Caregiver are Intended Recipients**

In each of the three above cases, the initial utterance displays both a problem and one caregiver's attempt to solve it. The other caregiver makes use of that, as well as her own visual assessment of the situation, to determine whether to assist and how best to do so. While these directives and corrections to children exert a direct effect on children's behavior, this does not mean that they are not also produced for the benefit of other caregivers as overhearers. In the following two examples, it is demonstrably the case that they are.

In Excerpt (5), below, the overhearing caregiver's perception of the verbal and/or embodied aspects of an utterance to a child is essential to carrying out the course of action that is initiated. This is particularly clear because collaborative action does not

occur and because this can be traced to the other caregiver's failure to hear the utterance and see the action directed toward the child.

When the segment begins, Monica is extending an invitation to Lena to participate in a particular verbal and manual routine they refer to as "Apple Tree." The "Apple Tree" and "Row Your Boat" routines performed and referenced in this segment involve the caregiver holding both hands of a child and enacting a series of conventional movements that correspond with the words of a song. These take place in the context of the larger activity, "Circle Time," in which the children and caregivers gather together to sing songs and read stories.

**(20) "Row Row Your Boat?"**

1 Monica: Good job [Rebecca  
 2 Child: [AH:::  
 3 Monica: Lena apple tree?  
 4 Child: oh ba ba (.) ba ba  
 5 Robert: Bye bye. Where you goin.  
 → 6 Monica: Kari:m row your boat?  
 7 Robert: ((l [ a r g e y a w n ))=  
*Robert's eyes are closed during yawn*  
 → 8 Monica: [Karim row row your boat?  
 9 Robert: =h o o : :  
*Shakes head*  
 → 10 Monica: Row row your boat?  
*Places left hand on Karim's back and points towards Robert with right  
 Robert is looking down*  
 11 Robert: (.) It's been a long day.  
 | Karim walks toward Robert |  
*Robert looks up Robert reaches out and stops Karim with hand*  
 12 Monica: Way: up [high: in the apple [tree  
 13 Child: [(MOMMA)  
 14 Robert: [tree  
 15 Monica: [Two little apples looking at me  
 16 Robert: [Two little apples looking at me  
 17 Monica: [so I shook the tree as hard as I °coul::d  
 18 Robert: [so I shook the tree as hard as I could (.)  
 19 Monica: .hh [the apples fell down  
 20 Robert: [the apples fell down  
 21 Monica: [mm: ((deep voice)) that was good  
 22 Robert: [mm °that was good.°  
 23 Monica: ((deep voice)) yummy apples yum yum yum.  
 24 Yummy apples yum yum yum.  
 25 Child: Bye bye (1.2) a bye bye

At the beginning of this segment, Monica has just completed a second round of “Row Your Boat” with Rebecca. Before that Monica had performed “Row Your Boat” with Karim, after which Karim walked away from the circle. Robert tried several times to call him back, but did not succeed and abandoned his effort. At line 4 a child (probably Mikey) says “ba ba”. Robert appears to take his utterance to mean “bye bye”: he responds first by asking Mikey “where are you going?” but then seems to adopt a different interpretation and looks around the room, presumably to see who Mikey is saying good-bye *to*. Monica also looks. She calls “Karim.” Monica then offers “row your boat?” to Karim (line 6). Karim raises his right hand toward Monica, seemingly in preparation to take her up on her offer. She then repeats her invitation twice (lines 8-10), placing her left hand on Karim’s back and pointing towards Robert with her right. This repeat thus constitutes a revision, or clarification, of her offer: it is not she who will play “Row Your Boat” with Karim, but Robert. As she says this, however, Robert is yawning and shaking his head. Karim walks towards Robert. As he reaches him, Robert puts his hand up and prevents Karim from coming closer. Karim turns around and looks back at Monica. Monica has begun “Apple Tree” with Lena. Robert joins in and sings along. Karim watches Monica and Lena and does some of the corresponding actions on his own. He then departs the circle while Monica tickles Lena.

In this segment, Monica employs an activity in which the group has been engaging to lure Karim back to the circle. However, she already has her hands full (literally) with another child. Robert, however, has a child in his lap but his hands are free and could conceivably play Row Your Boat with Karim. Rather than asking Robert

to do that, she makes the offer to Karim, and then guides him toward Robert. However, Robert (who is yawning and shaking his head, thus temporarily impeding his own auditory and visual faculties) does not perceive Monica's talk or actions with Karim. Therefore, he does not interpret Karim's movement towards him as compliance with her instruction, and rebuffs him with his hand.

This segment shows a caregiver speaking to a child in order to enlist that child's embodied participation in engaging another caregiver in his care. However, bringing this off requires being heard or seen by the other caregiver. Here, Robert is not monitoring Monica's talk to the child, thus collaboration fails.

In Excerpt (21), speaking through a child is employed as a second strategy after a more direct utterance addressed to the other caregiver fails to achieve its purpose. In contrast to the example just discussed, here it is clear that the utterance is not meant to communicate information to the child because it does not deal with something the child could be expected to respond to or act upon. However, this example is more complex—unlike similar utterances addressed to infants but intended for overhearers (e.g., Excerpt (15)), Robert in this case makes use of Rebecca's relatively advanced competence in order to provide an interactional space for the issuing of his indirect request to the other caregiver, Monica.

When Excerpt (6) begins, Monica is reading a story called *The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and The Big Hungry Bear* (Wood & Wood, 1984).

## (21) Rebecca's Present (Transcript A)

1 Monica: The big hungry bear can smell a red ripe strawberry a mi::le  
2 away:. °(do you wanna/excuse me while I turn the page \_\_\_\_\_)°  
3 Robert: Sit. Sit.  
4 Monica: Especially one [that has just (.) been (.) picked. °sit down°  
5 Robert: [Oh:: Sit (.)  
6 Robert: Sit. (.) Sit down.=  
7 Monica: =Oh no::. Boo:m boo:m boo:m. ((deep voice)) The bear'll tromp  
8 through the forest on his big hungry feet and sniff sniff  
9 sniff (.) fi:nd the strawberry  
10 Robert: °Oooh° ((looking in Rebecca's diaper))  
11 Monica: No matter whe::re it is ↑hidden  
12 Or who::s guarding it.  
13 Or how: it is disgui:sed.  
14 (Quick) there's only one way in the whole wide world to save  
15 a red ripe strawberry from the big hungry bear  
16 Cut it in two (.) and share half with me (.)  
17 and we'll both eat it all up  
18 Mmmm  
19 [Now that's one red ripe strawberry the big hungry bear will=  
20 Robert: [Hey hey pick that up.  
21 Monica: =never get. [The end.  
22 Robert: [Thank you Thomas.  
23 (1.2)  
24 Robert: Becca made [you a present.  
25 Monica: [yay [::::: ( ) mouse  
26 Child: [a DA: YAH:  
27 Monica: See the mouse? ( sleep[ing?) The mouse is sleeping.  
→ 28 Robert: [Becca (.4) Becca (.) Becca  
→ 29 Show [Monica the present you made her.  
30 Monica: [°the mouse is sleeping°  
→ 31 Robert: Show Monica your present.  
32 Monica: Okay you read some books. (1.2) °(try to get 'em all back)°  
33 Monica: Oh:uh: (.) Miss [Rebecca  
34 Lena: [((starts crying))

While Monica is reading, Rebecca stands and tries to hand her a different book. Monica attempts to get her to sit down, but Rebecca resists and ends up being pushed backwards towards Robert. Robert seats Rebecca on his knee, and then takes a look into her diaper and comments on the smell (line 10). Monica continues to read and does not look in that direction.



Rebecca walks back over to Monica and stands in front of her while she finishes the story. After Monica says “The end” (line 21), Robert tells her that, “Becca made you a present”. However, Monica starts to say “yay:::::” (a conventional way of ending circle time activities), and another child is shouting, so it is unlikely that Monica hears him.

**(21) Rebecca’s Present (Transcript C)**

19 Monica: [Now that’s one red ripe strawberry the big hungry bear will=  
 20 Robert: [Hey hey pick that up.  
 21 Monica: =never get. [The end.  
 22 Robert: [Thank you Thomas.  
 23 (1.2)  
 → 24 Robert: Becca made [you a present.  
 25 Monica: [yay [::::: ( ) mouse  
 26 Child: [a DA: YAH:

As Monica talks to Lena, Robert makes another attempt to give Monica his news. At this point, however, he addresses Rebecca rather than Monica. In both versions, Robert uses the expression “a present,” by which he refers to soiled diaper (or more accurately, that which it contains). This is a somewhat conventional way of talking about dirty diapers for them. (Though its origins are presumably humorous, it does not generate a laugh at this point. I have also found this terminology used in other rooms of the center.) By labeling it a present *made for* Monica, Robert acts to establish that it is Monica’s duty to change this diaper.<sup>28</sup> When Monica fails to respond to this information,

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<sup>28</sup> In a subsequent interview, Monica indicated that Robert had changed diapers in the morning and therefore considered it to be Monica’s turn in the afternoon. Monica did not entirely agree, as she felt that he should be willing to tend to such matters when she was running an activity. Although this is not a focus of my analysis, Monica could be seen as actively resisting Robert’s attempts to inform her of Rebecca’s dirty diaper (in her lack of uptake to his initial noticing (line 10) and subsequent announcement (line 24)). Similarly, it is possible that Robert orchestrates his withdrawal in Excerpt (5) in order to avoid taking part in the task of engaging Karim in circle time activities.

he does not repeat it; rather he attempts to get Rebecca's attention by calling her name three times (line 28).

### (21) Rebecca's Present (Transcript D)

27 Monica: See the mouse? ( sleep[ing?] The mouse is sleeping.  
 → 28 Robert: [Becca (.4) Becca (.) Becca  
 |  
 Rebecca turns to Robert  
 → 29 Show [Monica the present you made her.  
 30 Monica: [°the mouse is sleeping°  
 → 31 Robert: Show Monica your present.  
 Rebecca walks to Robert  
 32 Monica: Okay you read some books. (1.2) °(try to get 'em all back)°  
 Tosses book in bin Scoots bin to Robert and starts to stand  
 33 Monica: Oh:uh: (.) Miss [Rebecca  
 34 Lena: [((starts crying))

These summons are produced loudly and thus also are likely to attract Monica's attention and increase the chances that she will be monitoring when Robert speaks to Rebecca. (In fact, Monica appears to lift her gaze from Lena to Robert on the second utterance of "Becca"). After the third recitation of her name, Rebecca turns to Robert. Upon securing her gaze, Robert says "Show Monica the present you made her. Show Monica your present." (lines 29 and 31). During the first part of this turn, Monica is speaking to Lena. That Robert repeats it indicates that the utterance is not being solely produced for Rebecca, but for Monica, as well.

Further evidence that this utterance is intended for Monica comes from the fact that Rebecca is not likely to be able to determine what Robert means by the euphemism "your present." Of more immediate and pragmatic importance is that the directive does not really provide Rebecca with any appropriate action to perform (it would be physically difficult and altogether unlikely for Rebecca to open her diaper so as to provide Monica with a view inside). It is evident that Rebecca in fact does not understand what he means

because she responds by walking over to Robert and opening a book that he holds in his hands.

This example differs from instances of speaking to infants in that Rebecca is capable of understanding a great deal and may well be able to comply with a similar directive, such as “Show Monica your book.” Further, Robert designs his talk to create and fit within an exchange with Rebecca—he solicits her attention, holds off on delivering his utterance until he has her gaze, and delivers it with his gaze fixed upon her. However, Robert simultaneously displays attention to Monica’s reception of the utterance, repeating his message to ensure that it is not blocked by her own talk to Lena. In a sense, Robert is designing his utterance to fit into two separate interactions.

Monica, for her part, treats his utterance as though it were not just spoken for her benefit, but addressed to her. By responding “Okay” she reframes his utterance as a request; and by continuing “you read some books” she makes it clear that she has shifted from addressing Lena to addressing Robert. She then directs Robert to take over the task she has been engaged in. As she does this, she scoots the book bin in Robert’s direction; then she stands, picks up Rebecca and takes her to the changing table.

Robert’s talk to Rebecca provides a means of having Monica hear it without directly engaging her in an exchange. Having informed Monica of Rebecca’s dirty diaper in a more direct (if euphemistic) manner without receiving a response, Robert is in a potentially awkward position. By using a somewhat formulaic child-directed utterance, Robert can give Monica another opportunity to respond to this information without running the risk that he will be heard as issuing repeated requests (aka “nagging”).

Notable here is that he does not merely go through the motions of directing an utterance to a child, but rather engages Rebecca in an actual interaction for Monica to overhear.

In this section, I have analyzed instances of *communicating through children* in which the triggering utterance was one designed to initiate a course of action with a child. Therefore, in each case these are utterances that are intended to be heard and understood by the children to whom they are addressed, although they might also be intended for overhearers (as in the last two excerpts). The overhearing caregiver thus plays an integral role in constituting these exchanges as communication between caregivers. Further, these examples show not only that this phenomenon is not limited to talk addressed to preverbal infants, but that when addressed to older children it has a very different character that demands taking the children's participation into account in the analysis. These themes will be further elaborated in Section 6.1.4.

### 5.3. SHARING AND NEGOTIATING INTERPRETATIONS

Thus far I have focused on episodes in which talk to children leads to caregiver cooperation on an immediate task of caring for a child. In other cases, however, a caregiver's talk to a child may not initiate or contribute to any activity currently underway, and yet still may constitute a form of collaboration. Such talk allows caregivers to share interpretations and work out joint understandings about topics relevant to their jobs, such as current goings-on in the daycare or a particular child's progress along a course of development.

In a sense, any time one caregiver talks to a child in the presence of another caregiver collaboration is potentially being accomplished, even where there is no

response from the other adult. Talk to children inevitably makes it possible for others present to ascertain information about children's actions and states, as well as the speaking caregiver's interpretations of such behaviors, and oftentimes courses of action upon which caregivers are embarking in response. Other caregivers in the room can make use of that information for both short-term and long-term purposes, without necessarily making it obvious that they are doing so. On the other hand, it is always possible that the non-speaking caregiver is not monitoring the other's talk to a child. However, the examples already shown demonstrate that hearers are often making subtle discriminations as to whether some talk produced by another caregiver is directed to them or necessitates a response—this indicates that in general caregivers in the daycare room pay a great deal of attention to the talk of other adults (as well as children) in the room even when it is not addressed to them.

That being acknowledged, my focus in this section is on not on such “unilateral” utterances that merely display a perspective, but rather on utterances to children that provoke discussion and, sometimes, contestation from another caregiver. In the previous sections, I have looked at some examples of this occurring where the discussion or negotiation is relevant to an immediate project being undertaken by one or more caregivers. In the following examples, the joint understanding that emerges is not immediately “put to use,” but rather provides background knowledge that may be of use in the future. Speaking to (and sometimes speaking for) children provides a platform for negotiating such shared knowledge.

### **5.3.1. Building Shared Understandings**

In a common manifestation of this phenomenon, one caregiver's talk to a child occasions a discussion in which caregivers share information about the status of a child's development, for example, the child's verbal abilities. In the following examples, one caregiver addresses a comment about a child's ability to that child or encourages a child to perform some developing ability; such utterances then lead to further dialogue among the caregivers as to what the child is (or is not) able to do.

Interaction with older infants (usually 6 months and older) often takes the form of re-formulation and clarification of their vocalizations into discernible linguistic utterances (as briefly discussed in Chapter 4). In the following example, Karen performs such a re-specification and Patrice picks up on it, triggering a brief discussion and the achievement of consensus about whether Dylan is able to meaningfully say "ma ma."

## (22) “Did you say mama?”: Transcript A

1 Karen: ((blows raspberry into William’s cheek))  
2 Dylan: da:yu  
3 Karen: ((blows raspberry))  
4 Dylan: mama  
5 (1.5)  
*Karen carries William into kitchen area*  
→ 6 Karen: >Did you say< ma ma:?  
7 Dylan: ra ra ra (.6) ra  
8 (2.2)  
|  
*Patrice looks at Dylan*  
9 Patrice: Oh.  
*Patrice turns toward Karen, who is walking out of kitchen area*  
10 I ju[s-  
11 Karen: [(hup)= ((to William))  
*Patrice turns back to child on changing table*  
12 Patrice: =I just know that Dylan said it (.) just a [few day]s ago. *Patrice*  
*turns back to Karen* |  
*Karen turns to Patrice*  
13 Karen: [He did.] (.) uh huh.  
14 Patrice: He did and he s[aid it while you were (next doo:r?)  
15 Karen: [ye:ah uh huh?  
*Karen turns and walks around bench*  
16 Patrice: and it was very clear.  
*Karen turns to Patrice, nodding, then sits down on bench*  
17 Karen: And (.) som- and it’s when a parent comes?  
*Karen turns back to face Patrice gestures and looks towards door*  
18 So I think he knows [(.) °what it means°  
19 Patrice: [Of cou:rse  
*Patrice looks at Karen, cocks head, extends arm towards Karen*  
20 Karen: >He sezit some other times but< whenever a parent comes in >I  
21 noticed< he says ma ma.  
22 Dylan: la la  
23 Karen: ma ma?  
24 Dylan: hm:?  
25 Karen: ma ma? ((laughs))  
26 Dylan: hm:.  
27 Karen: *I heard you, I di:d.* ((smile voice))  
28 Patrice: ((chuckles))

[Karen continues to utter “mama” and then “dada” towards Dylan and other children with questioning intonation, apparently attempting to elicit similar utterances from them.]

Karen’s question in line 6 functions much like the accounts described earlier (in Section 5.2.2.4), in that it offers up a symbolic interpretation of what might otherwise seem to be nonsensical babbling coming from the child. Since a child’s babbling is not generally treated as actionable in the way that a child’s cry would be, Karen’s talk does



begun (for example, with her overlap and avid agreement in line 13, as well as her nodding and turning her body 180 degrees to look at Patrice in line 16).

Though Patrice's utterance is clearly occasioned by Karen's talk to Dylan, the "Oh" sets it apart and prevents it from functioning as a straightforward response. With "Oh" Patrice marks it as being responsive to something other than the immediately preceding utterance—although that something could be a memory triggered by the immediately preceding utterance (Heritage, 1984a).

In this segment, the situation is temporarily changed from an unfocused "open state of talk" to a focused conversational encounter (Goffman, 1963, 1981). The caregivers cease talking to the children and actively attend to one another while they work out this issue, and then return to the children. This example stands apart from most of those that I have analyzed in this chapter by virtue of the degree to which the caregivers actively orient to one another as interlocutors in a dyadic exchange. This is not done by abandoning their work—in fact, during the entire segment Karen is holding an infant and Patrice is changing another child's diapers—but rather by overlapping one another's talk, issuing continuers and tokens of agreement, and seeking out and meeting one another's gaze, which importantly makes possible the use of manual gesture and nodding (interactional behaviors that occur relatively infrequently in the unfocused interaction structures of the daycare classroom).

As much agreement as there is in this exchange, there is also potential conflict. In Karen's initiating utterance (line 6), she proposes that Dylan is saying "mama" now. Patrice, however, treats Dylan's current utterance as possibly not an attempt to say

“mama,” by contrasting it with a previous event about which she claims strong personal knowledge that he definitely “said it”. Further, Patrice relates her information about Dylan’s previous utterance of “mama” as *news* for Karen, which Karen contests with her emphatic agreement (line 13) and a one-upping account (lines 17, 18, 20 and 21: Dylan doesn’t just say “mama” clearly, he says it at appropriate moments and thus “knows what it means”).

At the same time, both parties do much to verbally and physically enact their agreement with one another. At some points they seem to be merely couching their opposing positions in terms of agreement. However, Patrice’s gesture and head position in line 19 visibly display her realization of a new idea and attribution of it to Karen. (Interestingly, Karen then downgrades her claim somewhat, acknowledging that Dylan says mama at both appropriate and *inappropriate* moments. Arguably, this works toward strengthening their agreement, in that it enlarges the account to encompass Patrice’s earlier observations, while also making it perhaps a more reasonable assessment of Dylan’s abilities.)

**(22) “Did you say mama?”: Transcript C**

17 Karen:       And (.) som- and it’s when a parent comes?  
                   *Karen turns back to face Patrice       gestures and looks towards door*  
 18                So I think he knows [(.) °what it means°  
 19 Patrice:       [Of cou: rse  
                   *Patrice looks at Karen, cocks head, extends arm towards Karen*  
 20 Karen:       >He sezit some other times but< whenever a parent comes in >I  
 21                noticed< he says ma ma.

In this exchange, therefore, Patrice and Karen do not merely display their agreement, but rather display the active working out of an agreement.

In the following example, one caregiver's talk to a child about his linguistic ability is also followed with a comment directed to that caregiver on the same topic. Here, however, both caregivers are already engaged in the project of trying to interact with the child, and there is correspondingly little effort made to establish a space for the caregiver's comment. When the transcribed segment begins, the lead teacher (Katherine) and the foster grandmother (Grandma Cooper) have been talking for several minutes about various children's abilities to speak, interspersed with talk to David about how he must finish his milk before he can have water in his sippy cup.

**(23) "I think you can talk"<sup>29</sup>**

- 1 Laura: Mine.  
 2 Kath: Leave it on the table because it's gonna spill.  
 3 David: Me muh m[i: : : ((whiny))  
 4 Sarah: [Mi:[:ne  
 5 Kath: [Nobody's taking- nobody wants your food.  
 6 Michael: Be bai bu(h) gu:: ((whining/almost crying))  
 → 7 Kath: David you're saying something?  
 8 David: [( ) be: bu:  
 → 9 Kath: [You telling me [( )  
 10 Grandma: [sounded like he sayin something about mi:lk but  
 11 David: geh  
 12 Grandma: You don't like red ( )?  
 13 David: No.  
 14 Kath: No= ((imitating tone of David's voice))  
 15 Grandma: =Mm now you said something that ti(h)me ah heh heh [heh  
 16 David: [( )  
 → 17 Grandma: I think you c'n talk. N hu You just won't.=  
 18 Kath: =His mom said (.) >he goes< he's just foolin y'all.=He can  
 19 talk real well.  
 20 Grandma: You can ta::lk. ((singsong))  
 21 See. Ah heh heh heh heh  
 22 See?

Both caregivers are engaged in the joint project of interpreting David's vocalizations; they do so in the form of questions addressed to David for his response. In

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<sup>29</sup> The (h) in line 6 is a "crying" particle; whereas, lines 15, 17, and 21 include transcribed laughter.

lines 7 and 9, Katherine questions David about the communicative intent of his vocalizations. This triggers a comment from Grandma, addressed to Katherine, in which Grandma ventures a guess as to what he is trying to say. Further on, when Grandma receives a clear “no” to one of her questions to David, she addresses to him comment on his previous utterance (line 15). She then projects from that to a more general attribution about his abilities (line 16), still addressed to David. At that point, Katherine addresses to Grandma a report from David’s mother about his verbal abilities, which supports what Grandma has just said. Grandma’s response to Katherine’s utterance is not addressed to Katherine, however, but to David.

In this case, there is no true conversation with one another; rather isolated utterances addressed from caregiver to caregiver are embedded in a larger sequence in which caregivers alternately speak to David. While Grandma’s utterance to Katherine in line 10 functions as assistance with the current project (i.e., of figuring out what David is saying), Katherine’s talk to Grandma in lines 18 and 19 does not, but rather contributes towards a shared understanding of what this particular child is able to do in general, not just in this particular situation.

The previous examples are ones in which the verbal exchange between a caregiver and a child provides the material on which the other caregiver comments (i.e., evidence of a child’s verbal abilities). However, something very similar can occur when caregivers direct talk to children about other abilities. For example, in Excerpt (24) Karen’s talk to a child about his crawling efforts occasions comments on the child’s developmental status from the other caregiver. At the beginning of the transcribed

segment, Karen is changing a child's diaper and watching William, who is on the floor.

Patrice is interacting with another child in the kitchen area.

**(24) "He's so close"**

1 Karen: .hh  
*Karen looks at William*  
2 (3.0)  
*Karen continues to gaze at William with mouth open while William pushes himself up onto hands and knees*  
→ 3 ((smile voice)) Are you gonna get up by yourself? (.)  
→ 4 Are ya? (.7)  
*William begins to inch backwards*  
→ 5 You're gonna crawl backwards all the way to the wall  
→ 6 [aren'tchu?  
7 Patrice: [Goo:d jo::b. ((to Justine))  
8 Karen: t huhuhuh  
9 (1.0)  
*Patrice sits up on knees and looks over bench at William*  
10 Patrice: There he goe:s  
11 Karen: eh hehehe heh  
12 Patrice: He's so::: close.  
13 Karen: I know. ((end smile voice))  
14 (.8)  
15 He knows how to go ↑backwards.  
16 He got himself u:p. Has he been doin that?  
*Karen turns to Patrice Patrice starts nodding*  
17 Patrice: mm hm. (.5)  
*nods*  
18 Past (.) couple days.  
19 Child: ((cries))  
20 Patrice: ↑Uh oh:::  
*Patrice walks toward crying child*  
21 Karen: Even mister crawly Dylan doesn't do that.  
22 Patrice: Say ↑uh oh:::  
23 Karen: °Good job William°

Karen's talk to William alerts Patrice, who is engaged with another child, to what William is doing. At the same time, it seems to provide a space for Patrice to enter into the interaction between Karen and William and offer her own supporting assessments. The discussion between them results not just in the expression of positive affect regarding William's abilities, but in further explication and specification of what those abilities are. Here Karen seems to accept Patrice's claim to greater knowledge of the child's recent exploits and developmental status.

### 5.3.2. Issuing Contesting Attributions

In other cases, one caregiver picks up on another caregiver's talk to a child and offers assessments and/or attributions that clearly oppose the perspective revealed in the initiating talk. Such exchanges potentially contribute to the greater process of achieving working consensus in the daycare classroom, though no such resolution is explicitly reached in the examples described below. Rather, as in Excerpt (6) discussed above (in which Natalie suggests that Patrice remove a toy from Caroline's bouncy seat), contrasting perspectives are aired, and the issue is dropped.

At the beginning of Excerpt (25) Alicia has been addressing the child in her lap, when Jason starts to crawl towards her.

#### (25) "Are you gonna walk?"

→ 1 Alicia: Jason are you gonna walk?  
→ 2 Miss *kika kita* next door *fanci foo: is walkin (.6)*  
→ 3 Miss *Fancy is walkin*  
4 Annie: I been helpin him out, seein if he'll stand up but he's jus  
5 (.) [he's not ready yet  
6 Alicia: [What are you *seeing* Symon  
7 Annie: He's not ready yet  
8 Alicia: No burp yet Tom? (1.2)  
9 I know my sinuses are acting up if [it hurts to wear my glasses  
10 Annie: [(*Oh:::: whatsa matter Tom*)  
11 Alicia: *Even my glasses are hurtin my no:se*

Alicia asks Jason if he is going to walk and mentions another child that has started to walk. This occasions a comment from Annie about his abilities (lines 4-5). Annie marks her utterance as responsive to Alicia's talk to Jason by addressing it to Alicia. (She also turns her face in Alicia's direction, but I am not able to determine whether she is directly gazing at her.) Annie begins by describing her own actions taken in support of the goal that Alicia has introduced. With "but" (in line 4) it becomes apparent that she is going to introduce some kind of conflict with this goal, and she then does so in the form

of the attribution that he is “not ready yet.” By that time, however, Alicia is overlapping Annie’s talk with a question directed towards another child (who is banging a toy on the bottom of a shelf). Annie repeats her assessment in line 7, however there is still no uptake from Alicia. Rather Alicia turns her attention back to the child in her lap, and then embarks on a description of her sinus problem. Interestingly, Annie displays a similar lack of attention to Alicia’s talk of sinus problems—overlapping it with talk to the child sitting in a bouncy seat beside her. Alicia gains a recipient for her talk by redelivering the content of her overlapped utterance in baby talk addressed to the child in her lap.

Alicia’s talk in lines 1-3 treats as viable the prospect of Jason’s walking soon, and Annie then rejects that possibility based upon a claim of greater experience and knowledge with the child. Alicia does not defend her initial position, nor does she explicitly accept Annie’s, rather she simply declines to respond (even after Annie’s second try at getting a response). Even though she gives no sign of having heard Annie, she then acts in a manner fitting what she has been informed about, by ceasing her attempts to get Jason to talk.

In that example, the overhearing caregiver directly addressed her response to the speaking caregiver. Another strategy in this context is to deliver one’s contesting interpretation of events in the child’s voice. In the following segment, for example, a foster grandmother is rocking a crying child in the rocking chair. When Natalie delivers a bottle, he starts to eat with enthusiasm. The foster grandma then labels him as “greedy,” an attribution Natalie contests by “animating” the child—speaking in his voice.

## (26) “Hungry, Grandma”

- 1 Natalie: Here ya go:.=  
*Hands Dan a bottle.*
- 2 Grandma: =(he say shame- [(.) shame on you)
- 3 Patrice: [*That's Adele's pa:ssy.*]
- 4 Natalie: Are ↑you en↓joying tha:t.
- 5 Patrice: a hm hm
- 6 Natalie: *That looks like you:r passy doesn't it.*  
*Takes pacifier from Dylan.*
- 7 Grandma: °You a gree[dy little boy.°
- 8 Natalie: [*There ya go.*]
- ⇒ 9 Natalie: >He says< hungry grandma hungry
- 10 You starving me to death.
- 11 Grandma: We:ll=
- 12 Natalie: =It's been almost three whole hours since I ate last.

This is a very direct contradiction in which heavy stress on the adjective is used to contrast it with the adjective in the previous utterance. Using the child's voice, however, mitigates the threat of making such an unambiguously disagreeing statement. As in an example described earlier, the infant is animated not in baby talk but in “little kid talk,” making it come off as a childish but emphatic protest. The playfulness of this move minimizes the chance of its being heard as direct criticism, while at the same time, using the child's voice can be seen as a rhetorical device to figure the correction as coming from the child, not Natalie. In reality, however, this is an issue with which Natalie as a caregiver is quite likely to be concerned, given that such negative labeling is seen as highly problematic in contemporary childcare practice.

In the following example, the same strategy is used not to contradict but rather to introduce a new frame for interpreting an observation about a child. Preceding the excerpt transcribed below, Grandma has noted that Jason smells bad and is missing one sock.

**(27) “I’m mobile”**

- 1 Grandma: Where d’you get these dirty socks from. (Ma:n).  
2 (2.0)  
⇒ 3 Natalie: °(he) say° ↑Grandma that’s cuz I’m mobile.  
4 Grandma: Huh:  
⇒ 5 Natalie: ((louder)) He says that’s cuz I’m mobile.  
⇒ 6 I’ve got dirty socks cuz I can get around.

Here, the initial utterance to the child is a question, which makes possible an answer. However, the “answer” that Natalie provides from the child does not seem to be what Grandma is looking for, as indicated by her request for a repeat in line 4. It could be that the term “mobile” is unfamiliar or unexpected; there is also the possibility that this is a simple hearing problem. Natalie adjusts her next utterance to deal with either possibility: she increases her volume for a simple repeat, but then follows up with a rephrasal in which she makes the connection between Grandma’s question and her response more explicit by recycling part of Grandma’s question. Again, Natalie makes use of the playfulness of *speaking for* a child, while also making an implicit claim to be speaking from the child’s point of view. It is highly unlikely, however, that if this infant could talk he would justify the dirtiness of his socks in terms of his stage of development—in doing so, Natalie is very much taking the perspective of a professional caregiver.

The examples in this section highlight some themes already identified. For example, we find further evidence of the agency of the hearer in transforming talk to a child into an opportunity for communication and collaboration among caregivers. The “initiating utterances” in this section are not necessarily produced solely or primarily for the purpose of communicating with another caregiver. It is the overhearing caregiver

who makes that happen. In these examples, that means initiating some sort of verbal exchange between caregivers. This takes different forms, however: in excerpts (22) and (24) the caregivers engage in a brief dyadic conversation; excerpts (23) and (25) feature isolated caregiver-to-caregiver utterances embedded in talk to the children; and excerpts (26) and (27) involve the construction of exchanges between a caregiver and a child (where the child is being “voiced” by an overhearing caregiver).

In all the forms they take, these exchanges between caregivers (and children) in some way show caregivers actively working together to make sense of children’s actions and states in the daycare classroom. The shared understandings thus created have value for future use in the ongoing work of minding the children. They also could conceivably play an important role in the socialization of childcare workers: in these excerpts much is displayed and negotiated about what aspects of children’s manner and appearance are worthy of noticing, encouraging or commenting upon and how they should be construed.

## **Chapter 6. Modes of Participation in a System of Distributed Cognition: The Example of *Communicating through Children***

In this chapter, I consider some ways in which the phenomena described above can shed light on contemporary theorizing about communication, especially as it occurs in sites in which human beings jointly pursue practical action. In Section 6.1, I consider the significance of communicating through children for the concept of *participation* in interactional scholarship. I specifically argue that the role of the overhearer must be foregrounded, which is not done in other research on the practice of speaking through third parties, and that the active participation of children in these processes has to be taken into consideration. In Section 6.2, I sketch out a description of how communicating through children supports the functioning of systems of distribution of cognition (or the achievement of “collective mind”) in this workplace. Overall, my goal in this chapter is to demonstrate that the close examination of the phenomenon of communicating through children serves not only to enhance our understanding of childcare practice, but also complicates and contributes to our greater understanding of the complex but utterly ordinary processes by which human beings pursue courses of practical action in one another’s presence.

### **6.1. PARTICIPATION IN EPISODES OF SPEAKING THROUGH CHILDREN**

The participation framework for interaction laid out by Goffman (1981) provides us with conceptual tools that can be used as a basis for describing the practice of communicating through children. However, as Goodwin and Goodwin (2004) have

pointed out, Goffman's model is quite impoverished when it comes to accounting for the active and dynamic nature of hearers' participation in interactive events. This deficiency in Goffman's concept of participation framework can be seen clearly when it is applied to the phenomenon of communicating through a third party. As suggested above, it is the overhearing caregiver who determines whether and how to act on another caregiver's talk to a child, and whether to constitute his or her action as a response to such talk. While other recent studies have explored speaking through children and pets as a strategic resource for speakers, I attempt to rebalance this account by foregrounding the work done by the hearer. Further, other studies have not given much attention to the addressees' participation in these exchanges. I show how addressed children (especially those over 12 months of age) actively participate in the episodes in which they are spoken through, and further demonstrate that their actions affect the way in which collaboration between the caregivers proceeds.

After a brief discussion of the literature, I examine episodes of *communicating through children* as joint accomplishments of speaker and hearer (Section 6.1.3). I first consider the agency of speakers in these episodes, by looking at examples in which there is evidence that the speaker has designed her or his utterance to be overheard by another caregiver. I then turn my attention to the ways in which hearers can exert control over the direction these episodes take: (1) by ignoring speaker's attempt to communicate, (2) by initiating collaboration when there was no such attempt by speaker, (3) and by marking his or her subsequent action as either responsive or not to speaker's initial utterance (an effort which speaker may cooperate with or resist). In Section 6.1.4, I

consider the role of children in these episodes, showing examples in which successful and unsuccessful attempts at collaboration are designed to enlist children's participation as part of the communicative process.

### **6.1.1. Goffman's Notion of 'Participation Framework'**

In his seminal essay "Footing," Goffman (1981) breaks down the global categories of speaker and hearer into an assorted set of positions that participants can take up in a social encounter. While his analytical decomposition of the speaker into principal, author and animator (the "production format," p. 145) has arguably been the most influential aspect of this work, his catalog of types of recipient is particularly useful for elucidating the phenomenon under investigation in this paper. Goffman distinguishes between ratified participants, who include both addressed and unaddressed recipients, and non-ratified participants (or bystanders) who may be either overhearers (if known to the speaker) or eavesdroppers (if not). Levinson (1988) expands this list to include additional roles, including one quite relevant to the investigation here: the 'target' as an intended recipient who may or may not be the addressee. Kerbrat-Oteccioni (2004) similarly advocates some terminological and conceptual amendments to Goffman's typology, particularly to deal with the problematic concepts of 'ratification' and 'address.'

The critique of Goffman's concept of participation framework launched by Goodwin and Goodwin (2004), however, is not easily resolved with a few terminological modifications. They point out that the bifurcated organization of the original chapter gives rise to several problems. For instance, the separate consideration of speaker and

hearer roles provides few or no tools for examining the ways in which speakers and hearers dynamically coordinate with one another in the construction of utterances. In addition, the very different ways in which Goffman breaks down their respective roles privileges speakers over hearers. Speakers are shown to be creatively manipulating their stance towards the ongoing talk, while hearers are merely plotted as “points on an analytic grid.” (C. Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004, p. 225). Furthermore, the significance drawn from these categories reflects attention back to the speaker in that the purpose of elucidating them is to “establish the participation framework in which the speaker will be guiding his delivery” (Goffman, 1981, p. 137). Finally, they argue that the sophisticated linguistic maneuverings described as part of the production format lead to an emphasis on speech over embodied forms of communication, which by definition are the primary means by which hearers effect their participation in interaction.

### **6.1.2. Speaking Through Children and Pets: Previous Studies**

In Chapter 3, I discussed three recent studies that examined the ways in which young children and pets can serve as an interactional resource for adult speakers and hearers, and I briefly review them again here. Tannen (2004) finds that family members speak through their dogs in order to achieve interpersonal ends, such as buffering criticism and complaints, occasioning apologies, introducing humor, as well as enacting a construction of the family in which the pet is a central member. Tannen sees this strategy as a speaker’s means of managing his or her stance in the interaction: primarily a way of distancing oneself from one’s own talk. Roberts’ (2004) study of talk to pets in a veterinary clinic finds that this practice serves both task-specific and more general

interactional functions: it is used to bring up problems with the client's caretaking, to diffuse tension during a difficult exam, to display expertise and professional knowledge, as well to enter into interaction and deny the need for an apology. Roberts points out that the particular value of this strategy is that utterances directed to animals make possible a response from a human participant (usually the pet's owner) but do not require it.

While both Tannen and Roberts note parenthetically that talk to pets may be produced for purposes other than communicating with overhearers, they do not take any other such function into account in their analyses. Such an approach, however, is inappropriate for the analysis of talk to children, even very young infants. Mitchell (2001) points out that while talk to children and pets are similar on some counts, there are also significant differences; these are chiefly attributable to the fact that pets are not expected to develop conversational competence through such interaction. Further, there is in effect a powerful cultural and professional ideology of language socialization that dictates that caregivers should speak to children as though they were competent interactants (Ochs, 1992; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Popular scientific discourse addressed to parents supports this kind of talk as a crucial component of children's language acquisition (e.g., Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2000; Gopnik *et al.*, 1999), and it is also advocated for professional childcare workers (Warren, 2000). Talking to one's dog simply is not mandated in the same way.

These differences suggest that the other functions of talk to children must not be ignored in analyses of the ways in which it is used to communicate with overhearers. Furthermore, acknowledging the emerging communicative competency of children

requires that analysts attend to the ways in which they may become active participants in these interactions. This is absent in an article in which Tannen looks at instances of speaking through both children and pets (Tannen, 2003). Though some of her examples reveal children actively participating in the interactions in which they are spoken through, Tannen does not account for their participation in her analysis.

The studies reviewed above largely conceptualize communicating through a third party as a *speaker's strategy*. For example, while Roberts seems to highlight the hearer's active role when she notes that the inherent ambiguity of talk to pets means that overhearing owners can choose whether or not to respond, her analytic focus remains on the purposes for which speakers employ this practice. In my investigation of talk to children in the daycare setting, I demonstrate that hearers possess a great deal of agency in choosing whether to act or not and, if they act, whether to perform their actions as responsive to the other caregiver's preceding utterance to a child. As such, hearers actively collaborate with speakers in shaping the communicative effect of the initial utterance. Further, adult caregivers are not the only participants in this process. When older infants and toddlers are spoken through, it is apparent that adults are mindful of children's nascent communicative competencies in designing their utterances, and that children's own actions shape the ways in which collaboration between the caregivers occurs.

### 6.1.3. Communicating through Children: A Joint Accomplishment of Speakers and Overhearers

In this section, I endeavor to show that the communicative effect of speaking through children is jointly achieved by speakers and hearers. While speakers may in fact design their talk to a child for the benefit of overhearing caregivers, the hearer ultimately decides whether or not to respond. Even where utterances are demonstrably *not* intended for an overhearer, hearers can still use them as the basis for subsequent action, thereby transforming their interactional significance.

#### 6.1.3.1. Speaker Agency

In what follows, I examine some instances in which one caregiver's utterance to a child appears to be built and timed for its receipt by an overhearing co-worker. For example, Excerpt (2), discussed in Chapter 5, is reprinted here for ease of reference.

#### (2) "You falling over?"<sup>30</sup>

- 1 Natalie: O↑kay guys I'm going on ↑brea:k,  
2 I'll be back in a ↑little bit.  
3 Patrice: °(Can you look over here)° Caroline? Caroline? (.) right here  
William falls  
over  
4 (1.3)  
Natalie stands up and looks at William  
→ 5 Natalie: Uh oh William you falling over?  
Patrice sets | Patrice looks at William.  
toy down |  
Natalie looks away  
6 William: ((cries))  
Patrice crawls over to William  
7 Don: °>meow meow ↑meow ↓meow< (.) he heh he° (.) Watch out it's  
8 wrapped around your ↑toes

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<sup>30</sup> For consistency of reference, I retain in this chapter the excerpt numbers used in Chapter 5.

In this segment, Natalie, who is preparing to leave the room for a break, notices that one of the infants (William) has fallen over and addresses a comment about that to him. The other caregiver, who was interacting with another child and apparently did not notice William's falling, immediately moves towards him and helps him up.

There are several features of Natalie's utterance that indicate that it may have been intended to communicate with Patrice. First, there is the fact that it is particularly well-designed to do so. As discussed in Section 5.2.2.1 above, the utterance is structured so that it immediately makes apparent the fact that it is (1) addressed to a child and (2) deals with some sort of a problem, and very shortly thereafter reveals that it is (3) addressed specifically to William. Patrice's reaction shows that such fine-tuning is in fact consequential, as she immediately makes use of this information as it is provided.

In Excerpt (5), it also appears that the speaker designs her utterance to a child to be overheard and acted upon by another caregiver. In this case, however, that does not happen. The fact that the speaker then follows up with a direct request provides some evidence that the original utterance in fact was intended to produce the same effect. Here, the talk to a child is responsive to a child's cry and consists in acknowledging that the cry is heard.

**(5) "You wanna grab William"**

1 William: ((cries))  
→ 2 Natalie: *Oh: there you are Mr. William*  
→ 3 *I hear you:*  
4 William: ((cries))  
5 Natalie: Maureen.  
6 Maureen: Huh?  
7 Natalie: You wanna grab William  
8 Maureen: Okay: ( ) go get William.  
9 Gonna go get William.

As discussed in Section 5.2.2.2 above, it is not the form of the utterance itself but rather aspects of the situation and the way in which Natalie follows up that indicate that her talk to William may have been produced for the purpose of spurring Maureen to act. Given that a child waking up from a nap and crying is generally treated as requiring immediate attention, and given that Natalie is busy feeding two other children while Maureen is merely playing with one child on the floor, it is reasonable for Natalie to expect, or at least hope, that Maureen will realize that her assistance is required. However, Maureen does not act. This does not appear to result in any negative consequences, at least not as evident in the moment of interaction. Natalie simply upgrades the directness of her request, in two stages (at lines 5 and 7).

#### **6.1.3.2. Overhearer Agency**

While I have been focusing on evidence showing that speakers in some cases design their utterances for non-addressed parties, the segments above also begin to reveal the crucial role that hearers play in the way in which these collaborative episodes unfold. Excerpt (5), just discussed, reveals perhaps the most basic way in which hearers' actions are crucial: Because these utterances are ambiguous as to whom they are directed, hearers can choose to respond or choose not to. As laid out above, Maureen's failure to act based on Natalie's talk to William is remedied by simply upgrading the directness of the request, and there is no apparent cost to Maureen for having missed or ignored Natalie's initial attempt. In other cases, a failure to act on the part of the overhearing caregiver is simply allowed to pass, without leading to a more direct request or any other comment on the part of the speaker.

It may not always, or ever, be the case that the hearer's choice as to whether or not to respond is entirely voluntary. However, it is important to note that the factors that may compel a response are external to the talk; the utterance itself, addressed to a party who is incapable of response, does not require one.

In cases where there is no reason to believe that the speaker designed her utterance for an overhearing caregiver, such talk can still communicate with another caregiver and trigger collaborative work. Here, the important role of the hearer becomes abundantly clear, in that it is the hearer who initiates such collaboration.

Excerpt (1), reprinted below, provides an example.

**(1) "You have one diaper"**

1	Monica:	<u>.hh</u>	
2		Shante, Shante ( )	
→ 3		You have <u>one</u> diaper.	
→ 4		>You only have< <u>one</u> : diaper.	
			<i>Robert shifts gaze to Monica</i>
5		Can you hold this for me?	
		<i>Monica hands diaper to Shante</i>	
6		(1.9)	
		<i>Robert stands</i>	
7	Robert:	I think she's got more in her: her (.) cubby.	
		<i>walks towards cubbies,</i>	
		<i>gazing at Monica</i>	
			<i>shifts gaze to cubbies</i>
8	Monica:	Karim what's so funny?	

Shante, at approximately 14 months, is capable of understanding a great deal. However, the topic of Monica's utterance is not one with which she can be expected to be concerned, nor is she, lying supine on the changing table, in any position to do anything about it. Thus it does not appear that Monica intends to communicate information to Shante through this utterance. However, this does not mean that it is not directed to her. There is no reason to believe that the utterance is targeted at the other caregiver; it is unlikely that Monica would suspect Robert of having special knowledge of Shante's extra

diapers.<sup>31</sup> While the repetition in lines 3-4 seems well designed to attract his attention, it also is a characteristic feature of talk to children. This appears to be an instance in which an observation about something in the room serves as material for the ongoing project of maintaining active interaction with the children. It is Robert who, monitoring Monica's interaction with Shante, identifies a way in which he can assist, and acts upon it—thus creating a moment of caregiver-caregiver communication out of a caregiver's talk to a child.

In the following example as well, it does not appear that the talk issued to a child is intended primarily, if at all, for an overhearing caregiver. In this case, the speaking caregiver, Katherine, is talking to a child who is old enough to understand what is being said. The speech addressed to the child (Rosalita) consists of threats and directives designed to get her to cease her current activities. The other caregiver, Grandma Cooper, picks up on Katherine's correction and takes a complementary approach to the same project.

**(19) “You're gonna be all done”**

1 Grandma: ((to Damon)) That's her food.  
 2 You have ↑fi:sh. (.) a:nd ↓co:rn (.) and: (.) it look like  
 3 sweet potatoes.  
 → 4 Kath: Rosalita.  
 5 Grandma: Yeah [( ) ((still speaking to Damon))  
 → 6 Kath: [You're |gonna be all done.=  
 7 Damon: [ba?  
 → 8 Kath: =I need for you to [sit on your bottom please.  
 9 Grandma: [Uh:: |  
 10 Damon: Yah yah *Grandma looks at Rosa*  
*Rosa climbs onto chair*  
 11 (2.0)  
*Grandma starts to get up*

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<sup>31</sup> More precisely, if Monica knew that Robert knew of extra diapers, then Monica would know about the extra diapers, too, obviating the need to solicit the information (or diapers) from Robert.

*Rosa bounces on her knees in chair*

12 Grandma: Rosa look at your chair. (.8)  
*Grandma stands up* |

13 Rosa's gonna fall:. *Rosa sits on her bottom*  
*Grandma walks around table*

14 (2.3)  
*Grandma turns Rosa's chair*

15 And you will hurt your body.  
*Grandma tucks Rosa's chair under the table.*

Katherine's utterances are not only addressed to Rosa but are produced for the purpose of being understood by her and affecting her actions. And in fact Rosa responds to them—specifically, when Katherine tells her to “sit on your bottom,” Rosa climbs back onto her chair. Rather than actually sitting on her bottom, however, she sits on her knees, and her bouncing seems to emphasize this act of defiance. It is this combination of actions—Katherine's directive and Rosa's incomplete compliance with it—that triggers Grandma Cooper's act of assistance. There is no evidence that Rosa's talk to the child was issued for the purpose of enlisting the help of Grandma Cooper, although it is impossible to tell. Once again, it is the overhearer (Grandma Cooper) who takes the step that creates collaboration between caregivers out of talk to a child.

Another way in which hearers determine what type of communication occurs as a result of these utterances to children is by rendering their subsequent actions as either responsive or non-responsive to the initial utterance. For example, returning to Excerpt (1) above (in which Monica informs Shante that she is nearly out of diapers) Monica's talk to Shante triggers both physical and verbal action from Robert.

Robert displays his action to be *a response* to Monica's talk in several ways. The verbal accompaniment to his retrieval of this diaper is addressed to Monica, as indicated by his gaze which is held on Monica through the first half of his utterance, as well as the

use of the pronouns ‘she’ and ‘her’ to refer to Shante (who is the only other likely addressee of this utterance). Cohesion with Monica’s previous utterance is further demonstrated through his elision of the object noun phrase, which again can be supplied by reference to Monica’s preceding talk. Furthermore, though he shows through his gaze that he is attending to the situation earlier (line 4), he waits until she is done talking before delivering his news, which indicates that he intends for his utterance to be heard by Monica (he is not merely “thinking aloud”). Monica, for her part, does not join him in rendering his actions responsive to her own talk—she provides no uptake to his utterance in line 7, nor does she register receipt of the diapers upon their delivery.

Overhearers that take action based on another caregiver’s talk to a child can also work to perform their actions as independent and *not* responsive to that talk. In fact, doing so may be a joint accomplishment of both speaker and hearer. For example, in Excerpt (2) (printed again below), it was demonstrated above that Patrice’s action was triggered by Natalie’s talk to William, due to its precise timing with respect to aspects of that utterance and the fact that Natalie’s talk and Patrice’s action preceded the other possible trigger—William’s cry. However, unlike Robert in the example just examined, Patrice does not verbally or otherwise mark her actions as being carried out in response to Natalie’s talk. Rather than turning her gaze to Natalie, Patrice looks to William. She does not wait until Natalie finishes her turn, but rather begins her own action while Natalie is still talking.

## (2) “You falling over?”

- 1 Natalie: O↑kay guys I'm going on ↑brea:k,  
2 I'll be back in a ↑litt<sub>l</sub>e bit.  
3 Patrice: °(Can you look over here)° Caroline? Caroline? (.) right here  
William falls over  
4 (1.3)  
Natalie stands up and looks at William  
→ 5 Natalie: Uh oh William you falling over?  
Patrice sets toy down | Patrice looks at William.  
Natalie looks away  
6 William: ((cries))  
Patrice crawls over to William  
7 Don: °>meow meow ↑meow ↓meow< (.) he heh he° (.) Watch out it's  
8 wrapped around your ↑toes

The speaker (Natalie) also works to avoid the constitution of Patrice's action as a response to her talk. I have noted that Patrice never directs her gaze towards Natalie. More significant, perhaps, is Natalie's pattern of gaze. When she begins to speak she is looking in William's direction (which is also the general direction of Patrice). Before she says "William," however, she shifts her gaze towards a crib by the door, in which she appears to look for something without finding it. She continues to restrict her visual attention to the front of the room, never looking back towards William and Patrice, until she departs. Importantly, her gaze shifts away from William and Patrice *before* Patrice starts to move towards William, removing any possible appearance that she is monitoring Patrice to see how she responds to her talk to William. As such, it can be argued that the two caregivers cooperate in minimizing the appearance of responsivity, despite the fact that Natalie's utterance clearly occasions Patrice's action, and was likely intended to. (See Goodwin (1987) for another example in which multiple parties work together to establish the non-consequentiality of an utterance.) As a result, Patrice's actions appear to be voluntary and autonomous, rather simply the execution of a request made by Natalie.



#### **6.1.4. Children as Participants in Communicating through Children**

Other studies that have examined how talk addressed to one party can serve communicative purposes with another have not considered the addressee as an active participant. This may be understandable when the addressee is a pet or a preverbal infant, although the relevance of such parties' actions cannot be ruled out. When the addressee is an adult or a child whose interactional competence is clearly oriented to by the other parties present, the addressee's participation must be factored into an analysis of the communicative effect of the utterances addressed to them.

For example, in Excerpt (19) above, it is clear that both the initial correction to the child and Grandma Cooper's follow-up were designed with the assumption that the child is capable of understanding what is said to her. Further, the child's actions, both cooperative and resistant, play a part in how the collaborative episode unfolds. Grandma Cooper's action of rising from her seat and moving towards Rosalita was prompted not just by the other caregiver's directive, but also by the child's incomplete compliance with it.

While Katherine's instructions seem to have been produced for the child (but then picked up on by another caregiver), in other cases they are arguably designed for *both* the child and an overhearing caregiver.

In Excerpt (20), for example, Monica's directive to Karim's depends for its success on being heard and understood by both Karim and Robert. Monica gains Karim's compliance; that her project fails is attributable to the fact that Robert is yawning

and shaking his head during the utterance, blocking auditory access to her talk and visual access to her actions with Karim.

**(20) “Row Row Your Boat?” (last 11 lines deleted)**

1 Monica: Good job [Rebecca  
 2 Child: [AH::::  
 3 Monica: Lena apple tree?  
 4 Child: oh ba ba (.) ba ba  
 5 Robert: Bye bye. Where you goin.  
 → 6 Monica: Kari:m row your boat?  
 7 Robert: ((l [ a r g e y a w n ))=  
*Robert’s eyes are closed during yawn*  
 → 8 Monica: [Karim row row your boat?  
 9 Robert: =h o o : :  
*Shakes head*  
 → 10 Monica: Row row your boat?  
*Places left hand on Karim’s back and points towards Robert with right  
 Robert is looking down*  
 11 Robert: (.) It’s been a long day.  
 | *Karim walks toward Robert* |  
*Robert looks up Robert reaches out and stops Karim with hand*  
 12 Monica: Way: up [high: in the apple |tree  
 13 Child: [(MOMMA)  
 14 Robert: |tree

Monica’s repeats in lines 8 and 10 serve to engage Karim’s participation in a specific activity—performing the “row your boat” routine not with her, but with Robert. Her second utterance of “row row your boat” (line 8), draws Karim towards her. When Karim extends his arm to Monica, she clarifies what is being offered by repeating “row row your boat” and pointing towards Robert with her right hand and placing her left hand (and probably some slight pressure) on Karim’s back.

Further, in order to achieve an action like the one that Monica attempts, it is necessary for the other caregiver to be monitoring her as well as the child to whom she speaks. Robert, however, has effectively taken a step out of the interaction to attend to his own physical needs, by yawning and shaking his head. It was noted parenthetically in the data analysis section that Robert’s withdrawal could have been purposeful, an effort

to resist cooperating in the project Monica is initiating. It seems surprising that a single yawn could effectively block out three repeats of an utterance. (It should be acknowledged that Monica's actions may not have been entirely blocked—for example, Robert may have heard some part of Monica's offer but assumed that it was she who would perform the "row your boat" routine.) It is notable that Robert extends his period of unavailability by shaking his head and looking down (lines 9 and 10) after his yawn, before looking up at seeing Karim (in line 11). His utterance in that line ("It's been a long day") indexes his just completed yawn and thus helps construct an account for his subsequent failure to cooperate.

In this example, it is plain that Monica's utterance was designed to be perceived and acted upon by both the child and the overhearing caregiver. The child is in fact drawn into this proposed course of action. When it is not consummated, Karim is left in an odd position: neither Monica nor Robert makes any effort to compensate for their failure to come through on this offer.<sup>32</sup> Thus while the child's participation is crucial, it does not seem to be oriented to in the same way that an adult's might be in a similar situation.

In Excerpt (21) it is also apparent that the child's ability to understand and participate in interaction is integral to accomplishing the task that the caregiver sets out to

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<sup>32</sup> While this situation (akin to reaching out for a handshake and receiving none) might make an adult quite uncomfortable, Karim recovers well. In fact, he seems to become distracted by something else going on in the room at the moment Robert raises his hand to rebuff him. While he briefly participates in the "row your boat" activity, he then seems quite content to toddle off towards other engagements.

accomplish. Here, Robert follows up on an informative utterance addressed to Monica that failed to elicit action, with one addressed to a child, Rebecca.

**(21) Rebecca’s Present<sup>33</sup>**

19 Monica: [Now that’s one red ripe strawberry the big hungry bear will=  
 20 Robert: [Hey hey pick that up.  
 21 Monica: =never get. [The end.  
 22 Robert: [Thank you Thomas.  
 23 (1.2)  
 24 Robert: Becca made [you a present.  
 25 Monica: [yay [::::: ( ) mouse  
 26 Child: [a DA: YAH:  
 27 Monica: See the mouse? ( sleep[ing?) The mouse is sleeeping.  
 → 28 Robert: [Becca (.4) Becca (.) Becca  
 |  
 Rebecca turns to Robert  
 → 29 Show [Monica the present you made her.  
 30 Monica: [°the mouse is sleeeping°  
 → 31 Robert: Show Monica your present.  
 Rebecca walks to Robert  
 32 Monica: Okay you read some books. (1.2) °(try to get ‘em all back)°  
 Tosses book in bin Scoots bin to Robert and starts to stand  
 33 Monica: Oh:uh: (.) Miss [Rebecca  
 34 Lena: [((starts crying))

Here, the child’s role is somewhat different from the segment above. For Robert to achieve his purpose, it is not necessary for Rebecca to understand and comply with the directive he addresses to her. In fact, as discussed earlier, the prospect that Rebecca would actually show Monica “her present” is quite unlikely (and altogether unappealing, to say the least). Given that fact, and given that it reintroduces information addressed to Monica mere seconds before, it seems evident that Robert’s utterance is being directed to Monica and that its being addressed to Rebecca is mere superficial “packaging.” Robert, however, displays his awareness of Rebecca’s ability to engage in interaction with him by repeating her name until he gains her attention (she shifts her gaze to him), at which time he delivers his directive. Thus he creates an interaction with her, into which he can

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<sup>33</sup> This transcript combines Transcript C and Transcript D from Section 5.2.3.2.

embed this utterance for Monica to hear. (As discussed earlier, the repeated summons also work to gain Monica's attention and he repeats part of his utterance when it appears that Monica's reception of it might have been blocked by her talk to another party.)

It is notable that, once again, there is no attempt to maintain this interaction once initiated, or make the exchange intelligible to the child. When Rebecca responds to Robert's directive by walking over to him and opening the book in his hand, he does not, for instance, make any effort to clarify his intent. In this segment, Robert leans heavily on Rebecca's ability to engage in interaction with him in order to achieve his goal. However, he does not make himself accountable to her to the extent he might a full-fledged adult participant.

While others have examined the phenomenon of speaking through a third party in terms of the purposes for which it is employed by speakers, in this section I have highlighted the dynamic role of other participants in this process: both overhearers and the addressed children. Thus I take up the project endorsed by Goodwin and Goodwin (2004) of exploring participation as *action*, focusing on the "practices through which different kinds of parties build action together by *participating* in structured ways in the events that constitute a state of talk." (p. 225). To the extent that my analysis reveals aspects of the phenomenon of *communicating through* that are not identified in previous studies, I believe this results from my situating this practice within the frame of collaborative work. Seeing the daycare classroom and the communication that occurs within it in terms of the workings of a system dislodges the tendency to focus on the (verbal) actions of speakers and consider other participants only in terms of how the

speaker's awareness of their presence affects the design of utterances. In what follows, I wrap up my exploration of the practice of communicating through children with a discussion of how it allows for the emergence of "collective mind" (Weick & Roberts, 1993) or socially distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1991, 1995) in the daycare classroom.

## 6.2. COLLECTIVELY MINDING THE CHILDREN

Throughout Chapters 5 and 6, I have supplied examples that show the ways in which talk addressed to children can serve the purpose of collaborative work. In this section I specifically ground these activities in the theoretical construct of collective intelligence (e.g., Cooren, 2004; Hutchins, 1991, 1995; Hutchins & Klausen, 1996; Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Weick & Roberts, 1993). In this perspective, cognitive processes ordinarily thought to occur within individual minds are re-conceptualized as being accomplished by systems made up of multiple individuals working together, as well as the tools they use and the material environments in which they work.

Because this idea extends the boundary of human cognition "beyond the skin" and into the social world, interactional mechanisms are repositioned as being fundamentally constitutive (not just reflective) of cognitive processes, revolutionizing our understanding of human thought. Furthermore, this approach provides a framework for demonstrating empirically how it is that a group (as small as a two-person team or as large as an organization) can function as a knowing, thinking, acting entity. The system, rather than the individual actor, is the unit of analysis; at the same time, this is not *system* as vaguely postulated abstract structure—rather the purpose of such studies is to show precisely how

the system arises out of the actions of individual participants and their interactions with one another and their environment.

As reviewed in Chapter 2, work conducted by Edwin Hutchins and his colleagues is generally referenced under the heading of *distributed cognition* (or *socially distributed cognition*). In such research, there is attention to the ways in which patterns of interaction among actors within a social system affect the cognitive functioning of the group (see especially Hutchins, 1991), but there is also a great deal of emphasis on the role played by tools and the built environment<sup>34</sup> (Hutchins, 1995; Norman, 1993). Non-human entities exhibit a form of agency in that they can make possible or prevent particular actions as a result of their development and refinement in the context of purposeful use. The properties of such human and nonhuman systems are emergent; groups have capabilities that the individual components taken separately do not. Cognition is an accomplishment of the group as a whole. It is not always fully shared (c.f., Schegloff, 1991) but is rather distributed; it is often the case that no individual knows everything that the system knows (Hutchins, 1991).

At the same time, a crucial feature of such systems is the overlapping of task knowledge. In an apprenticeship system, for example, advanced members of the group will have a practical understanding of the requirements of their own task as well as the tasks they have been responsible for “on their way up”. Task awareness also overlaps when work is conducted within the visual and auditory field of other workers—a situation that affords learning, error detection, and the coordination of actions. A key

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<sup>34</sup> The use of such tools and the built environment are seen as another form of social distribution, in that they have been shaped by a history of use by other persons.

concept in Hutchins' work is the "horizon of observation" (elsewhere termed "situation awareness" (Norman, 1993) or "peripheral awareness" (C. Heath & Luff, 1992)); this refers to the degree to which the environment allows or facilitates sensory access to the work being done by others (particularly with respect to their contributions to potentially shared activities).

In organizational communication scholarship, the notion of collective intelligence in the workplace has primarily been popularized through the works of Karl Weick and his colleagues (Weick and Roberts, 1993; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001; see also Taylor, 1999; Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Cooren, 2004).

For Weick, the notion of collective intelligence is used to describe the functioning of particular types of organizations, not all organizations. Specifically, he finds "collective mind" in the operations of what he terms "high reliability organizations". These are organizations characterized by a focus on high performance as opposed to efficiency—the prototypical examples are workplaces in which small errors can have enormous consequences and where stringent efforts are undertaken in order to reduce the incidence of such mistakes.

In their groundbreaking investigation of an aircraft carrier as an example of a high-reliability organization, Weick and Roberts define collective mind as "a pattern of heedful interrelations of actions in a social system." (p. 357). They start with a concept of mind, from Gilbert Ryle (1949), as a disposition towards action (as opposed to an entity contained within the skull). Specifically, mind is defined as a disposition to act with *heed*. While Ryle finds mind to be located in the heedful actions of individuals,

Weick and Roberts focus on “collective mind” as located in heedful interrelations of individual actions.

Weick and Roberts further elaborate their notion of collective mind by borrowing from Asch (1952) a set of “defining properties of group performance,” which include the actions persons take when they behave as though there were social forces governing them (Weick & Roberts, 1993, p. 362-3). The first of these, **contributing**, involves constructing and performing actions in support of the group-level purposeful activity (e.g., landing an airplane). Doing this heedfully requires **representing** the system, i.e., envisaging it in its entirety and with as much detail as possible, crucially including the contributions of other actors within it. **Subordinating** one’s contributions means constructing and timing one’s actions in terms of how they fit into the envisaged system. Thus, Weick and Roberts also stress the importance of overlap in the system; they cite Hutchins’ (1990) analogy of the hologram to get at the idea that the system as a whole is represented, in some way, in each of its parts.

While the concepts of “collective intelligence” or “group mind” may call up Jungian notions of a collective unconscious, there is no mysticism here. Rather, collective mind is grounded in the actions and interactions of real people, always traceable to empirically observable phenomena. Organizational knowledge is not a reified abstraction; rather, as Weick and Roberts put it, “[w]hen we say that collective mind ‘comprehends’ unexpected events, we mean that heedful interrelating connects sufficient individual know-how to meet situational demands.” (p. 366). As much as this perspective is grounded in practical action, however, the findings of the 1993 article are

based primarily on stories told by organizational members, which are treated as direct representations of the events that occurred. Arguably, interaction analysis is a more appropriate way of investigating the phenomena in which Weick and his colleagues are interested (for a similar perspective, see Cooren, 2004).

### **6.2.1. The Daycare Classroom as Cognitive System**

It perhaps seems odd to characterize a room in a childcare center as a cognitive system. After all, the work that is done there is not usually considered to be particularly cerebral or intellectually demanding: it does not require extensive training or the use of opaque tools or procedures and it is quite similar, at least superficially, to the unpaid work that many women and men do in their homes.

Further, the research that has been done on collective intelligence, whether under the label of distributed cognition or collective mind, tends to focus on professions that would be considered either high-tech or high-reliability, and oftentimes both. The childcare setting is decidedly low-tech. While it is not normally thought of as a high-reliability organization, a daycare does exhibit some of its features: the possibility of disaster is always present (a child forgotten in a hot van, a toddler running into a busy street) and many tools and practices are employed to prevent such a thing from happening. However, once such resources have been put in place, most of the day-to-day work is in fact relatively low-risk, which differentiates this site from those in which the primary business of the organization demands a continuously high level of reliability on the part of operators. It was to explain how such organizations manage to maintain their high function and minimize the occurrence of accidents that Weick and Roberts (1993)

developed the idea of collective mind. However, even in their initial article they specify that collective mind may be found to some degree in any organization, but that interactions in high-reliability operations manifest a greater degree of heed. In Weick's recent work (e.g., Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001), he suggests more explicitly that high-reliability organizations can be models for effective functioning for virtually any type of organization. Further, Cooren (2004) shows that collective mind can be found in mundane organizational interactions, such as board meeting conversations. Cooren adopts a fine-grained, processual approach to showing how “collective *minding*” (italics added) is achieved in interaction, particularly through the co-production and co-completion of turns at talk. Similarly, I attempt to show in this section how collective intelligence is produced through another type of linguistic practice: communicating through children.

In Hutchins' 1995 ethnography, the navigation team is clearly shown to accomplish the cognitive task of determining where the ship is and where it is heading. The lack of a similarly apparent group-level goal, in addition to the less intellectual reputation of childcare work, makes it more difficult to determine what type of thinking is being done by the childcare classroom as a cognitive system. However, upon reflection it is clear that there are many forms of cognition being accomplished in that environment, with varying degrees of complexity, and at both individual and group levels. In this discussion, I will focus on two interrelated cognitive functions, both achieved by the system as a whole and both related to the provision of basic care to children. The first I refer to as *tending* the children: it consists of the fundamental task of

maintaining constant awareness of children's states and readiness to act on their needs.

The second is a complex reasoning function that I will simply term *understanding* the children: it involves building interpretations and storing knowledge as to the significance of children's actions and what they imply for children's care needs over time. These are practices of diagnosis in everyday interaction (Maxwell *et al.*, 1999). This category of cognitive action corresponds closely to what Weick (1995, 2001) and others call "sensemaking."

These two forms of cognitive work taken together can be conceived of as *minding the children*. The functions are interrelated in that tending to children relies upon the attribution of meaning to their actions and vocalizations, and such understandings are always driven by the practical purposefulness of providing care to children in the moment. However, the ways in which the two functions are accomplished as group-level activities merit separate attention.

### **6.2.2. Tending the Children**

It is safe to say that the primary expectation a parent has when he or she drops a child off at daycare in the morning is that the child will be kept alive, healthy, and reasonably content until the end of the day. Most parents probably have additional expectations—that their children be stimulated and given opportunities to learn, grow, and enjoy themselves—but the expectation of safe custody would seem to be a baseline; a foundation upon which any other benefits must rest. Achieving this basic goal requires that the child be *tended to*; this crucially requires that the child be *attended to*, but merely monitoring the child is not sufficient.

### **6.2.2.1. Situation Awareness**

The physical environment of the daycare classroom is designed to facilitate the work of keeping children safe and under the surveillance of caregivers. The rooms are climate controlled—air conditioning was critical on the hot summer days when I was videotaping. Dangerous objects such as knives and scissors are kept out of children's reach and there are few hard surfaces or sharp corners that would cause damage in the event of a fall or collision. The spaces in which children spend their time are fully enclosed by walls, fences and gates (except during the brief periods when they are being shepherded from one such space to another). This prevents children from escaping to areas in which they would be unattended and encounter hazards (such as the street). It also ensures that they are always visible (and audible) to caregivers. In other words, daycare environments facilitate caregivers' situation awareness.

A few months before I started videotaping, the daycare center converted its front office into a childcare room. This room was L-shaped and therefore a caregiver sitting in one part of the room could not see the entire room. To deal with this, the site director had a fish-eye mirror installed, which attests to the importance of visibility in the daycare classroom. Of particular concern was the fact that a caregiver in the back of the room could not see the door, which could hypothetically allow children to leave or intruders to enter unattended. To deal with this possibility, a bell was also installed on the door.

While the built environment can facilitate or block workers' ability to monitor the actions of co-present others, Heath and Luff (2000) and Nevile (2004) have shown that situation awareness cannot be regarded as purely a property of the environment, but is

rather an accomplishment of human agents who actively attend to one another and also make their actions available for others to see and hear. In this setting, caregivers shift their focus between multiple children, and therefore cannot be constantly aware of everything going on in the room. Through talk to children, caregivers make states of affairs in the daycare classroom apparent to one another, allowing for other caregivers to act accordingly. As shown in the previous section, this requires work of both speakers and (over)hearers, and may be accomplished by virtue of the more or less strategic action of either party.

For instance, in Excerpts (1) and (2), the speaking caregiver, through her talk to a child, brings to light some aspect of the situation—that a child has run out of diapers or that an infant has fallen over—and another caregiver takes it upon herself to act to remedy a problem that this situation represents. Talk to the children provides information via an auditory channel, prompting the other caregiver to direct his or her visual attention to the situation. These utterances in a sense function as the “glue” that joins a problem with its solution; they afford the hearing caregiver a perspective that allows him or her to bring the puzzle pieces together.

#### **6.2.2.2. Eliciting Contributions**

Tending, however, requires more than attending; it also involves taking action to satisfy children’s immediate needs. Because of the child-caregiver ratio in a daycare classroom, it is often the case that a caregiver who notices a child’s need is not in a position to meet it. In the previous examples, one caregiver’s talk to a child allows another caregiver to “see” something that he or she did not before, and then act upon that

perception. However, talk to a child often does more than reveal that there is a problem, or even what it is (situation awareness), but also indicates what must be done to solve it.

In Excerpt (9), for example, (reprinted below) Natalie's talk to Lucy makes Patrice aware of a problem (Lucy does not have any toys and is therefore trying to play with the toys attached to Caroline's bouncy seat, potentially bothering Caroline). Patrice then acts to solve the problem. However, this is not a simple matter of drawing Patrice's visual attention to the situation. In fact, Patrice is already looking in Lucy's direction when Natalie speaks. Rather, Natalie's utterance serves to construct Lucy's actions *as a* problem. Furthermore, by attributing a cause for Lucy's actions that consists of a failure on her own part (i.e., not providing Lucy with access to toys), Natalie in effect suggests a particular solution to Patrice, on which Patrice follows through.

### (9) “Caroline’s Toys”

1 Natalie: But William shou- the [( ) (.)] those are for William.  
2 Grandma: [( ) ]  
3 Grandma: [(No:)]  
4 Natalie: [(Givin him that bo:ttle before he goes to sleep) (.7)  
*Natalie sets Lucy on the floor*

5 Natalie: O:kay.  
7 Grandma: Well good after↑noon (Lucy)=  
8 Natalie: =Let me fin- let me wash my hands and clean the table.  
9 (1.2)  
*Lucy waves arms and reaches toward Caroline;  
Caroline waves arms and feet*

10 Grandma: ( )  
→ 11 Natalie: She’s trying to reach (.) ↑Caroli:ne and Caroline’s toys  
→ 12 *Cuz I didn’t put you where there were any toys*  
→ 13 *I’m sorry Lucy Loo.  
Patrice shakes toy.  
Lucy looks at toy Patrice is shaking*

14 Patrice: How bout this one.  
15 How ↑bout it  
*Caroline waves arms and feet, Lucy looks back at Caroline  
(3.0)  
Patrice scoots on the floor towards Lucy*

16 Lucy: hh hh hh  
17 Patrice: (Right here)  
*Patrice tosses toy to Lucy*

18 Grandma: (oh) she likes thi:s  
| |  
*Lucy looks down at toy Grandma points at Caroline’s toys  
Patrice has tossed*

19 Patrice: Yeah.  
20 (4.0)  
*Lucy picks up toy and brings it to her mouth*

We can see, therefore, that the way talk to children contributes to the achievement of collective intelligence goes beyond situation awareness. In Weick and Roberts’ (1993) terms, Natalie’s description of the situation allows Patrice to align her own representation of the activity system with Natalie’s. Accordingly, she constructs a contribution that is subordinated to the situation as she has now represented it. Note that this representation consists not only of an understanding of what’s going on with the children (Caroline and Lucy) and how this situation has arisen as a result of the other caregiver’s improper contribution (setting Lucy down where there were no toys), but it also includes an understanding of what kind of contribution she can expect from the other caregiver with

regard to the problem as it exists presently. That was provided in line 8, also through an utterance directed to the child, in which Natalie indicates that she will be busy for the moment with other tasks (washing her hands and cleaning the table). Thus, through her talk to Lucy, Natalie provides Patrice with the necessary materials to build a rich representation of the immediately relevant activity—including the nature of others’ potential contributions—such that she can appropriately subordinate her contribution to it.

This phenomenon is not limited to moments in which one caregiver’s talk to a child elicits a contribution from another caregiver. For example, in Excerpt (10) above (“I turned my back”), in which Natalie speaks repeatedly to a child who has just woken up in her crib, she reassures the child that she will be coming soon and at the same time assists the other caregiver in building a more detailed representation of current circumstances in the classroom. As a result of this talk, the other caregiver knows that an actionable situation exists, but also can predict that the speaking caregiver’s upcoming contribution will be sufficient to deal with the situation, and thus that a contribution from her will not be required.

### **6.2.3. Understanding the Children**

In the previous examples, the caregivers make use of the culturally and professionally promoted practice of speaking to children in order to coordinate actions for the purpose of tending to a child. As shown above, however, this is not always a simple matter of providing information about what’s going on with a child to another caregiver. Rather caregivers advance interpretations and construct shared understandings of

children's conduct in order to arrive at a suitable course of action to remedy the problem that they have identified (or constructed). Talk to children provides a convenient way of displaying one's understanding of what it is that is going on with a child; such displays may provoke other caregivers to take appropriate action, but in other cases they may lead to negotiation or even contestation as to the best way of understanding a child's conduct.

### 6.2.3.1. Negotiating a Shared Understanding

In Excerpt (8) (reprinted below) Patrice, through her talk to Dylan, lays out several candidate explanations for Dylan's vocalization (lines 9, 11 and 12). Karen picks up on one of them and displays this through her talk to another child (Jason, in lines 18 and 19), and subsequently through her talk spoken *for* Dylan (lines 22 and 24). Patrice signals her acceptance of this particular interpretation through her appreciative laughter (line 21). This sharing of interpretations and settling upon on a course of action is accomplished without words being directly exchanged between the two caregivers.

#### (8) Are you stuck?

1 Patrice: ((whistles along with music))  
 2 Tom: bla bla: : : :  
           *Tom waves arm*  
 3 Patrice: ((laughs))  
 4 Child: ((whimper))  
 5 Dylan: b̄a ba. ba.  
           *Dylan drops his bottle.*  
 6 A: : AH.  
           *Dylan waves arms*  
           *Patrice turns head to Dylan*  
 → 9 Patrice: Are you stuck?  
 10 (1.5)  
           *Patrice holds gaze; Dylan waves one arm*  
 → 11 Or are you just laid back? (.)  
 → 12 *You got some milk on your fa:ce. (.)*  
 13 Dylan: A: : [ya ya  
 14 Patrice: [ye:ah. (.)  
 15 *Is it good?*  
 16 (2.0)  
           *Dylan waves arms*  
           *Patrice looks back at child on lap.*



latter stretches across boundaries of time and space to form something larger, a body of knowledge about the dispositions and needs of particular children. However, such knowledge is primarily manifested in moments of real-time action and interaction; it emerges from and reappears in efforts to deal with practical problems of caring for children in the daycare classroom. The accounts for children's actions that caregivers provide (e.g., Excerpt (8), lines 9-12, 21 and 24; Excerpt (12), lines 4, 5 and 7) are prospective rather than retrospective; their function is not to explain deviations from social expectations or moral order (c.f., Buttny, 1993; Stokes & Hewitt, 1976); nor is it to arrive at a context-free, scientific description of the significance of children's actions. Rather, they explain children's behavior in terms that make it apparent what an appropriate next action should be on the part of the caregivers.

#### **6.2.3.2. The Production of Social Facts: "Scaling up" to the Organizational Level**

While the negotiations in these examples are rooted in the practical action of the moment, they result in interpretations of children's actions and even attributions of children's dispositions or developmental states that have potential implications beyond this moment in time and beyond the immediate confines of the daycare classroom. We can see that in the way that Tom is diagnosed as getting "overstimulated very easily" (Excerpt (12) above), Jason is found to be not yet ready to walk (Excerpt (25), discussed in Section 5.3.1), as well as in how an attempt to explain a child's behavior in trait-based terms ("greedy") is countered with a state-based explanation ("hungry") in Excerpt (26) below.

## (26) “Hungry, Grandma”

- 1 Grandma: °You a greedy little boy.°
- 2 Natalie: >He says< hungry grandma hungry  
You starving me to death.
- 3 Grandma: We:ll=
- 4 Natalie: =It’s been almost three whole hours since I ate last.

The work of Cicourel (1968; Cicourel *et al.*, 1974), Leiter (1974), Mehan (1993), McDermott and Gospodinoff (1979) and others has shown how the ad hoc categorization of persons for local interactional purposes can result in the production and circulation of institutional “facts” about those persons that have implications far beyond the present moment. In this study I do not attempt to track the long term effects of such labeling practices. However, I believe these examples clearly show how the exigencies of the immediate institutional environment shape diagnoses of children’s behavior, as well as the extent to which contemporary ideologies about children’s development and behavior can inform local sensemaking procedures.

While the cognitive systems described by Hutchins and Weick did not necessarily expand to the level of what would be considered an entire organization, Weick’s examples, in particular, did involve the interrelated contributions of actors separated in time and space. More recent scholarship using the construct of collective mind has focused more on the relationship between particular, momentary interactions and the emergence of macro-organizational collective mind (Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Cooren, 2004). In contrast, I have focused on the smaller, co-present collective represented by the daycare classroom and have sought to uncover one of the practices through which it is able to act intelligently and know what it knows. I believe this is a worthy contribution, in that there exist to this day very few fine-grained explications of the precise interactional

mechanisms through which systems of socially distributed cognition function. However, the segments analyzed also have interesting implications for “scaling up” to the organizational level, i.e., for investigating how these micro-level interactions can be constitutive of the larger entity of the childcare center as a whole.

One form this may take consists of the ongoing processes of occupational socialization represented in these segments. Speaking to children is an important medium by which caregivers are continuously demonstrating to each other how children’s actions should be construed and acted upon. Because these caregivers substitute for one another in different rooms, they are frequently exposed to one another’s practices—in this way the whole childcare center becomes a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This can be clearly seen in the use of common terms from a shared register that the caregivers refer to as “All Aboard Language” (described in Chapter 4). However, the sharing of interpretive procedures that goes on in these excerpts suggests that caregivers have the opportunity to take on not just one another’s habits of articulation, but also their habits of perception (Bourdieu, 1977).

I believe these examples also show that the collaborative sensemaking practices that take place within the classroom can also have broader organizational relevance. The “social facts” so constructed potentially endure over stretches of time and are transmitted across boundaries of space. This occurs when, for example, socially negotiated understandings of children’s actions are recorded in periodic evaluations or on “daily sheets” supplied to the parents, thus becoming divorced from the context of their

creation, crossing into the realm of text and entering into broader circulation both within and outside of the organization.

#### **6.2.4. Heedful and Heedless Interrelating**

Though I do not claim that this is a high-reliability operation, at least not to the same extent as an aircraft carrier, the phenomenon that I have identified can only be successful if caregivers are interrelating their actions with a high degree of heed. For a simple instance of coordinated action via talk addressed to a child to occur, most (but not necessarily all)<sup>35</sup> of the following requirements must be met:

- the speaking caregiver must be closely monitoring a child, even though she is sufficiently engaged in something else such that she is not able to fully attend to the child's needs;
- the speaking caregiver must be aware of the hearing caregiver's position and availability;
- the speaking caregiver must design his or her utterance so that it can be heard and understood by the hearing caregiver;
- the hearing caregiver must be monitoring the speaking caregiver's talk;
- the hearing caregiver must have a sufficient understanding of the requirements for children's care and her responsibility for providing such care so that the

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<sup>35</sup> Coordinated action can still occur without, for example, the speaking caregiver being aware of the hearing caregiver's position and availability in cases where the speaker had no intention of communicating with the other caregiver but the other caregiver simply "picks up on" talk to a child and offers a contribution.

implications of the description of the situation provided in the utterance to a child will be clear to her; and

- the hearing caregiver must be aware of the speaking caregiver's position and availability for action.

All of this means that caregivers must continuously engage in the active construction, maintenance and revision of their representations of the operative activity system in the childcare room.

All of the examples I have provided of successful communication through talk to children exemplify heedfulness, to lesser or greater degree. Where such communication does not occur, this can be explained as a lack of heed on the part of one or both of the involved parties.

In the segment reprinted from Excerpt (20), below, we find that communication is unsuccessful because Robert has failed to monitor Monica's talk to the child, Karim. This seems to have occurred because Robert has temporarily shut down his own auditory and visual faculties in order to yawn, a withdrawal of heed that may or may not be inadvertent and unavoidable.

**(20) "Row Row Your Boat" (partial excerpt)**

- 6 Monica: Karim row your boat?  
7 Robert: ((l | a r g e y a w n ))=  
*Robert's eyes are closed during yawn*
- 8 Monica: [Karim row row your boat?  
9 Robert: =h o o : :  
*Shakes head*
- 10 Monica: Row row your boat?  
*Places left hand on Karim's back and points towards Robert with right  
Robert is looking down*
- 11 Robert: (.) It's been a long day.  
| *Karim walks toward Robert* |  
*Robert looks up*                      *Robert reaches out and stops Karim with hand*

We can further identify a lack of heed on the part of Monica, who in failing to time her utterances so they can be (undeniably) perceived by Robert, fails to adequately subordinate her contribution to the system as it exists.

According to Weick and Roberts, “when interrelating breaks down, individuals represent others in the system in less detail, contributions are shaped less by anticipated responses, and the boundaries of the envisaged system are drawn more narrowly, with the result that subordination becomes meaningless. ... There is less comprehension of the implications of unfolding events, slower correction of errors, and more opportunities for small errors to combine and amplify.” (1993, p. 371). The example provided shows this occurring on a small scale. Having missed Monica’s contribution, Robert fails to comprehend the significance of Karim’s walking toward him, and puts his hand up to block him. Monica, for her part, either does not perceive or wrongly comprehends Robert’s action and, as a result, makes no attempt at correcting his error. The immediate goal (keeping Karim engaged in the activity) is not achieved and the larger objective (preserving the sanctity of Circle Time as an activity) is thereby threatened.

In Excerpt (5) we see a similar failure, but in this case the situation is remedied.

**(5) “You wanna grab William”**

1 William: ((cries))  
→ 2 Natalie: *Oh: there you are Mr. William*  
→ 3 *I hear you:*  
4 William: ((cries))  
5 Natalie: Maureen.  
6 Maureen: Huh?  
7 Natalie: You wanna grab William  
8 Maureen: Okay: ( ) go get William.  
9 Gonna go get William.

Here we can be less certain of the reason for Maureen’s failure to respond to Natalie’s utterance to a child with an appropriate contribution. It could be that she simply

does not hear or attend to Natalie's utterance. Alternatively, she may hear it but not understand what it implies for her own actions, or not deem it to be her responsibility to pick up the crying child. These possibilities constitute failures to represent the system in a way that would make it clear to her that a particular contribution was needed and perhaps even expected. This is particularly likely because Maureen's role, as a substitute in this classroom, was somewhat ambiguous. (Of course, there is always the possibility that Maureen hears, understands, and knows that it is her job to pick up the child, but chooses not to. This would not be an example of heedlessness on the individual level, but still a failure to heedfully interrelate.)

This example also shows, however, that a breakdown in interrelating does not necessarily carry serious implications in this environment, in contrast to the high-reliability environments that Weick has studied. Maureen's lack of an immediate response does not appear to result in any negative consequences, at least not as evident in the moment of interaction. Natalie simply upgrades the directness of her request, in two stages (at lines 5 and 7). It would seem that for this reason communicating through children is an appropriate practice for this environment, in that the risk that one or both caregivers will not proceed with sufficient heed to accomplish the coordination of their jobs is outweighed by the benefits of using the strategy.

#### **6.2.5. Affordances of Talk to Children as a Resource for Caregiver Collaboration**

A hallmark of research on distributed cognition is the focus on particular artifacts or aspects of the material environment and the ways in which they affect the cognitive

functioning of a group. In focusing on the phenomenon of ‘communicating through children’ I have done something similar, except in this case the “tool” that I analyze is not a physical object but an interactional practice. The concept of affordances, which can be originally attributed to Gibson (1979) is ordinarily used to describe how objects—tools or aspects of the built environment—make certain agentive actions possible or likely (Hutchby, 2001). To borrow from Donald Norman (1988) some examples of everyday technologies for opening doors: handles afford pulling, knobs afford twisting (and pulling), and flat panels afford pushing. Discussion of an artifact’s affordances often also involves consideration of its constraints; for example, while doorknobs allow both pushing and pulling, flat panels afford pushing but constrain one from pulling open the door. It is in this way that the objects in our environment shape our actions. The notion of affordances, however, is also useful for analyzing the effectiveness of other types of resources, including interactional practices.

The affordances of talk addressed to children as a resource for caregiver collaboration have been alluded to throughout this chapter, but here I briefly list them in an explicit manner. A primary one has to do with its being performed through the auditory modality. This means that caregivers whose visual attention is otherwise occupied (or whose field of vision is in some way blocked) can either be signaled to refocus their visual attention or directly informed (through the verbal channel) of something going on in the daycare classroom.

Another significant affordance of talk to children is its potential for multifunctionality. In addition to whatever it might achieve in communication with a

coworker, it is always in line with the ongoing project of maintaining phatic interaction with children as support for language acquisition and socialization. Because this is a generally acknowledged good in this community and a component of caregiver training, it also contributes to a positive construction of professional identity.

Furthermore, because of the fact that caregivers are actually *talking to* children – providing them with fairly sophisticated, lengthy, and fluent samples of language use – there is the potential to provide a great deal of information to another caregiver. Caregivers often reveal not only that there is a problem, or what the problem is, but also the particular actions that another caregiver can take to solve it. Alternatively (or in addition), caregivers may provide a rich representation of their own interpretation of a child's actions, such that negotiation and the achievement of shared understanding between the caregivers becomes possible. Furthermore, as children become increasingly competent as interactants, the possibility of influencing the actions of both children and co-present adults emerges.

The built-in ambiguity as to whom the target (Levinson, 1988) of such an utterance is is also a resource. As Roberts (2004) notes in her analysis of talk to pets in a veterinary clinic, a pet's owner may take such talk as intended for the pet (since it is addressed to the pet) or for the owner (since the pet cannot respond). The situation when preverbal children are spoken to in the company of their children may be quite similar, i.e., the parent may take the utterance as requiring a response from him or herself as representative adult, but can also elect not to do so. This option not to respond for the child is arguably even more defensible in the daycare situation, in that there is no adult

present who plays the role of representative for any particular child. When one caregiver does have the information that is being requested in a question directed to a child, for example, she may volunteer that information (see Excerpt (11)). However, there is no evidence in any of the instances I analyze that caregivers can be held accountable for providing a response to an utterance addressed to a child.

This ambiguity can be a resource for both hearing and speaking caregivers. Speakers are free to “throw out” information that might elicit assistance from their coworkers, without being accountable for initiating unwanted interaction and without having to be particularly attentive as to the demands they are placing for a response. If the speaker desires a specific response, and it is not forthcoming, the option to upgrade to an explicit request is still available.

The fact that such talk is produced regularly, without expectation of response, means that overhearers are free to either take it up or not, and are not bound to account for their failure to do so. This also means that the hearer can pick up on talk to a child that may not be intended for an overhearer. The fact that any utterance to a child can potentially be intended for an overhearer means that no exchange with a child is treated as “private”. This can be used as a resource when, for example, a hearer wants to chime in or jump into an interaction that another caregiver has established between herself and a child (e.g., Excerpt (24)).

Particularly noteworthy are the *interpersonal* advantages of this strategy. These should not be thought of as in addition to or separate from the affordances of this practice for the cognitive functioning of the system, but as a crucial element of it. Both Hutchins

and Weick and Roberts comment on the significance of interpersonal aspects of relating for the maintenance of collective mind. Weick and Roberts contend that “interpersonal skills are not a luxury in high-reliability systems. They are a necessity.” (1993, p. 378). On the flip side, Hutchins notes that “building and maintaining good social relationships becomes an important motive for competent performance” in systems of distributed cognition (1995, p. 224). Neither, however, provide analyses in which the connection between interpersonal relationship and task structure are teased out. Examining the practice of communicating through children may provide an opportunity to do just this.

The uncertainty as to whom talk to children is truly directed, along with the playfulness of the form, gives it advantages for the congenial accomplishment of potentially difficult interactional tasks. For example, in Excerpt (2), the design and timing of Natalie’s utterance provides some evidence that it was in fact issued for the purpose of alerting Patrice to William’s predicament of having fallen over. This allows us to ask why it may have been chosen. It cannot be solely the close coordination it allows. An utterance directly addressed to Patrice could do the same work. It would seem that there are at least two advantages to accomplishing this communicative action through talk addressed to a child. One is simply that it works toward satisfying the requirement that caregivers interact actively and frequently with children, while simultaneously getting a more immediate job done. Another advantage is its ambiguity. Because Natalie could simply be talking to the baby, Patrice’s action is, for the record, undertaken on her own accord. Natalie achieves the results of a direct request, without going on record as delivering one (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This may be particularly salient in a situation

such as this one, in which there is a lead teacher (Natalie), but there exists some disagreement about the degree of authority this role should confer.<sup>36</sup> We can see the same principal at work even more clearly when Natalie abruptly shifts from addressing her utterance to the other adults in the room to addressing it to a child in Excerpt (9), thereby lessening the likelihood that she will be heard as directing Patrice to get Lucy a toy, while still accomplishing precisely those ends.

While I will not elaborate extensively on the multiple ways in which communicating through children can accomplish interpersonal functions that support the collaborative work of groups, a few examples are immediately apparent from a review of the segments I have analyzed. It would not seem to be purely a matter of mitigating the face threat of requests. It can also be a way of managing the possible affront of asserting expertise (Excerpt (22)) or sharing an opinion (Excerpt (26)). Talk to children can create opportunities for others to join into collaborative interactional activities such as shared assessments (as seen in Excerpt (13)). It can be a resource for hearers, as well as speakers; for instance, it can be used to enter into an existing interaction to make supportive comments (Excerpt 22) and it also can be used as a playful means of contesting another caregiver's talk to a child (Excerpts 26 and 27). Such analyses are a potential site for further work and could constitute an important contribution to fleshing out the "social" aspects of socially distributed cognition.

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<sup>36</sup> I was informed of this in an interview with the site director.

### 6.3. CONCLUSION

It has not been my purpose in this chapter to advance an argument that communicating through children is the dominant mode of interaction in the daycare setting, though the ease with which I found examples indicates that it is far from rare. Nor do I claim that this is the only means by which collaboration between caregivers occurs. Rather, my analysis shows one way in which a local resource available to childcare workers is harnessed and put to use for the purpose of achieving the difficult task of simultaneously caring for multiple children. Further, I have proposed that close examination of the practice of speaking through children brings to light aspects of this environment as a site for collaborative work that may otherwise not be apparent. The peculiar interactional milieu of the daycare setting as a site in which there is a near-constant stream of talk that does not require a response, and in which caregivers are expected (but not quite required) to constantly monitor one another's talk and actions with children, emerges clearly from analysis of these segments. Consideration of how collaboration occurs through this practice can contribute to further elaboration of the multiple and complex forms of participation that are possible in everyday interaction and to our understanding of the ways in which collective mind is achieved in mundane environments.

The analyses in this chapter highlight several aspects of the nature of these classrooms as systems of collective action. First, they reveal one important way in which the presence of children shapes the interactional environment. Further, they hint at the pervasiveness of an improvisational mode of action in which childcare workers adapt to

local contingencies and make use of resources at their disposal in order to perform actions that simultaneously address multiple functions. Relatedly, the segments analyzed show the heedfulness of childcare work, evident in focused attention and careful monitoring necessary for *communicating through children* to be effective as a strategy for managing interaction in a complex environment. In the next chapter, I shift from looking at collaboration between childcare workers to examining a style of interacting with children, while maintaining a focus on the ways in which heedfulness and improvisation are manifested in the ways in which caregivers accomplish their work.

## Chapter 7. Guiding Children's Actions by Creating Contexts for Participation

### 7.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I shift my focus from the interactional practices employed by childcare workers for the purpose of collaboration with one another to consideration of the ways in which caregivers communicate with children. In particular, I examine caregivers' strategies for managing interactions with children, and focus on a set of practices that involve guiding children's actions indirectly by manipulating the environments in which they act.

The structure of ordinary conversation between adults has been found to be locally managed and party-administered (Sacks *et al.*, 1974). This means the apparent orderliness of conversation is not the product of global rules or pre-formulated scripts but is rather ongoingly accomplished on the level of micro-behaviors (e.g., Schegloff, 1986). Conversationalists exhibit considerable flexibility in carrying out courses of action, for example, in adapting to momentary contingencies in the construction of a turn (C. Goodwin, 1979; Schegloff, 1987).

These early, fundamental findings of conversation analysis were based upon research conducted on interactions almost exclusively between linguistically competent adults (Firth, 1996). Conversations between adults and the very young children in the childcare setting I investigated, however, differ from that norm in important respects. While conversations are still locally managed and party-administered, the order that they display is achieved almost entirely by one party—the adult. That is to say, while the

children act in purposeful ways within the interaction, they do not orient towards maintaining the coherence or integrity of the interaction, nor do they appear to concern themselves with the broader forms of organization of which these conversations are a part, such as “doing art” or “reading stories” (which occur over longer spans of time and involve larger numbers of participants). It becomes evident from comparison with the daycare situation that in ordinary conversations between adults participants are able to rely to a much greater extent on the other party to both produce sensible utterances and make sense of those produced by others. The bulk of the sense-making work in adult-child interactions, however, falls upon the adult. Furthermore, the adult cannot count on the child to recognize the relevance of overarching activity categories and generally act in accordance, but rather must locally and repeatedly guide children to act in a situationally appropriate manner. Therefore, interactions between adults and very young children display a fundamental asymmetry, in addition to whatever difference in power and verbal ability there may be.

These different goal-orientations mean that conversations with children require a different kind of labor on the part of caregivers than do interactions with other adults. These interactions are, in a sense, “micro-managed” by the adult caregivers. However, the term “micro-management” as it is commonly used implies the assertion of absolute control over the actions of another in pursuit of carrying out a plan. Caregivers’ management of children’s conduct in the daycare classroom, however, does not involve the imposition of a global form of order over the actions of children (or over the adults’ own actions). As in adult-adult conversations, caregivers make use of local materials and

adjust to shifting circumstances in carrying out courses of action through talk and embodied action. In fact, because of the less predictable nature of children's interactive moves, I argue that caregivers must call upon skills of improvisation and ingenuity to a greater degree than adult interactants in ordinary conversation. Because they cannot count on the cooperation of a knowledgeable and similarly oriented interlocutor, caregivers must devote a great deal more attention to the design of their utterances. In particular, they must be forward-looking, always cognizant of how their current actions will or will not make possible other actions on the part of children.

In this chapter, I examine a particular strategy for managing interactions with children in which caregivers create or reshape interactional and physical environments for children's actions. This is opposed to a rhetorical approach to controlling behavior, in which caregivers attempt to affect children's conduct by altering children's intentions towards action. It also, of course, can be opposed to the use of directly coercive tactics. Through this strategy, caregivers reshape the context so as to (a) enable or constrain certain actions, or (b) alter the significance of what children are already doing (or are likely to do). As an example, consider the practice of spelling rather than saying certain words in a conversation held with or in the presence of a pre-literate child. Parents might spell out i-c-e-c-r-e-a-m rather than saying the words as they discuss the feasibility of making a stop at the ice cream shop on the way home. By doing so, they avoid creating an environment in which a request from the child is likely.

I explore this phenomenon using the analogy of child-proofing, which refers to a set of modifications adults make to the physical environment in order to allow or disallow

certain actions on the part of children, or to create a setting in which the actions children are likely to take become unproblematic. While its primary purpose is surely to keep children safe, it is also recommended as a way to avoid frequently reprimanding children or directly intervening in their activities.

The difference between child-proofing and the interactional phenomenon that I am investigating is not that one is physical and the other verbal. The environments created through “interactional child-proofing” may be situations brought into being through words (or through withholding or disguising words, as in the i-c-e-r-e-a-m example), but they can also be physical environments. Rather, the difference is that while child-proofing is done in advance, allowing the caregiver to then proceed to other matters without having to be concerned about the environment, “interactional child-proofing” is an ongoing process. Caregivers need to continually attend to children's movements and stay "one step ahead" of them in order to avoid having to resort to more direct forms of coercion. This is then a form of planning, but it is "situated planning": planning as an on-line, emergent process (c.f., Suchman, 1987).

This is not to say that other strategies for influencing children’s conduct are not employed in the daycare setting. In fact, the implicit means that I focus on in this chapter must be understood as just one tool (or set of tools) in a toolkit of techniques for guiding children’s actions. Nor are these techniques deployed on separate occasions; rather they are used in combination—serially and sometimes simultaneously.

In general, caregivers’ actions in the classrooms I studied accord with prescriptions for “positive guidance” (Honig, 2000) or “developmentally appropriate

practice” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) in early childhood education. For example, these caregivers rarely use explicitly negative directives, such as “Stop,” “No,” or “Don’t do that.” Rather, they give positive directives, such as, “Keep your feet on the floor” (as opposed to “Don’t climb on the couch”) or “Paint on the paper, please” (as opposed to “Stop painting on the table”). Such directives are sometimes prefaced by “You need to” or “I need you to”.

Directives may also take the form of statements that make reference to general rules, such as, “We don’t hit” or the minimal “That’s not okay.” Another variation includes assessments that presuppose the existence of standards for children’s conduct, such as “Your feet are too high, sir.” Propositions like “It’s Karen’s turn,” or “That’s Laura’s work,” are also frequent, from which presumably a child is to infer that it is not her turn (or her work) and therefore that she does not have the right to do what she is doing. Such reference to rules, standards and rights is also in keeping with guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Caregivers make use of physical force, albeit in a gentle form, by taking objects out of children’s hands, pushing children into sitting positions, picking them up and taking them to other parts of the room, holding out arms to restrain children from moving in certain directions, and the like. These practices are used selectively and tactically, but not infrequently. Later analysis will show how physical force or presence can be used in a way that reframes or encourages certain wanted behaviors rather than directly constraining unwanted actions.

Though caregivers avoid negative directives, they use quite regularly a positively-phrased correlate: “Walk away” (an item from the “All Aboard” lexicon). This would seem to fit the bill of suggesting an action rather than prohibiting one, but in fact is quite minimal and vague in terms of the other activity the child is being asked to undertake, and really only has meaning with reference to the undesired activity (whatever it is that the child is supposed to walk away from). It should also be noted that some of the other phrases used to direct children towards positive behaviors are in fact quite conventionalized responses to negative behaviors and thus may index the negative behavior and reaction more than it would seem simply by virtue of the words used. (For example, Monica addresses the phrase “Let’s keep our feet on the floor” to a child whose feet *are* on the floor but is reaching for something on the back of the couch. It seems as though “Keep your feet on the floor” is synonymous with “Don’t climb” for Monica. Similarly, she says “We need to keep our toys on the floor” when taking a toy away from a child, but then immediately places the toy on a table—Monica seems to be using this phrase in response to the fact that the child was walking up the steps to the slide with the somewhat large toy in her hands, which she thought was inappropriate.)

One particularly artful (Morrison, 1991) set of strategies are those often labeled as “redirection,” which involve moving children away from unwanted engagements and towards positive ones. This can be done in a very explicit manner (e.g., “Hey Karim, want to play with blocks?”). It also can be done in a highly inexplicit manner, by setting up opportunities for involvement that children then choose on their own accord. Some of the excerpts that I examine in this chapter would seem to be prime examples of

redirection. Others do not fit this category so well, in that rather than causing children to abandon their actions they re-contextualize those actions—turning them into something more desirable.

In this chapter, I focus on interaction in the toddler rooms (in which the children are between 12 and 24 months old). Similar phenomena occur in the infant rooms. However, in those classrooms caregivers are not actively attempting to guide children's behavior through their interactions with them—there is very little attempt to tell children what to do and when there is it is not carried out through direct verbal means. It is the distinction between the strategy I examine here and more explicit ways of verbally or physically influencing children's behavior that render it significant in the toddler rooms.

In the infant rooms, and even in the toddler rooms, there is a sense in which all of the activities that the caregivers engage children in work to permit particular kinds of actions on the part of children and discourage others. By simply engaging a child in an activity like painting or playing with a particular toy, the caregiver also discourages him or her from engaging in problematic activities such as taking other children's toys, climbing on furniture, and other such things. But I focus on moments in which a caregiver spontaneously and momentarily creates a new context in response to or in anticipation of a particular problematic behavior.

While this strategy is demanded because children of this age do not behave as cooperative interactional partners in the way that adults do, it is perhaps also made possible because young children are particularly willing to accept possibilities for action that arise in a serendipitous manner (as also found by Lerner (2004)). While ordinary

conversation between adults may also involve the creation of contexts for others' action with some degree of purposefulness, for childcare workers this practice is continuous and highly strategic; furthermore the consequences of a failure to do so are far greater. Thus it can be analyzed as a form of skilled practice in childcare work, one that demands a high degree of focused attention and presence of mind—what we might call mindfulness (Langer, 1989; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001).

In this chapter, I discuss cases in which environments are created so as to allow for or prevent certain actions and cases in which environments are altered in order to recontextualize and thus change the significance of an action already in progress or anticipated. I also describe instances in which caregivers alter the context in a way that reframes both their own and children's actions.

## 7.2. CHILD-PROOFING

The popular term *child-proofing* (or *baby-proofing*) is used to refer to the alterations adult caregivers make to built environments inhabited by children, primarily in order to minimize risks to children's well-being. In contemporary U.S. discourse on parenting, such efforts are taken to be a necessity (for example, adoption agencies may want to see that prospective parents have baby-proofed their house, or to review a baby-proofing plan), and have spawned an enormous industry dedicated to the sale of products like gates, toilet locks, cabinet latches, outlet covers, and coffee table bumpers, to mention only a few. (Apparently, one can even hire a baby-proofing consultant.) In addition to the purchase and use of such mass-produced objects, most baby-proofing projects also involve the

strategic rearrangement of existing household items. For example, toxic cleaning supplies are moved to higher shelves, glass knick-knacks are stored behind locked cabinet doors, and electric cords are re-routed behind large pieces of furniture. There is also an affirmative element to baby-proofing techniques—the ideal baby-proofed room is not a padded cell in which all potential for harm has been removed, but rather a room in which stimulating and attractive alternative options for engagement are available to the child (e.g., in the form of toys or safe play spaces).

Baby-proofing techniques are designed to affect children's actions in two ways. The first is that they simply prevent certain unwanted actions while allowing others. Gates and locks, for instance, make certain dangerous actions impossible, or at least more difficult. The second way that baby-proofing tactics shape children's actions is by allowing those actions to occur but altering their significance. For instance, realizing that their child is likely to play with whatever is on the lower three shelves of the bookcase, parents may move their cd collection and replace it with a collection of children's stories, thus reconstituting a child's misbehavior as budding literacy.

Child-proofing efforts are certainly undertaken with children's safety in mind. However, it is generally acknowledged (e.g., in child-rearing guidebooks) that baby-proofing is not just about keeping children safe, but doing so in a way that enables adults to reduce their use of verbal forms of discipline. For example,

To make your no's more effective, use them only when you need to. Avoid "no" overload without squelching your toddler's exploratory instincts by eliminating as many potential points of conflict from his environment as possible. Make your house safe for your toddler and your toddler safe in your house ... and you'll have fewer reasons to say 'no.'

(A. Eisenberg *et al.*, 1996, p. 49)

Further, as evidenced by the last quotation, baby-proofing is also seen as a means of providing a space fit for children to explore and play freely. In fact, adults – both parents and professional caregivers – make alterations to the physical environment that are specifically designed to support children's learning and development (e.g., Trancik & Evans, 1995).

Certain features of the phenomenon of baby-proofing deserve mentioning. For one, baby-proofing requires *taking the perspective of the child* in order to identify aspects of the setting that might be particularly dangerous, or to otherwise determine how a child is likely to interact with the environment. Baby-proofing guidelines recommend that caregivers crawl around the area (for an infant) or get down on their knees and look around (for a toddler) in preparation for taking steps to modify a room (e.g., "Baby-proofing your home", 1995; A. Eisenberg et al., 1996).

Further, as practiced in the daycare center I studied, baby-proofing involves the *use of locally available resources in combination with conventional tools* specifically designed for this purpose. For example, with the addition of a child-safe gate, the diaper

table and a bookshelf are pressed into service to keep small children away from the temptations of the diapering area.

Because of this, *a single object often has multiple functions*; for instance, a set of long, foot-high shelves were used in an infant room to create a barrier between the kitchen and the play area, while also providing accessible toy storage and serving as a sturdy support for infants to practice pulling up.

In what follows, I describe interactional strategies for guiding children's behavior that share these fundamental characteristics of baby-proofing.

### 7.3. "CHILD-PROOFING" AS INTERACTIONAL STRATEGY: GUIDING CHILDREN BY SHAPING ENVIRONMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION

In this chapter, I use the notion of 'child-proofing' as an analogy to explore a set of interactional techniques that involve manipulating children's immediate environment in order to influence children's actions, bearing in mind that the relationship is not merely one of analogy—both practices are situated within a common ideology of childrearing practice, termed "child-centered" by its advocates and "child-accommodating" by its critics (Ochs, 1992). The difference between child-proofing and its interactional correlate is not that one occurs in the material world and the other in the world of discourse. In fact, "interactional child-proofing" can be accomplished through the strategic deployment of bodies and physical objects (as shown below). The difference is rather that while child-proofing is accomplished in advance, presumably allowing the caregiver to then focus on other issues, these interactional strategies are employed as part

of the ongoing process of adjusting to and dealing with children's actions and are therefore improvisational, adaptive, and performed "on the fly."

My focus as I have defined it does not give rise to a clearly delineated category, but rather a fuzzy collection of practices, ranging from commonplace and seemingly trivial actions (such as giving children warnings of upcoming transitions, postponing directives or repeating them at more opportune moments) to quite ingenious and locally adaptive maneuvers (a few of which will be described below). In what follows, I will provide examples of several different ways in which caregivers guide children's actions by altering contexts for action. I will then review a more extended sequence in order to show how this is done in combination with other strategies, and to illustrate the moment-to-moment work involved in managing children's actions in the daycare.

#### 7.4. SHAPING ENVIRONMENTS TO ENCOURAGE OR DISCOURAGE CERTAIN ACTIONS

##### **7.4.1. Creating an Appealing Opportunity for Engagement**

Caregivers have a number of strategies to choose from when it comes to guiding children away from dispreferred activities and towards desired ones. As discussed above, the caregivers in this setting commonly utilize a strategy of positive guidance—rather than directing children to stop what they are doing, caregivers tell them to do something else. This is still a fairly direct form of guidance. Another possibility, however, is to merely create an alternative possibility for engagement that is more tempting than the one in which the child is currently involved, thus allowing children to choose a desired action rather than being directed toward it.

A very basic example of this occurs when a caregiver attempts to lure a child away from an inappropriate engagement by calling out his or her name. A summons represents an opportunity to engage in an interaction. When the summoned party is an adult it may even obligate that party to participate in an interaction, however brief (Schegloff, 1968), but very young children may not be held accountable to such requirements.

Often caregivers merely call out children's names. In other cases, they may hold out a physical object, such as a toy, with which children may be interested in playing. In the following example, Tara is attempting to lure Lena away from her mother (the researcher, who is tending the camera and proving to be an irresistible presence to her 17-month-old daughter). Tara starts by calling the child's name, then upgrades the attractiveness of the alternate activity she is proposing by chanting Lena's name and clapping, and then singing a song commonly sung in the classroom that involves embodied forms of participation ("Walk Along Joe"). Others (the foster grandmother and the researcher) join the attempt to engage Lena in interacting with Tara, in different ways.

(1) “Lena. Lena. Lena. Lena.”

1 Lena: ((cr[ies])=  
2 Tara: [Le::na  
3 Lena: =[(cries))  
4 Tara: [Lena. Lena. Lena. Lena. ((clapping rhythmically))  
5 Grandma: Lena ( )  
6 SM: What do you want to ↑pla:y?  
7 Grandma: ↑Hi Lena. (.) Hi Lena.  
8 SM: You wanna play a game?  
9 Tara: What about Walkalong Joe.  
10 SM: Lena you wanna do Walkalong Joe:?  
11 Tara: ((singing and clapping)) ↑Walkalong Joe::  
12 ↑Walkalong Joe::  
13 You're the best horse in the ↓town I know::  
14 ↑Walkalong Joe::  
15 [↑Walkalong Joe::  
16 SM: [↑Walkalong Joe::  
17 Tara: WHOA (.) You already fell.  
18 SM: WHOA::: JOE

While Tara starts with a very minimal and straightforward technique for engaging a child—calling her name (line 2)—she then upgrades the attractiveness of the activity she is offering in a step-wise manner. First she starts to chant “Lena” while clapping rhythmically along with her chanting. In addition to generally being acoustically appealing to children, the clapping offers the possibility of joining in (these very young children quite regularly join in on rounds of clapping at the ends of songs and stories). However, this does not draw Lena in. While Lena’s mother suggests vaguely that she play a game, Tara is more specific, offering her the possibility of singing Walkalong Joe. Walkalong Joe is a song that involves rhythmic thigh-patting and some simple hand movements that children often take part in enthusiastically (see the analysis of an extended Circle Time segment, later in this chapter). It also offers the opportunity for others in the room to join in, thus potentially enhancing further the attraction of this activity. Lena’s mother and a child (whom Tara addresses in line 17) do avail themselves of this opportunity. Lena, unfortunately, does not.

Tara's choice of a strategy of distraction—or tempting Lena away from her mother with an attractive activity—makes sense in this situation. While this behavior is unwanted in this moment, there is no general rule against it that can be invoked, nor does there exist a conventionalized strategy for dealing with it, since it is not a problem often encountered in the days' normal course of events. This shows that this strategy is a particularly pliant and flexible one—it can be used to deal with difficulties that are quite emergent and where there is no need or desire on the part of caregivers to socialize the child towards a general understanding that a particular behavior is undesirable.

In the previous example, a caregiver simply creates an opportunity for a child to engage in an interaction with herself. More complex instances occur when a caregiver attempts to orchestrate an opportunity for involvement with another party, for example, the other caregiver.

In the following example (discussed in more detail in the preceding chapters), Monica is leading a Circle Time activity. Circle Time is a typical event in preschool and elementary school classrooms, during which teachers and children arrange themselves in a circle or semicircle and read and listen to stories, sing songs and perform other verbal and gestural routines.

In this segment, a child (Karim) wanders away from the circle. Monica looks over at him (her attention may be drawn to him by another child who says “bye bye”). She prepares herself to call his name, but then waits until he starts walking toward her on his own. (This is evident on the videotape as she opens her mouth, shaping it to utter his name, and then holds her mouth in that position while she tracks the child with her gaze.)



to the circle. However, seeing that he is already walking in her direction, which may or may not mean that he was headed back to the circle (there are other items of interest in that part of the room—in fact, a box of toys in that area had drawn him away from the circle earlier), she waits a moment until he is closer. At that point she offers him the opportunity to do “Row Your Boat,” but does not yet specify that she means for him to do it with Robert. Karim then moves closer to her, at which point she is afforded the opportunity to touch his body and she makes use of this possibility, in combination with a pointing gesture, to clarify that she is suggesting he engage in this enjoyable routine with Robert. Karim cooperates, but Robert is not attending to this interaction and thus rebuffs Karim when he approaches. Nonetheless, Karim is sufficiently attracted by the opportunity to participate peripherally in the “Apple Tree” routine (which Monica and Robert do instead of Row Your Boat) that he stays within the confines of the circle for its duration, at which point he wanders away again.

In Excerpts (1) and (2) caregivers create opportunities for desirable engagements in order to draw a child away from unwanted activities (Lena’s clinging to her mother and Karim’s wandering around the room during Circle Time). These, then, are textbook cases of “redirection,” exercised in a particularly spontaneous and locally adaptive manner. In both of these instances, caregivers make use of a musical routine involving rhythmic body movements in their attempt to change children’s involvements. This need not be the case; simple summons, questions to children, and the offer of interesting toys can also be employed for this purpose. However, there are several elements that might make such musical routines useful in these circumstances: including the use of the

auditory modality (by which caregivers can gain the attention of children who are visually focusing elsewhere); the possibility for easily joining in (knee slaps and hand claps being well within the repertoire of these children, even if the words of the song are difficult to produce); and the possibility for involving others at the same time, which potentially makes the activities even more attractive.

#### **7.4.2. Erecting Barriers**

Caregivers also strategically alter children's environments in order to *prevent* certain actions. Since the purpose of this is avoidance, such a strategy may not always clearly manifest itself in the discourse. For instance, spelling i-c-e-c-r-e-a-m is really a strategy of prevention that only appears in the discourse because the adults attempt to use code rather than skipping the conversation altogether. In other cases, caregivers may use strategies that do not manifest themselves audibly or visually (e.g., postponing a request when a child is judged to be unlikely to comply) and therefore such strategies are not available for analysis.

The physical actions that caregivers take to prevent children's actions are more available to observation, particularly when they work to prevent the repetition of an action that the caregiver has already tried to correct.

In the following example, Monica creates a physical impediment to discourage Karim from continuing an unwanted action. This segment takes place towards the end of snack time. The children eat their snack all together, gathered around a large, low table at one end of the room (actually two tables pushed together). Monica has dished out some food (fruit salad, I believe) into small paper bowls. Curtis and Karim are sitting at

the far corner. As the children finish what they have been given, Monica goes around the table and puts graham crackers in their bowls. After Monica puts a few crackers in Curtis's and Karim's bowl, Karim starts to reach towards Curtis's bowl. (It appears that Curtis may still have some of the fruit salad, but he has now switched to eating a graham cracker.) Karim drags Curtis's bowl closer to himself, dips his spoon into it and eats, while Curtis watches. He then picks out some food with his fingers and eats it. None of the caregivers seem to notice this. Karim takes some more, and then Curtis pulls his bowl back. Karim tries to pull it away again, but Curtis does not let go. At this point, Monica is walking by the table and sees this happen.

### (3) Monica Sits between Karim and Curtis

1 Monica: Oh: Karim: ↑That's not your bowl honey. (.)  
 2 That's Curtis's bowl  
 3 (6.5)  
*Karim looks at Lena, drops spoon, reaches towards Curtis's bowl again and grabs it.*  
 4 Monica: Karim.  
*Monica walks over to Karim and bends over.*  
 5 This is Karim's bowl right here.=  
*Points at Karim's bowl and taps several times*  
 6 This is Curtis's bowl.  
*Places bowl in front of Curtis.*  
 7 Monica: °(Curtis are you ?)°  
*lifts Curtis's hand*  
 8 (1.5)  
*Monica tucks Curtis's chair in; Karim reaches towards Curtis's bowl*  
 9 Kari::m.  
*Monica kneels down, takes Karim's hands and places it on table in front of Karim's body*  
 10 Sir you need to listen to my words.  
 11 This is Curtis's bowl and this is Karim's bowl.  
*Taps Curtis's bowl Taps Karim's bowl*  
 12 This is your food.  
 | |  
*Points to Points to Karim's bowl*  
 Karim  
 13 (You have) some more of the fruit salad.  
*Monica turns to Curtis, rests her chin in left hand*

At the beginning of this transcript, Karim has reached for Curtis's bowl, but Curtis held on to it, which resulted in a brief tug-of-war.



Figure 5: Karim, Curtis and Curtis's bowl

Seeing this, Monica does not directly tell Karim to stop, but rather invokes a notion of bowl-ownership (in lines 1-2). When Karim tries to take the bowl again, she kneels down between them and addresses Karim, once again explaining that he and Curtis each have their own bowls. Monica then rests her elbows on the table and stays put for a while (approximately one minute beyond the transcribed segment). After Monica sits, Karim does not try to take the bowl again.

Interestingly, as Monica sits she says to Karim, “Sir you need to listen to my words” (line 10). In fact, she ensures that his compliance will *not* depend upon his listening to her words but rather on his attending to the presence of her body.



Figure 6: Monica sits.

It is not that she literally creates a barrier. Karim is not physically constrained; in fact, if she didn't move he could still reach the bowl. Rather, she positions herself so as to be ready to intervene should Karim try to reach the bowl. In a sense, she creates a “display” of her physical potential. The action of reaching for the bowl becomes less attractive to Karim due to this change in his physical environment.

From this position Monica is still able to do other parts of her job, i.e., monitoring and speaking to other children. Sitting between Karim and Curtis for a moment allows her to balance her need to prevent Karim from taking Curtis's food with her need to attend to other goings-on. In fact, Monica and Robert move around the table sitting at different places throughout snack time. Their movements may or may not be motivated by similar goals. In one case, when Robert sits down next to a child who has just been

brought back to the table after walking away, it clearly is. In other cases, they seem to be simply picking a perch from which to watch and interact with the children.

As stated above, practices through which caregivers act to discourage children's actions may be difficult to identify in the discourse because in order to be effective (and not engender resistance) they must be in some sense "hidden". In this case, Monica's action is evident and her motivation fairly safe to assign in that we see her acting to prevent reoccurrence of an action that has already occurred. Even here, where she makes use of her whole body in order to discourage Karim's problematic behavior, her action "blends in" quite smoothly with the types of actions she is taking anyway. In other cases, a physical action that might seem to be initiated purely to create a barrier can in fact be seen as a way of creating a new interpretation of a child's action.

#### **7.4.3. Creating Contexts to Re-frame Actions in Progress or Anticipated**

Through practices falling under this category, caregivers influence children not by preventing certain actions or encouraging others, but by rather allowing actions to occur while altering the environment to change their significance. Returning to the child-proofing analogy, this is akin to storing the child's toys on the lower shelves of the bookcase—the child's likely action of taking things out and playing with them is transformed into a wanted activity.

The interaction represented in Excerpt (4) takes place during the same Circle Time event that was described above. At the beginning of the segment, Monica has just finished a song and proposes a new one to the group ("Itsy Bitsy Spider," a song that is accompanied by a set of specific hand gestures).

#### (4) Moving the Blue Chair

- 1 Monica: Which one? (.) Which one's next?  
2 Child: ((very high)) i:: ya:::  
*Karim wags index finger*  
3 Monica: Itsy bitsy spider? Where are your spiders.  
*Brings hands to first hand position of song*  
4 Robert: Oo[p. Ready? °ready°  
5 Monica: | [Lena, where's your ↑spi↓der.  
*Thomas starts to walk away*  
*Lena turns to face Monica*  
6 Robert: Ar:: gotcha.  
*Robert grabs Thomas and puts on his lap*  
*Monica repositions Lena's body to face hers*  
7 Monica: Where's your ↑spi↓der. Ready?  
8 Robert: The::[: itsy bitsy spi:de:r went up the water spout.  
9 Monica: [itsy bitsy spi:de:r went up the water spout.  
*R & M both do index-finger-to-thumb spider crawling hand movements*  
10 Monica: [Down came the rai:n an[d=  
10 Robert: [Down came the rai:n |°sit down°  
*Robert moves chair*  
*Robert wiggles fingers while lowering arms*  
*Thomas gets up and starts to walk away*  
11 Monica: =washed the spider out.  
*Robert takes Thomas's hand*  
12 Robert: °Sit dow::n >please<.  
*Robert pushes Thomas into chair.*  
13 Robert: Thank you.

As the group prepares to sing “Itsy Bitsy Spider,” Thomas stands up from the blue chair and starts to walk away from the circle. Robert grabs him with a playful “Ar:: gotcha” and seats him in his lap (line 130). Shortly thereafter Robert’s hands become occupied with “Itsy Bitsy Spider.” Thomas seizes this opportunity to again stand up and start to walk away from the circle. Robert reaches in front of Thomas but instead of grabbing him, he pulls the chair closer so that it will be directly in Thomas’s path.



Figure 7: Moving the Blue Chair

In other words, rather than altering Thomas's movement, Robert attempts to change the target of his movement, so that he ends up in the chair rather than on the other side of the room. Robert takes Thomas's left hand to guide him into the chair, but Thomas turns his body and tries to walk around it, at which point Robert takes Thomas's left hand and nudges his hip into the chair.

This is a simple example in which a caregiver assesses a child's course of action and alters the environment so as to change not the child's path, but rather its endpoint. That he uses the chair for this purpose is not accidental, it is something that serves not just as barrier to Thomas's movement out of the circle, but a desirable end in itself. (Thomas had earlier demonstrated an interest in the chair when he claimed it after it had been momentarily vacated by Karim.) When Robert's initial strategy is not entirely successful (Thomas tries to walk around the chair), he resorts to a physical means of

guidance. Note, however, that this use of force has been reframed as movement into a chair, rather than prevention of movement away from the circle.

Though both this and the last example analyzed involved, in some sense, the momentary installation of barriers to children's movement, this is not just about preventing movement (although Robert does, in fact, prevent Thomas from moving further away from the circle) but is about altering the trajectory of a movement by changing the context.

#### 7.4.4. Creating Contexts to Re-frame Actions of both Caregiver and Child

In some instances, the changes caregivers make to the interactional environment may do their work more by altering the significance of their own actions than those of the child (although both may be the case). In the examples I examine below, caregivers act to reframe their own conduct towards children, particular their efforts to influence children's behavior.

#### (5) Doing Another "Row Your Boat"

1 Monica: Oh you want to row row your boat, okay. Hold on let me get your  
2 ha:nds. ↑Get your hands (in)  
3 Robert: Karim, [Karim.  
4 Monica: [Hold on.  
5 Robert: Come back.  
6 Monica: Ready? Row [row row your boat gently [down the strea:m,  
7 Robert: [come back [thank you for sitting down  
8 Monica: [if you see an alligator don't forget to scr[eam. AAH:::::  
9 Robert: [okay ) [( )  
10 Monica: Good job Rebecca. All done.  
11 Rebecca?: ( )  
12 Monica: [I don't wanna ( ) it's someone else's turn  
13 Robert: [>>Row row row your boat gently down the stream  
14 Robert: [if you see an alligator don't forget to scream AH::  
15 Monica: [if you see an alligator don't forget to scream AH::  
16 Good job [Rebecca  
17 Child: [AH::  
18 Monica: Lena apple tree?

In this case, the caregiver (Monica) makes use of a verbal routine (“Row Your Boat”) initiated by another caregiver in order to resolve a dilemma. Monica and Rebecca are doing “Row Your Boat.” When sung in this childcare room, Row Your Boat involves a caregiver taking both hands of a child and making rowing motions, which move the child back and forth. It is sung with a nontraditional last line (lines 8 above), followed by a formulaic “scream”. When they are done performing this routine, Monica attempts to let go of Rebecca’s hands. (She may loosen her grip earlier, but she clearly opens her hands as she utters “Good job, Rebecca,” line 10). However, Rebecca does not let go. Monica then says, “All done,” while shaking her own (and Rebecca’s) hands. Shaking both hands in the air is a conventional “baby sign” (Acredolo & Goodwyn, 1996) used at the center. Shaking her hands is potentially multifunctional in this situation: it signifies “we are all done now” and could also conceivably shake Rebecca’s hands loose. However, Rebecca maintains her grip. Monica starts to explain to Rebecca why she must let go by invoking a general rule (“it’s someone else’s turn,” line 12). As she says this, Rebecca further indicates her unwillingness to move on by starting to rock front to back (the body movement done during the song).

At the same time, however, Robert has started to do “Row Your Boat” (at a much faster pace) with the child on his lap. Monica joins in (line 15) and starts to rock Rebecca back and forth. Rebecca turns to look at Robert, so she is not as well-positioned or physically prepared for this round, and thus it seems less of a joint effort than their previous round--Monica basically does the rocking. When Monica finishes singing and

pretending to scream, she again says “Good job, Rebecca” and immediately wrests her hands away from Rebecca’s, and thrusts them towards Lena.

By joining in on Robert’s round of Row Your Boat, Monica provides herself with another opportunity to end the activity with Rebecca. Now that she knows that Rebecca is not going to let go easily, she can quickly and decisively remove her hands at the end of the song, rather than entering into a protracted negotiation that is more likely to produce protest than consent.

In the following segment, we can identify two ways in which caregivers do their directives so as to create a context in which compliance is more likely. This occurs when Monica and Robert are both working to initiate a Circle Time activity by directing particular children to move to the circle and sit down.

### (6) “Up go to Monica”

1 Robert: I need you guys to sit down coming down the slide,  
2 none of you sit down.  
3 Karim: ((laughs))  
4 Robert: There we go Shante, sittin down. ↑Whee::: Sit down. Sit down  
5 thank you. Shante you need to ↑move. There’s people comin.  
6 [You need to move move. Move.  
7 Monica: [(Lena do you wanna) sit down so we can (read that book)  
8 together?  
9 Child: [(yeah)  
10 Robert: [See? (.) Now Karim’s behind ya.  
11 Monica: ((in falsetto)).hh Rebecca, Curtis, [Karim,=  
12 Robert: [You can  
13 do it.  
14 Monica: =Sha[n]te and Thomas right here ↓please.  
15 Robert: [Up. (.) up up. (.) Up go to [Monica.  
16 Monica: [(Time to) sit down.  
17 Robert: Go sit down. She’s doin stories, go sit [down.  
18 Monica: [Come sit down.  
19 Robert: Go sit. I’m gonna go too, let’s go sit.  
20 Child: ( )  
21 Robert: No:?. You [don’t wanna sit? Come on. Here. Will you sit with me?  
22 Monica: [(Can you get me) that book right there. Give me  
23 that book? [(Get me) that book.  
24 Child: [mm mm mm [(.) ay (.) AA:: ((escalating whine))  
25 Robert: [ >Come on (.) Come on< OH: (.) OH OH::  
26 OH: >it’s terrible, come on< (.) come on. Uh: ((sound of  
27 effort))

The extent of overlap between Robert and Monica is notable in this segment. Both Monica and Robert are speaking loudly; their utterances have similar semantic content and, it would seem, the same function. Though they are engaged in separate interactions, they are clearly aware of each other; in fact, it is only Monica's calls to the other children that have informed Robert that Circle Time is about to begin (as discussed in Chapter 5). Though it would seem that they could easily time their utterances so as not to overlap, they do not. On the contrary, in lines 25, 26 and 27, in particular, they both overlap and echo one another's utterances. That makes it seem quite unlikely that the overlap results from simply disregarding one another's utterances. Such overlap does, however, display a sort of inattentiveness to one another's utterances, though that may be more apparent than real. As a result, overlapping such parallel utterances to separate children effectively shows the caregivers to be both independently motivated and common in their purpose. Such a context, once created, may lend a sense of inevitability to the transition toward Circle Time for the children.

In the above excerpt we can also see another way in which a caregiver enhances the desirability of compliance with a request by altering its context and shifting its meaning. Robert is sitting near the slide and has been counseling the children in slide etiquette (e.g., sit down, keep moving). In line 24 he issues a different kind of directive: "up". (Unfortunately, this all takes place off-camera, but I interpret this as meaning that a child who has just slid (Shante) should stand up and get out of the way of a child who is about to slide (Karim). It could also mean that a child standing on the stairs should climb them and slide down so other children can also; either of these interpretations is

consistent with Robert's immediately preceding directives to "keep moving"). The first part of his utterance ("up up up") overlaps with Monica's call to Shante and Thomas (two of the children on the slide). He then repeats, "up" and in the same breath (or tone group) adds, "go to Monica". This alters his directive by "packaging it" with Monica's call to Circle Time, so that it becomes interpretable as meaning that the child should get up in order to go to Monica and start Circle Time (rather than the previous reason, which was to get out of the way of other children). This makes it more attractive to the extent that Circle Time is a desirable activity, and in any case unites his directive with those being uttered by Monica.

In this section, I have given brief examples of several ways in which caregivers can guide children's actions by creating or altering the environments in which children act; specifically, they can set things up so as to encourage or discourage children's actions, they can re-contextualize the actions children are already undertaking, or they can re-contextualize both the children's and their own actions. I have not analyzed examples of ways in which this might occur that are quite possibly more commonplace; these include pre-announcements (i.e., the warnings workers give that a transition is soon to occur—these warnings clearly work by changing the environment for the directive that initiates the activity shift when it occurs), strategies of passive re-contextualization (i.e., waiting for a situation to change before repeating a request or even before issuing it in the first place), and simple repetition (inasmuch as every utterance changes the context for its next, a repeated request has a different effect than its first utterance).

The properties of baby-proofing outlined earlier are manifested in the instances I have described. It is clear that the success of these strategies depends upon caregivers being able to take the perspective of the children they are caring for—they must be able to assess how possibilities for action arise for children and determine how their own actions will affect those possibilities. In doing this, they make use of both improvised and conventional tools, or use conventional tools for locally situated purposes; for example, Monica uses a routine (“Row Your Boat”) to create a moment (an ending) at which it will be appropriate for her to abruptly remove her hands from a child’s. Very often, caregivers’ actions have multiple functions. For instance, Monica’s seat at the table between Karim and Curtis is both a spot from which she can monitor and interact with the children who are having lunch and a strategic way to prevent Karim from eating out of Curtis’s bowl.

#### 7.5. INITIATING AND MAINTAINING CIRCLE TIME: THE USE OF MULTIPLE STRATEGIES FOR GUIDING CHILDREN’S ACTION IN AN EXTENDED SEGMENT

In this section, I describe the ways in which the strategies I have identified above, in combination with other tactics for influencing or controlling children’s behavior, are employed in an extended segment during which the caregivers are working to initiate and maintain a group activity. This excerpt represents a situation in which caregivers’ professional abilities are being called for and utilized. Through the frame-by-frame examination of this extended segment, we get a sense of how the work of childcare structures the lived experience of these workers, as well as the ways in which particular interactional practices are used to cope with the exigencies of the moment.

The sequence begins at the end of a phase during which the lead teacher (Monica) has been working with individual children at a table in one side of the room, doing an art project. At the same time, the other children have been playing with toys and engaging in other activities in the rest of the room, supervised by Tara (a substitute who has worked in this room before) and Grandma (a volunteer with the foster grandmother program).

Monica puts a tub containing art supplies away in the cabinet, at which time she utters her first verbal initiation of Circle Time (lines 2-3). She starts to move towards the “book area” (a couch with some small bookcases around it), followed by the foster grandmother, who is holding Tony in her arms.

**(7) Circle Time (Segment A)**

1 Monica: All righ::t.  
 2 (Can we) go sit down in the book area? C’n we go read some  
 3 books?  
 4 (1.0)  
*Monica and Grandma (carrying Tony) walk towards “book area”*  
 5 Read some books?  
 6 Grandma: ( )  
 7 (0.8)  
 8 Lena: Aa::↑a ah=  
 9 SM: =↑Stories. (.)[ ↑Stories.  
 10 Child: [(motorboat sound)]  
 11 Tara: Jonathon. Mister (.)feet too [high ma::n.  
 12 Monica: [Lena let’s go read some books  
 13 Tara: Feet too high [ma::n.  
 14 Monica: [let’s go sit down.

Three children—Karim, Jonathon and Thomas—are still in the slide area. Karim and Thomas are standing on the steps leading up to the slide and Jonathon has climbed onto something behind the slide. Tara approaches him saying “Jonathon... Feet too high man.”



Figure 8: “Feet too high, man.”

Tara takes Jonathon by the hand and leads him off of the object, but he resists slightly and ends up seated on the floor. She then helps him up with both hands and sets him in motion towards the book area. At the same time, Karim has climbed down the stairs and walked away towards the book area. As Tara lets go of Jonathon and reaches toward Thomas (who is still on the stairs), Jonathon veers off his previous path and starts to walk in another direction.



Figure 9: Jonathon turns back

### (8) Circle Time (Segment B)

12 Tara: Come on buddy.  
 13 Let's go read some books.  
 14 Let's go read some books, c'mon.  
*Thomas turns and scrambles up the stairs*  
 15 .hh Come on Thomas ((breathy and high-pitched))  
 16 You wanna go down the slide?  
*Tara walks around stairs toward slide*  
 17 Is that your method of  
 18 Monica: >Let's go read some books< let's read 'em over here Lena.  
 19 Grandma: No: ( )  
 20 (1.0)  
 21 Tara: AGH::[:::  
 22 Thomas: | [AA::[: AA:::  
*Tara grabs Thomas and picks him up*  
 23 Tara: |Ah Ah  
 24 Tara: Do you wanna go down the slide first?=Do you wanna go down  
 25 the [slide?  
 26 Thomas: |A:: A::  
 27 Grandma: Come on. Goin read some books.  
 28 Tara: °c'mon°  
*Tara sets Thomas down on top of slide*  
 29 Monica: Come [sit do::wn  
 30 Tara: |You want the (.) stairs?  
*Tara holds Thomas's hand and walks him down stairs*  
 31 Monica: Jonathon. Come sit do:wn.

Though she glances towards Jonathon, Tara is now involved with getting Thomas to move towards the book area. When Tara reached for him, Thomas scrambled away and back up the stairs. Tara responds to this with “you wanna go down the slide? Is that your method of...” (line 16). What Tara does here, in a fairly explicit way, is frame Thomas’s movement away from her and up the stairs not as him running away from her, but rather as him taking an alternative path to the book area.

At the same time Monica and Grandma, who are now in the book area, are directing several children to sit down for book reading (lines 18, 19).

In keeping with the interpretation of Thomas’s action that she has incompletely verbalized (that going down the slide is his “method” of getting to the book area), Tara moves around to meet him at the bottom of the slide and holds out her arms to him. Thomas, however, does not go down the slide, but rather starts to turn back towards the stairs. Tara then grabs him, making a growling sound while she does so (line 21). By momentarily pretending to be a fierce predator, Tara attempts to recontextualize both Thomas’s and her own actions as “play” (Bateson, 1955); as, specifically, a chase game (or perhaps a ‘hunt and devour’ game). As she picks him up, however, Thomas continues to scream in a way that signals protest, not play. Tara first mimics Thomas’s cry, as though to make a different game out of it, but Thomas does not play along. She then gets his attention by holding his chin in her hand and returns to her previous ploy of treating the stairs/slide combo as a means of getting to the book area (lines 24 and 25). She sets Thomas down at the top of the stairs and holds his hand while he walks down the stairs.



Figure 10: Tara leads Thomas down the stairs.

### (9) Circle Time (Segment C)

32 Grandma: Oh::Get up. Oh::*(she can) get up.* Oh::  
*Thomas turns back towards slide*

33 Child: yow

34 Monica: Come and sit down we're gonna rea:d=

35 Tara: =Thomas. I need you over here please.

36 By the books.

37 By the books Thomas. Ah::*you're trying to play ga:mes.*

38 I'm not playing games with you.

40 Monica: Sit down.

41 Tara: C'mon buddy.

42 Monica: Sit down, Tony.

43 Tara: I gotchu [↑ah:: ↑I gotchu

44 Monica: | [Than:k you:  
*Monica pushes Tony into sitting position*

45 Monica: (Good sitting.)

46 (2.0)  
*Monica moves the book bin to her side*

47 Monica: Sit ↑do:wn.

48 (1.2)  
*Monica pushes Karim into sitting position*

49 Monica: Lena come sit do:wn.

50 (.7)

51 Monica: Thomas P. Come sit do:wn.

52 (2.5)

53 Tara: Tony. Uh oh.

54 Uh uh. Uh oh. You gonna make me pick you up.

55 Oh (.) I gotcha. I gotcha.

56 ↑Woo::h  
*Tara carries Thomas into book area*

As they walk toward the book area, Tara diverts her attention to another child (out of frame) and motions for that child to come. She lets go of Thomas's hand, and Thomas immediately turns around and walks back to the slide.



Figure 11: Thomas turns back

Throughout, Monica continues to direct other children to sit down in the book area.

Tara turns her attention back to Thomas. She starts her utterance to him by adopting a fairly direct strategy (line 35). The address term and general tone, especially the utterance of “please” with falling intonation, give this directive a more serious feel—Tara is no longer signaling ‘play.’ She makes this even more explicit as her utterance progresses. Perhaps in response to Thomas’s continuing resistance (the two are now off camera), Tara verbally displays her realization that Michael is “trying to play games” and asserts that she is “not playing games” with him. She then shows herself to be serious, but (ironically) does so in a playful manner, by accompanying her attempts to pick him

up with utterances that once again reframe this use of adult force as play (e.g., “gotcha,” “Wooh,” lines 55 and 56). She also produces an account for her use of force, in which she justifies it as being caused by the child and out of her control (“You gonna make me pick you up,” line 54).

## (10) Circle Time (Segment D)

56 Monica: Come sit down. Ready?  
57 We're gonna read (.) the pudy book of Mother Goose.  
58 °sit down ( )°  
59 Ready?  
60 The cat in the fiddle,  
61 Hey diddle diddle the cat in the fiddle  
62 the cow jumped over the moo:n  
63 John: WAA::K  
*Jonathon slaps at books with both hands, pushing Monica's arm down*  
64 Tara: ( ) [time  
65 Monica: [Jonathon si:r  
66 You need to cal:m your body  
67 And the little dog laughed (.) to see such a sport  
*Thomas runs off*  
68 and the dish ran away with the spoon  
69 Ready? Humpty dumpty sat on a wall.  
70 Humpty dumpty had a great fall.  
71 All the king's horses and all the king's men  
*Tara lifts Tony onto her lap*  
72 Couldn't put humpty together agai:n  
*Tara beckons to Thomas on the other side of the room*  
73 Thomas. Can you come sit do:wn? (1.1) Come sit down.  
*Points at floor Nods and makes face*  
74 (1.2)  
75 Monica: Lena come sit down.  
*Beckons points at floor*  
76 Tara: C'mere Thomas.  
77 (1.9)  
78 Monica: °Jonathon.°=  
79 Tara: =.hh (.) tch tch tch ((kissing))  
80 Monica: Sit down sir.  
81 Thomas come sit do:n.  
*Beckons points at floor*  
82 Tara: Karim stay. Stay for me.  
*Monica holds pointing gesture*  
83 Monica: Come sit do:n=  
*Beckons*  
84 Tara: =Put your bottom down.  
*Monica points at floor*  
*Tara pats Karim's lower back as he stretches over chair*  
85 Karim: A aa:  
86 Tara: Ah::::  
*Monica starts to get up*  
87 Karim: A:::::  
88 Tara: Ah. Sit your bottom [down.  
89 Monica: [( )] come get you because you were not  
90 listening to my words on purpose.  
91 (1.0)  
92 You were not listening to my words on purpose.  
93 (1.2)  
*Monica carries Thomas back to circle*  
94 Let's come and sit down.

By this point most of the other children are in the book area—although not all of them are seated—and Monica begins her story. Halfway through the first page, Jonathon walks over and tackles the book, to which Monica responds with an injunction to “calm your body” (line 66). As she continues to read, he takes another swipe at it, which she dodges. He then hurls himself back into the miniature blue couch. In the meantime, Tara is struggling with Thomas, attempting to keep him in her lap, and Karim gets up and walks toward Monica. Monica (right after telling Jonathon to calm his body) holds an arm up to Karim and Tara then reaches out to guide him back into his chair. When she does that Thomas stands up and runs to the other side of the room.

Tony (who has not been in the circle) toddles up to the group and Tara seizes that opportunity to pick him up and set him on her lap. She then motions towards Thomas to come back to the group. Monica finishes her stanza (“...humpty together again”) and calls out to Thomas (line 73). She also directs Lena, who is standing behind the miniature couch, to come sit down. She then similarly addresses Jonathon, while Tara attempts to get Karim to “set his bottom down.” In these five lines, the caregivers address similar directives to four different children. Monica then gets up to physically move Thomas back to circle—like Tara, she offers an account for this overt use of force (lines 89, 90 and 92).

## (11) Circle Time (Segment E)

95 ? Oh:: [( )  
96 Monica: [( )  
*Monica sits down with Thomas on lap*  
97 Ready?=  
98 Tara: =°( )°  
*Jonathon walks away from circle, Grandma restrains him with arm*  
99 Monica: Little boy blue:: come blow your ↑horn=  
*Grandma lets Jonathon go Tara pulls Karim by shirt into chair*  
100 =the sheep's in the meadow the cow's in the co:rn.  
101 where's the boy who looks after the [sheep?  
*Lena walks toward Monica*  
102 SM: [( ) stories ((whispered))  
103 Monica: Where's the boy Lena?  
*Lena walks toward Monica with arm outstretched*  
104 Where's the boy?  
*Lena points at book*  
105 There he is::.  
106 He's under the [haystack fast asleep.  
107 Grandma: [uh: hunh:::  
108 Monica: Thomas you need to stay sitting.  
*Thomas gets up and looks in book bin*  
*Lena walks away from circle*  
109 Mary had a little lamb=  
*Karim gets up and starts to walk away*  
110 =whose fleece was white as snow::?  
*Tara puts Thomas in blue chair*  
*Grandma restrains Karim with two hands*  
111 (.8)  
*Monica puts book down and looks around*  
112 °okay°

While Monica is gone, Lena walks away from the circle (and towards her mother). Monica sits down, with Thomas on her lap, and signals (with “Ready”) that she is about to begin and starts to read “Little Boy Blue” (line 99). At the same time, Jonathon gets up and starts to walk in the same direction as Lena. Grandma puts out an arm to restrain him, but he persists and pulls away from her. Karim stands and Tara pulls at his shirt to get him back into his chair. He briefly bounces in his chair and stands up again. As Monica reads “Where is the boy..” (line 101), Lena starts to walk toward the circle, and Monica gazes in her direction. When she finishes the line, Monica asks “Where is the boy Lena?” Lena walks toward her and points to the picture.



Figure 12: Lena points to the boy

In this moment, Monica recognizes an opportunity to engage Lena—who has been holding back from the circle—and makes use of it. It appears that Lena might stay for a moment—she lingers and then gazes briefly at the couch, finds it occupied (with Jonathon) and then toddles back to her mother. Thomas, at the same time, climbs out of Monica’s lap. Monica warns him to “stay sitting” but he does not; rather he starts to look through some books in the bin next to Monica. Tara guides him into the blue chair that is next to her, but he does not stay.

In the meantime, Karim, who was bouncing on his seat, has stood up, walked a few feet, and tripped over Monica’s outstretched legs. When Lena walks away he gets up and follows her. Grandma holds out her arm to restrain him; he walks in place (line 110). Monica has started to read another story, but after one line she stops and sets the book down, muttering “okay” (line 112).



Figure 13: “Okay.”

## (12) Circle Time (Segment F)

- 113 Grandma: C'mon si'down. Sit down.  
*Thomas leave the circle*
- 114 Karim: ((cri[es])
- 115 Monica: [(What's [going on today:]
- 116 Tara: [(they got energies)
- 117 You guys need to run around a little bit more.=
- 118 Monica: =What is going un today:..
- 119 Jonathon: Unnh  
*Stands up and shakes body*
- 120 Karim: ((cri[es])
- 121 Thomas?: [Da uda da da [(.) da da da da u.
- 122 Monica: [(D'you guys wanna do) walkalong Joe? (.)  
*Starts patting knees*
- 123 Ready to do Walkalong Joe?  
*Karin turns Karim starts to Monica patting knees*
- 124 Tara: ( ) what? ((to Thomas))
- 125 Grandma: Walkalong Joe ((singing))  
*Pats knees*
- 126 Monica: Ready? Ready?
- 127 Thomas.=
- 128 Tara: >You wanna do walkalong Joe?<=
- 129 Monica: =Come sit down sir we're gonna do walkalong Joe:..  
*Beckons to Michael Pats knees Tara starts to pat knees slowly*
- 130 Ready?

*Tara and Monica sing in unison:*

131 Walk along Joe:: Walk along Joe::  
132 You're the best horse in this town I know::  
*Jonathon walks back to circle, patting legs*  
*Tara pats Tony's knees with his hands*  
133 Walk along Joe:: Walk along Joe::  
134 WHOA::: JOE  
*Monica, Jonathon and Karim make motion of bringing arms above head and dropping*  
*Tara does motion with Tony's arms*  
135 (.6)  
136 >Trot along Joe:: Trot along Joe::  
*Thomas walks back into circle*  
137 You're the best horse in the town I know::  
*Michael sits down in chair*  
138 Trot along Joe:: Trot along Joe::<  
139 WHOA::: JOE  
*Monica, Jonathon and Karim make "Whoa Joe" movement*  
*Tara does movement with one of Thomas's arms*  
140 Monica: >Ready?=Go fast<

*Tara and Monica sing in unison; Tara, Monica, Jonathon, Karim and Grandma do hand motions:*

141 >Run along Joe:: Run along Joe::  
142 You're the best horse in the town I know::  
143 Run along Joe:: Run along Joe::<  
144 WHOA::: JOE  
145 ((Monica, Tara, Karim, Jonathon, Grandma and Lena clap))

At this point, Karim is sitting on the floor crying and Thomas is darting out of his chair. Both caregivers make comments about the children's behavior—thus grouping the diverse actions of many different children as a single problem in need of explanation and remedy (lines 115-118). Tara suggests specifically that the children may “need to run around a little bit more (line 117). However, they do not abandon Circle Time, though book-reading seems to be over. Rather, Monica initiates a more participatory, and possibly more appealing, engagement to lure children back to the circle, and seems to be quite successful.

In line 122 she asks “D’you guys wanna do Walkalong Joe?” Walkalong Joe, as described earlier, is a simple song about a horse that involves patting the thighs (at a faster pace each verse) and, at the end of a verse, lifting both arms and saying loudly

“Whoa!!!!”. Notably, as soon as she says “Walkalong Joe,” she begins to pat her thighs in alternation, using large movements. Karim, sitting next to her, cranes his neck to look in her direction and immediately starts to do the same. Grandma and Tara then join in, as Monica calls Thomas back to the circle (lines 127-129). Right before they start the song, Jonathon wanders away briefly, but then comes back, patting his legs. By the middle of the second verse, Thomas makes it back to the circle and, of his own volition, sits down in the blue chair. (He does not join in yet, though, and Tara raises one of his hands for him during the second repetition of “Whoa Joe!”). At this point all of the children are in the book area, and all are sitting (except for Lena, who is looking over her shoulder, body facing away from the circle).

During the last verse of the song, Tara takes Tony’s hands (Tony is in her lap) in her own and pats his thighs to the beat of the song. At the same time, she watches Thomas, who is not joining in and is looking at the other children in the circle. During “Woah Joe!” she does not raise his hand this time, but rather leans down to be right in front of him while raising her own hands and saying “Woah Joe.”



Figure 14: “Whoa Joe!”

### (13) Circle Time (Segment G)

- 146 John: AY::  
 147 Tara: Yay::: JOE  
 148 (.7)  
*Jonathon gets up and starts to walk around couch*  
 149 Monica: °(My throat's dry so)°  
*Touches hand to neck*  
*Thomas is kicking feet against Tara's legs*  
 150 Tara: ((to Thomas)) Can you stomp your feet?  
*Monica puts hands in beginning position for "itsy bitsy spider"*  
 151 Monica: Its:y bits:y spider [went up the water [spout.  
 152 Tara: [went up the water spout.  
 153 Grandma: [spout  
*Jonathon walks toward Monica Karim makes "spider" motions*  
*making "spider" hand motion*  
 154 Jonathon: DOW:::=  
*Jonathon throws his hands down*  
 155 Monica: =Do[w::n came the rain and washed the spider out  
 156 Tara: [Dow(h)n came the rain and washed the spider out  
*Monica and Tara continue to make hand motions with song*
- Tara and Monica in unison (Grandma is moving lips but voice is inaudible):*
- 157 Out came the sun: and: dried up all the rain  
 158 And the itsy bitsy spi::der went up the spout again.  
*Jonathon walks away*  
 159 Child: Yay::[:  
 160 Grandma: |Yay:::  
 161 Monica: |Yay:::  
 162 Tara: |Yay:::  
*All are clapping*

At the end of the song, all of the children and adults clap their hands, then Lena walks away and Jonathon gets up and walks in the same direction. There is a brief pause, and Monica complains quietly that her throat is dry. Thomas is pushing his feet against Tara's legs. Tara says quickly "Can you stomp your feet?" It seems that Tara builds on an action he is already doing to suggest an activity that might keep him engaged in the circle activity during this pause between songs.

But Monica has already positioned her hands to begin "Itsy Bitsy Spider." This is another song that involves hand movements—these are a bit more complex than those demanded by "Walkalong Joe". As she sings, Jonathon walks back into the circle and, in the pause between stanzas, says "Dow:::" and throws his hands down, anticipating the next line, which draws a smile and a giggle from Monica and Tara. Jonathon then wanders away again by the end of the song, but Thomas and Karim remain in the circle, in rapt attention.

The caregivers then proceed to go through three more routines: counting to ten, naming (and counting) some body parts ("one nose, two eyes..."), and singing the alphabet song. During this, Tara lets go of Tony, who crawls across the circle and starts to walk into the diapering area. Grandma issues a rare negatively-phrased directive and pulls him by the hand back to the circle (and into her lap, out of which he promptly squirms). At this point, Leticia, one of the center's "floaters," pokes her head in the door and asks whether Monica has had a break. Circle Time is then abandoned, as the workers

prepare the children for another activity, a wagon ride around the premises and a visit to the outdoor playground.

While my verbal description cannot capture the complexity of this activity in sufficient detail, I have attempted to show how caregivers actively and ongoingly work to manage children's actions in order to maintain the coherence of a group activity.

Caregivers shift their attention from child to child in a split second, and deal with new contingencies as they arise at a near-constant rate. Obviously, less structured activities in the daycare classroom may not require as much guidance, and Circle Time is certainly easier on days when the children are being more compliant. However, it is apparent that even when the children are engaged, such as when the group was in the middle of singing "Walkalong Joe," the workers are still actively scanning the group, noticing the potential for disengagement and acting to prevent it. This can be seen in the ways in which Tara acts to move Thomas's body and attract his gaze when he is not participating in the Walkalong Joe routine, even though he is not actively trying to leave. It can also be seen in the way that both caregivers attend to the possibility of disengagement at the end of a song and act to quickly begin a new activity or otherwise maintain the children's attention.

As stated earlier, evident in this segment is the combined use of multiple strategies for guiding children's behavior. Positively phrased directives, along with summons (usually using terms of address) are issued frequently and repeatedly. There is also some reference to rules and standards in the daycare classroom, such as Tara's description of Jonathon's feet as being "too high" (line 11), and Monica's prescription

that Jonathon needed to “calm [his] body” (line 66). Negatively-phrased directives are used only at one point, by the volunteer foster grandmother at the end of Circle Time. There is much use of physical manipulation, ranging from taking children by the hand or blocking their progress with an arm to physically picking them up and carrying their kicking bodies across the room. Interestingly though, the instances of the latter were in both cases accompanied by commentary that seemed to account for the use of force by linking it to a child’s intransigence.

Along with these techniques occurred the frequent use of the strategies I have sought to describe in this chapter. For instance, the use of physical guidance was often re-contextualized as play, and a child’s resistant moves away from a caregiver were framed as being simply another path towards the goal she set for him. The form of “interactional child-proofing” used most frequently (and most successfully) in this exchange, however, involved creating attractive environments for children’s actions in order to lead them towards wanted engagements and away from unwanted ones. Often this is done in a locally sensitive way, as when Monica notices Lena’s interest in the story and invites her to find the boy in the hay, or when Tara notices that Thomas is pushing with his feet at a moment when the main activity has stopped, and asks whether he is able to stomp his feet.

Initiating activities like “Walkalong Joe” and the other songs and chanting routines they do is itself a way to create an engaging context, but this should not be imagined as a simple act of launching an activity that will then engage children in throughout without the need for further intervention. Rather, Monica and the other

caregivers work to initiate and continue these activities in such a way as to capture and keep children's interest—i.e., by beginning the rhythmic thigh-patting or hand movements before the songs actually begin, by attending to the ways in which particular children are becoming disengaged and acting to rectify this, and by moving quickly to begin new activities when an activity ends.

## 7.6. DISCUSSION

### 7.6.1. Situated Planning

As described above, in general, the actions caregivers take to manage children's behavior are responsive to momentary and unpredictable conditions; in other words, they are very much *situated* within the particular interactional milieus in which they occur. But they are not “knee-jerk” responses to environmental stimuli. Rather, they evince careful foresight. Caregivers make creative use of current circumstances for the purpose of carrying out longer-range goals. Their actions are chosen on the basis of how they will affect environments for children's actions, and give rise to future actions and future environments for action.

In Lucy Suchman's (1987) *Plans and Situated Actions*, she argues against the notion—prevalent in the study of human-computer interaction at the time the book was published—that human actions arise out of or are ordered by pre-formulated plans (or scripts). This has often been taken as a denial that planning ever has a prospective effect on human action, and criticized by those who would claim that the actions we undertake are often guided by plans previously made (e.g., Nardi, 1996). Suchman (2003) and

others (e.g., Sharrock & Button, 2003) take issue with this interpretation of Suchman's argument.

Still others point out that planning itself is a situated and improvisational activity. The concept of improvisation has been an important tool for understanding organizations as complex systems (e.g., E. M. Eisenberg, 1990; Weick, 1998). Improvisation would seem to be the antithesis of planning, but Guney, Browning and McDaniel (2002) argue that planning is a form of improvisation, in that it involves working with pre-composed materials in a creative way in order to deal with the unforeseen. Similarly, but in the field of computer supported cooperative work (CSCW), Bardram (1997) suggests that the focus on situated action (following the popularity of Suchman's book) has led to plans being ignored and argues for analytical attention to the function of plans in work practices—not as generators of action, but as forms of situated action.

Both of these authors are referring to planning as an interactional activity that takes place separately from (and usually before) the action it, in some sense, governs. In this paper, I am looking at a somewhat different manifestation of planning—this is planning as it occurs in the midst of action. The planning I discuss usually does not generate 'plans' as discursive or material artifacts. Rather it is a form of prospective cognizing that is manifested in the action itself. Close analysis of caregivers' practices—the moment-to-moment choices they make—demonstrates that they are thinking ahead, remaining attentive to what will happen next, and acting in ways designed to bring about desirable ends. When shifting circumstances move a particular goal out of reach (as when Karim's and Thomas's noncompliant behavior made book-reading too difficult to

continue), caregivers quickly adjust and make new plans. This can be seen as a particularly context-specific form of “anticipatory interaction planning” (Goody, 1995); one that perhaps demands a greater degree of intentional strategizing than the forms found in ordinary interaction between adults.

This characterization of childcare work is supported by comments made by some of the caregivers I interviewed. They told me that to be successful in childcare you need to always have a plan—always be thinking ahead to what’s going to happen next—but also be flexible enough to modify or abandon your plan and create a new one on the spot.

### **7.6.2. Mindfulness**

Such situated planning requires presence of mind or “mindfulness.” This concept suggests itself because of its popular use (adapted from Zen Buddhism) to describe a state of being present, focused, and “in the moment,” as well as being creative and agile in one’s responses to circumstances that arise.

Weick & Sutcliffe (2001) define mindfulness on an organizational level, as a set of propensities promoted by an organization in order to enhance the group’s ability to deal with unexpected problems. Langer (1989), on the other hand, approaches it as an individual’s mode of perception and action. It is the opposite of mindlessness—which involves operating on “automatic pilot,” assigning new experiences to old categories, and being generally indifferent to the details of one’s environment. Mindful individuals, on the other hand, are engaged, flexible and prone to both seeking and producing novelty.

“Engaged” and “flexible” certainly describe the caregivers’ interactional practices in the childcare classroom. However, I do not see their mindfulness as individual

disposition, primarily, or as a property of the organization as a whole. Rather, I see it as arising from the structure of the social interactions in which the caregivers are involved. Mindfulness is made necessary, and rewarded, by the particular character of interactions with young children.

Thus, the skill that professional caregivers display is not just (or primarily) knowledge about children's development and physical needs (as gained through training or formal education), but is rather an embodied ability to adapt to children's ways of moving about in the world—a form of practical knowledge.

The (Buddhist) notion of mindfulness has been applied to parenting in popular literature (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1998), advocated as an everyday spiritual practice of being present for and attentive to the joys of childrearing, as opposed to being preoccupied with its difficulties. In a sense, what I describe in this chapter is the real, moment-to-moment manifestation of being highly attentive to children. However, I do not know that caregivers do this for the purpose of attaining spiritual reward (or that they do attain any). Rather, what is evident is that they are doing hard work called for by the interactional circumstances they are in—work that has high cognitive demands and that requires a substantial level of cognitive skill, albeit of a nontraditional sort.

The childcare workers I interviewed commented on the type of concentration required by the job. They described as one of its benefits the fact that they couldn't mope and stew about things that were going on in the rest of their lives while they were at work, because the job requires one's total attention. But there is obviously a down side to this. One worker told me that she planned to quit All Aboard when she went back to

school full time, because the work left her with little mental energy to devote to her studies. Another caregiver I interviewed—a musician and songwriter—quit her job as a preschool teacher because she found that it sapped her ability to do creative work. She currently accepts only occasional part-time nanny work (never a full day), for this reason.

This has interesting implications for the retention of childcare workers. Although we might assume that the low rate of pay is the main reason for caregivers to move on to other occupations, the toll it takes on their bodies and minds (perhaps in combination with its low pay) seems to be a factor leading these caregivers away from the profession.

## 7.7. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I describe a category of practices for guiding children's actions and attempt to situate it within a broader sense of the interactional demands of this type of work and the many strategies caregivers employ in order to meet those demands in a manner consistent with contemporary beliefs about appropriate ways of interacting with children.

The analogy of “child-proofing” helps to illuminate the subtle means by which caregivers intentionally modify or create environments in order to shape children's actions. This analogy also highlights the extent to which the caregivers in this environment engage in a strategy of “adapt situation to fit child,” versus “adapt child to fit situation,” in terms of the typology of childrearing practices laid out by Ochs and Schieffelin (1984). Ochs and Schieffelin specifically point to Western practices of “baby-proofing” as exemplifying a child-accommodating style. They not only dispute the universality of such practices, but also problematize them for the particular views of

self and other that they may engender (see especially Ochs, 1992). My aim in this paper is not to stake a position on this issue, but rather to examine such practices as they are purposefully employed in the particular context of the daycare classroom. With regard to child-proofing physical spaces to ensure children's safety, it should be noted that this work must be done by someone if it is not done by the environment: either caregivers' burden is increased or the work is offloaded onto the children, who, due to their lack of sophistication, are likely to make mistakes, potentially resulting in injuries. Similarly, while "interactional child-proofing" is certainly an accommodation to children in some sense, this characterization may miss what it achieves for the caregivers. Examining these practices in combination with others over an extended sequence shows them to be effective means of managing children's actions without provoking resistance (in contrast to the more direct methods used). Thus the use of such a strategy should by not be seen as a concession to the demands of children, but rather as a way for a caregiver to achieve her goals in the daycare classroom, given the particular interactional conditions of her work (conditions that include, of course, the norms for interacting with children in the larger culture in which the daycare is situated and the types of children such practices may produce).

This then is an interactional skill displayed by childcare workers, an embodied adaptation to the modes of action of very young children, strategically (sometimes ingeniously) deployed to accomplish workplace goals. To the casual observer, it looks like *patience*, a type of emotional labor often required by traditionally female occupations, including childcare (Colley, 2003; Hochschild, 2003). However, this

analysis shows that such an enactment of patience is not merely a matter of manufacturing caring feelings or suppressing irritation, but rather involves the performance of a particular form of interactional work. The strategies I have described are a manifestation of patience in professional childcare practice, not just because they require patience, but also because they provide a way of managing the interaction so that maintaining patient dealings with children is possible.

## Chapter 8. Conclusion

In this study I have taken the somewhat unusual approach of studying childcare as a form of *work*, rather than in terms of children's socialization, education, or general welfare. This has allowed me to view this mundane and seemingly well-studied site through a new lens. That lens is the accumulated research on micropractices of collaboration in the workplace. My findings contribute to and elaborate on our understanding of communicative action in the workplace, and also challenge existing conceptions about the interactional competencies of childcare workers.

The daycare site—atypical for microanalytical studies of collaboration at work—provides a complex picture of what it can mean to be a participant in a system of coordinated activity. It is the presence of children that generates this complexity. Children are the medium of childcare work and thus they are always intricately involved in its accomplishment. Activities are constructed out of the raw materials of children's actions and utterances. Caregivers work with children's actions as sculptors, both shaping them and incorporating them as “found objects” into the larger interactional events that emerge. This means that children have a decisive effect on what happens in the daycare classroom, if not always in a purposeful manner.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I focused on the ways in which talk addressed to children can be a resource for accomplishing coordination of caregiver action and group-level understandings of children's conduct. Viewing this phenomenon in relation to contemporary thinking about the participation of multiple parties in interaction reveals that overhearers play a (if not *the*) central role in rendering such utterances as

communicative events, and also shows that the ways in which addressed children participate in these episodes can also have an effect on how they occur. As such, these multi-party, multi-focused interactions among participants of varying ages and abilities—while utterly ordinary and commonplace—complicate notions of reciprocity, participation and coordination in communication, thus contributing to the emergence of a richer communication theory.

I have also considered this phenomenon from the perspective of research on distributed cognition and collective mind. While the daycare environment is an unusual site to study as a system of distributed cognition, I show that in fact group-level intelligent acts of *tending* and *understanding* children are accomplished through the heedful interrelations of caregivers' verbal and embodied actions. Again, the unique insights afforded by this study stem from the involvement of children in the activity systems through which cognitive action is accomplished, as very few studies have examined how distributed cognition is achieved when central participants in the interaction are not a part of the goal-oriented team. In the project of ensuring children's welfare, children are the purpose of the work, the conditions under which it is undertaken, and can even be tools for accomplishing it, but they are not co-workers. And yet they are human beings who play an active role in the interactions through which the work is accomplished.

In Chapter 7, I also looked at the ways in which children's unique characteristics as interactants lead to caregivers' use of particular techniques for accomplishing their work. In this case, I investigated a set of strategies for guiding children in the daycare

classroom that involve reshaping the interactional and physical contexts for children's actions, as opposed to using more directly coercive or persuasive means. The analogy of "child-proofing" allows us to see how common practices for interacting with children are in fact quite strategic and thoughtful ways of creating *spaces* for children to act in a situationally appropriate manner. As with any metaphor, the differences between target and source can also be illuminating. The spontaneous, online interactional adaptations that I describe are quite different from the all-at-once (or, at most, occasional) exercise of child-proofing a room, particularly in terms of the creativity, presence of mind and focused attention they require. This means of guiding children—while particularly illustrative of the unique demands of childcare work—is far from being the only one used. As such, in addition to describing individual cases I look at the ways in which such strategies are utilized in combination with others over a strip of activity.

This study has implications for broader discourses around the challenges of childcare work and efforts towards professionalization. While most would acknowledge childcare to be difficult work, it is not usually thought of as intellectually demanding. My analyses suggest that the effective accomplishment of childcare requires a particularly high degree of attention to one's surroundings (Chs. 5 and 6) and a level of focused attention, creativity and responsiveness quite beyond that required by ordinary conversation among adults (Ch. 7). The childcare workers I spoke to were quite aware of these demands of the job and their effect on other parts of their lives, and took these factors into consideration in their decision-making about whether to pursue or continue careers in this field. Policymakers should also be taking these factors into consideration

in their thinking about recruitment, compensation and especially retention of childcare workers.

The cognitive toll taken by childcare work has implications beyond childcare as a profession. The nature of interaction with very young children leaves very little opportunity for sustained reverie or even momentary reflection. Children occupy caregivers' minds as fully as they occupy their arms and laps. If female students, for example, are more likely than men to hold part-time jobs as caregivers, they will have less opportunity to reflect on their scholarly projects while working than would others whose jobs permit a certain amount of "autopilot" operation. If women are disproportionately responsible for the unpaid caregiving work in the domestic sphere (Hochschild & Machung, 1989), they will be less able to ponder workplace dilemmas during their "non-work" hours, potentially resulting in less productivity in their jobs.

Current efforts to establish childcare or early childhood education as a profession are following the well-trodden path of demanding ever-greater levels of higher education for certification. For example, in order for a program to obtain NAEYC accreditation teachers must currently have a CDA (Child Development Associate) credential. By 2010, the requirement will be for all teachers to have an Associates degree in child development or early childhood education; by 2020, 75% of teachers in a facility with four or more teachers will be required to have received a Bachelor's degree in child development or early childhood education ("Timeline for Meeting Teacher Qualifications", 2005).

While it is not clear that requiring such high levels of education will secure higher pay for early childhood educators, it will necessarily have the effect of locking out women and men who do not have the opportunity to pursue such educational paths. This is unfortunate, because while studies have shown a correlation between childcare training and quality of care as conventionally defined (e.g., Burchinal et al., 2002), my research shows that the practical know-how that can only be acquired through experience on the job is also extremely important for accomplishing childcare. This is something that the usual measures of caregiver quality, because of their focus on features of dyadic interaction rather than the management of multi-focused interactions, may be blind to. Furthermore, the proliferation throughout this center as a community of practice of “All Aboard Language” and related practices rooted in a contemporary philosophy of positive guidance suggest that a commitment to such an approach among caregivers may be effectively instilled through a center-based apprenticeship system.

This study contributes to the project of illuminating skills which can easily be taken-for-granted or rendered “invisible” (Muller, 1999; Suchman, 1995). Caregivers’ practical knowledge of the ways in which children move about in the daycare classroom, as well as the possibilities that the environment affords for diverse forms of communication with multiple parties are relatively context-dependent and do not lend themselves to abstraction and certification as do the facts about child development conveyed through schooling in early childhood education. Furthermore, the association of this kind of work with the unpaid domestic labor many women and men perform in

their homes makes it easy to miss the special skills required to simultaneously provide care to multiple children of the same age.

The interpersonal competencies necessary to effect smooth collaborations between caregivers and to maintain patient interactions with children tend to be seen as personality characteristics commonly held by women (patience, friendliness, supportiveness, etc.) rather than skills developed through years of practice. The fine-grained attention in this study to the ways in which childcare is accomplished shows that it demands more than having loving or generous feelings towards children. In this sense, this project contributes to making “invisible” gendered skills visible. However, while this study may uncover unrecognized skills, it does not uncover the processes that render such skills invisible in the first place. Understanding the ways in which caregivers are empowered and disempowered by their work demands taking into account factors that go beyond the discourse of the workplace (Cloud, 2005).

Notwithstanding its implications for childcare professionalization and the recognition of gendered skills, the greater value of this study is its contribution to our understanding of the nature of and possibilities for collaboration at work. The two foci of this project—a practice for facilitating coordination between caregivers and a practice for guiding children’s actions—are united in that both represent ways of achieving a certain seamlessness in the operations of the daycare center. In other words, when these phenomena are occurring, things are being made to happen in such a way that they appear to *just happen*. As a result of talk addressed to children, overhearing caregivers know what is needed and jump in to help without missing a beat. As a result of “interactional

child-proofing,” an action that a child is taking anyway becomes just the right thing to do at that moment. These may only be brief moments of smoothness in a turbulent day. It is, however, through practices like these that “flow” as an interactional experience becomes possible (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; see also Petroski, 2005). This is a state in which “action follows action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention on our part.” (Hadley, 2002, p. 16, citing Csikszentmihalyi and MacAloon). In these moments, by no means restricted to childcare but found in any workplace on a good day, routine instrumental tasks are transformed into aesthetically satisfying experiences in their own right. While they may appear to observers and even feel to participants as though they happen effortlessly, the analysis in this paper shows that they are interactionally orchestrated—the result of micro-actions precisely designed and timed to interrelate with one another.

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## **Vita**

Siri Elizabeth Mehus was born in Seattle, Washington on October 30, 1967, the daughter of Joanne Melson Mehus and David Earl Mehus. She attended Franklin High School and graduated from The Northwest School in Seattle, Washington in 1985, at which time she entered The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. She received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from The Evergreen State College in 1989. In August 1992, she entered the Graduate School of the University of Texas at Austin and in 1995 she earned the Master of Arts degree. In August 2000, she re-entered the Graduate School of the University of Texas. She is married to Steven Joseph Helbert and is the mother of Mina Ellen Mehus Helbert.

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