Qualitative Studies
Vol. 11, No. 3, 2026, pp. 148-167
ISSN 1903-7031

Approaching the Not-Yet-Known with Children: Emphasising Ethical Attentiveness and Methodological Manoeuvres

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Within childhood research, children's perspectives are conceptualised in fundamentally different ways. Drawing on agential realism, this article understands knowledge as relationally and materially constituted through the entanglements of children, researchers, discourses, materials and ethics, rather than as a representation of a pre-existing reality. From this perspective, children's world is approached as not-yet-known, open to that which cannot be fully anticipated or determined in advance, enabling the co-production of knowledge with children. Engaging with empirical material from my PhD research, I foreground how this stance can be enacted methodologically. In doing so, the article unfolds how research encounters are not merely sites for generating data but also spaces of becoming in which children, researchers and possibilities emerge together. The article contributes to qualitative studies by showing how an agential realist sensitivity to the relational and material constitution of research encounters can support more responsive, participatory, and ethically attentive research practices with children.

Keywords: early childhood education and care (ECEC), emergent methodology, ethical attentiveness, response-ability, the not-yet-known

Introduction

Within childhood research, the concept of children's perspectives has received extensive scholarly attention (e.g. Alminde, 2021; Clark, 2005; Harcourt & Einarsdottir, 2011; Hedegaard et al., 2018; Kampmann et al., 2017; Munck, 2020; Stanek et al., 2018). Researchers approach children's perspectives in diverse ways: as involving "both capturing children's voices and interpreting them as expressions of a discursive context"

(Halldén, 2003, p. 12, my translation); as "an attempted insider perspective" (Warming, 2019, p. 68, my translation); as 'the production of children's voices' (Spyrou et al., 2018, p. 85); or as a process of "attuning to and making sense of the world as seen through a child's eye" (Sommer, 2020, p. 13, my translation). Other approaches involve asking children what they think (Koch, 2020) or using children's subjective orientations as a means of accessing their perspectives (Juhl, 2026). While these approaches share an interest in children's perspectives, they differ in how they conceptualise children, agency and knowledge. They range from viewing perspectives as expressions of children's experiences and viewpoints to understanding them as produced through relational, discursive and material processes. These conceptualisations have important methodological implications, as they co-produce what the researcher looks for, how data are generated and what counts as knowledge. In my own fieldwork on children's perspectives and early detection and intervention in early childhood education and care (ECEC), I have given these issues considerable thought. How might I enter the ECEC setting? Where should I position myself? How should I take notes? Although seemingly practical, these questions are deeply interwoven with ontological and epistemological considerations. As such, researchers' conceptualisations of children's perspectives play a key role in shaping how children become visible in research. This has led to my growing interest in the emergence of knowledge through relations between researchers, children and materials.

This article draws on empirical material from fieldwork[1] I conducted with children aged 0-5 as part of my PhD project. The PhD project is embedded in the ongoing research project "Children's Life in the Welfare State",[2] which examines how early detection and intervention practices operate in and around children's lives. My contribution is to study how the prevailing political and professional emphasis on early detection and intervention (Petersen, 2022) comes to matter within ECEC, with particular attention to children's perspectives.

[1] All empirical examples have been anonymised, and the research was conducted in accordance with the Danish Code of Conduct and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
[2] The research project is funded by "The Partnership for Childhood Research", an initiative established by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science to advance Danish research on early childhood, with a particular emphasis on the youngest children.

I will begin with an encounter from my fieldwork in an ECEC setting. One day, Anton, aged 3, invited me into the cushion playroom, one of the few rooms where the children were allowed to play alone with the door closed:

> When we arrive, the door is blocked by cushions. Maren (an adult) helps to move them and closes the door from the outside. Anton pulls me in and Frida joins us. She sits down at the back of the room. I ask the other children, Lina, Conrad and Hans, whether it's okay for me to be there. They nod. They continue a gorilla-themed game in which they beat their chests, 'are strong' and throw large pillows. They scream. I feel the discomfort in my body. It feels awkward to be so much taller than the children, so I sit down on the floor. A large cushion is thrown at my head. It's unpleasant. Anton gives me a big round cushion with a hole in the middle and puts it around my head. He says it can protect me. "I'll protect you," he says, turning so he's standing in front of me. He stands with his arms at his sides and his legs wide apart. Conrad and Hans attack Anton. They throw cushions at him and shout. He sits down on the floor and raises his arms in front of his head. He starts to cry. I put my arm around him. Maren hears the commotion and comes to take him out of the cushion playroom (fieldnotes, 24/09/2025).

Taking this moment as its point of departure, the article argues that questions of ontology, epistemology and ethics are central to the production of knowledge with children. Here, Anton's invitation reconfigures the research relationship: he becomes an active co-producer of the encounter and enables me to take part in his world. Anton's invitation not only reshapes the research encounter but also raises questions about how we conceptualise children's perspectives in research.

Access to children's perspectives?

A systematic review of international research focused on eliciting the perspectives of young children (Urbina-Garcia et al., 2022) highlights the predominance of adult-directed methodologies, such as structured interviews and focus group discussions. These methodologies draw on verbal approaches in which adults ask questions and children answer, reflecting an assumption that researchers can access children's perspectives simply through direct (adult-oriented) enquiry (Rasmussen & Schmidt, 2024). As several scholars have argued, the problem of representation draws attention to the impossibility

of gaining direct access to children's perspectives (Warming, 2019; Sommer, 2020; Spyrou, 2018). Yet, children's perspectives are often conceptualised as an inner realm of experience that adult researchers may seek to approximate (Koch, 2020; Warming, 2019; Sommer, 2020) implicitly locating children's perspectives within the child. Moving beyond this understanding, the present article conceptualises children's perspectives as emergent, relational and contextually situated phenomena. In this respect, it aligns with current debates within childhood studies that challenge the notion of children's agency as an inherent individual attribute, independent of the social and institutional contexts in which children are situated (Alminde, 2021; Esser et al., 2016; Hedegaard et al., 2018; Spyrou et al., 2018).

Researchers have identified the persistent marginalisation of children's voices as a democratic concern, noting that children often occupy non-privileged positions in which their perspectives are overlooked or dismissed (Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Warming, 2018). Warming (2020) highlights how conventional conceptualisations of the child-adult dichotomy may inadvertently suppress children's voices rather than fostering their expression. Tisdall (2015) further argues that this silencing is embedded in adult-centric institutional structures that frame children's participation. Moreover, Davies' (2014, 2016) notion of 'listening as usual' draws attention to the difficulty of approaching children's perspectives beyond adult interpretive framework. It refers to the process of interpreting children's expressions through pre-existing understandings, thereby creating a risk that adults attend primarily to that which confirms their assumptions while overlooking perspectives that might challenge, enrich or extend them. Davies presents the concept of 'emergent listening' (Davies, 2016, p. 73) as a counterpoint to 'listening as usual'. It requires adults to reconsider how they understand themselves as listeners and to question their habitual perceptions. She unfolds how 'emergent listening' is about listening for what we cannot immediately understand or recognise as relevant in the context, as well as to what has *not yet* been articulated or thought through in a form that can be communicated clearly and coherently. Davies theorises this openness as the *not-yet-known*, emphasising the emergence of possibilities beyond established knowledge (Davies, 2016, p. 73). Along similar lines Bergstedt (2024) unfolds the importance of being open to "the events and moments in life that can reveal new insights by engaging

with the world that the child knows better than adults do" (Bergstedt, 2024, p. 30, my translation).

Not a fixed researcher position

Within childhood studies, the position of adult researchers participating in children's lives has long been debated, notably through the concept of 'the least adult role' (Corsaro, 1985; Mandell, 1991). This position entails that the adult observer participates on the children's terms. Related formulations include "the least possible adult" (Nielsen, 2001, p. 47, my translation), "an unconventional adult" (Kousholt, 2006, p. 52, my translation), "a different kind of adult" (Sørensen, 2021, p. 33, my translation) and an "atypical adult" (Paludan, 2005, p. 196, my translation). While I have been inspired by these different ways of participating, I recognise that calls to become 'a different kind of adult' still presuppose an established distinction between adults and children, one that is itself constructed from an adult standpoint. As Warming (2020) argues, such distinctions can contribute to the othering of children, for instance by positioning them as care receivers and adults as caregivers. This frames relationships in terms of a dependence-independence divide rather than interdependency. Consequently, children risk being positioned as a separate category rather than as participants in a shared and relational world. In response, rather than positioning myself as another kind of adult, I adopt an open and attentive stance, following how children and adults engage with, negotiate and potentially disrupt child-adult discourses in their everyday lives. I cannot begin from a fixed researcher position that differentiates me in advance from the children. Rather, this means entering into children's world and slowly becoming attentive to what matters within it. This requires staying with the not-yet-known: suspending expectations about where to be and what to look for while allowing moments and events to emerge and open new possibilities for insight.

By moving beyond the assumption that researchers can access children's perspectives, the article attends instead to what emerges in children's world, particular their everyday lives in ECEC settings, while acknowledging the fluidity of the researcher's position. It asks: What comes to matter when approaching children's world as not-yet-known?

To answer this quistion, I begin by presenting an emergent methodology (Gunnarsson & Bodén, 2021) building on agential realism (Barad, 2007). I then consider the implications of this perspective for the researcher's position and ethical attentiveness. Finally, I put this apparatus to work by returning to the introductory encounter in the cushion playroom and engaging with two materialities within which approaching children's world as not-yet-known is foregrounded.

An emergent methodology

I seek a framework that enables me both to understand children's perspectives as continuously emerging and to move beyond child-adult dichotomies and fixed researcher positions. Agential realism (Barad, 2007; Juelskjær, 2019) can provide such a framework. Being part of a posthumanist and new materialist agenda (Juelskjær, 2019, p. 13) agential realism (Barad, 2007, 2014) belongs to the broader material turn. This turn does not shift research interest away from human agents, such as children, but rather expands this interest to encompass non-human agents, including spatial configurations and materialities. Within this framework, agency is not an inherent property of discrete entities but emerges through entangled material-discursive practices (Barad, 2007; Juelskjær, 2019). The focus shifts from interaction between pre-existing subjects and objects to intra-action, in which entities materialise through the activity itself. Intra-action means that there are no entities prior to relation: they become through the very movements that enact them. Agency, therefore, is emergent within the ongoing re-configuring of the world within specific intra-actions.

Subsequent elaborations of this tradition by scholars such as Davies (2014, 2016), Gunnarsson & Bodén (2021), Juelskjær (2019) and Søndergaard (2018) have made the conceptual apparatus applicable to empirical study and to analyses of social and subjective processes of becoming. This perspective draws attention to the contexts in which children participate and to how these contexts co-constitute possibilities for children's becoming in everyday life. It thereby challenges conventional understandings of children's perspectives as bounded entities or as possessions of individual subjects. Instead, children's perspectives are reconceptualised as dynamic, emergent phenomena that are entangled and produced within intra-actions (Rasmussen & Schmidt, 2024). Accordingly, engaging with children's perspectives means becoming with children, not

to represent or explain their perspectives, but to attend to what might come to matter in their world. This calls for engaged participation *with* children.

Participatory engagement

An agential realist approach treats entanglement not merely as an analytical perspective that can be applied to empirical material retrospectively, but as a research approach in which the researcher and the employed methods cannot be separated from knowledge (Barad, 2007; Schmidt & Kortbek, 2024). This is supported by a postqualitative methodology, which similarly rejects predetermining what will end up as empirical material, as this is created in the intra-action between theories, methodologies, research questions, human and non-human agents, discourses, etc. (Gunnarsson & Bodén, 2021, p. 47).

Agential realism positions the researcher not as an observer from the outside but as a participant and co-producer of both the empirical material and its analysis (Schmidt & Rasmussen, 2022). Thus, the empirical material is produced through "participatory engagement" (Gunnarsson, 2018, p. 82, my translation) in the children's everyday life at the ECEC setting. Participatory engagement develops participant observation by emphasising that the goal is precisely to engage in the practice being studied – and not to distance the researcher from it. This means that research cannot be conducted at a safe distance from what is being studied but requires an embodied and materially situated proximity (Gunnarsson & Bodén, 2021). Engaging in children's everyday institutional lives involves engaging in what they do. This should not be understood as an attempt to become a child. Rather, it is an engagement that recognises agency as emerging through the entanglement of children, researchers, bodies, things, spaces and routines. Practically, this means saying yes to invitations, whether to enter the cushion playroom, go to the playground, play, draw, dance, run, jump, build, eat together, wait or help with a zip. These are not merely activities but material-discursive events in which the researcher and children become with the world. This also means waiting for invitations and for events and moments to occur, while making room for what is not immediately understandable. Drawing on Davies' idea of 'emergent listening', this calls for a 'slow listener': "…slow, ethical listening; it requires us to dwell in the moment of the pause before difference

emerges" (Davies, 2016, p. 74). Such an approach rejects a fixed research position in favour of responsiveness and ethical attentiveness.

Ethical attentiveness

Barad's concept of 'ethico-onto-epistem-ology' (Barad, 2007, p. 185) highlights that ethics is always entangled with ontology and epistemology. Thus, ethics is embedded in knowledge production rather than added as an additional layer (Gunnarsson & Bodén, 2021) and must play a central and ever-present role in all facets of the research process. Research knowledge does not merely represent the world; it also makes the world accessible in specific ways and, in doing so, becomes entangled with the very phenomena it studies (Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012). Ethics thus concerns both responsibility and the ability to respond. Barad's concept of 'response-ability' (2014, p. 183) does not simply mean 'responsibility' in the conventional sense; it points to an ethical and relational obligation that emerges from our entanglement with the world. It means being open and accountable to the relationships and effects that emerge through our participation in the world (Juelskjær, 2019).

Barad further presents ethics as a matter of justice, which entails openness and attentiveness in every encounter: "…the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly" (Barad, 2007, p. x). This suggests that allowing oneself to be affected by others and to affect them can be seen as an ethical responsibility in research (Gunnarsson, 2018). In turn, this calls for attention to 'agential cuts' (Barad, 2007, p. 140), which are the material-discursive practices that bring phenomena into existence and shape how matter and meaning emerge together. An agential cut does not merely represent a boundary; it actively constitutes what becomes visible, meaningful and possible to know, while rendering other relations and experiences invisible. A cut involves an ethical attentiveness to the worlds and relations enacted through research practices. In this sense, agential cuts and response-ability are co-constitutive: drawing boundaries is always already an ethical matter.

With these concepts of response-ability, agential cuts and approaching the not-yet-known, I now re-turn (to) the cushion playroom.

Re-turning the cushion playroom

Barad deliberately hyphenates the concept of 're-turning' to signal that it is not simply about going back, but "turning it over and over again – iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew" (Barad, 2014, p. 168). In the following section, I re-turn the cushion playroom to engage with it anew, attending to the discomfort that emerges when I restrain myself from interfering and letting something new arise. By staying with this discomfort, I attend to its potential to disrupt habitual ways of knowing and to make room for relations and possibilities that might otherwise remain unnoticed. When knowledge is understood as emerging from entanglements among researchers, children, bodies, materiality, time and space, knowing and being become inseparable: "we know because we are *of* the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 185). Thus affective and bodily responses such as discomfort may allow new knowledge to emerge (Ramirez & Ursin, 2025).

In the cushion playroom, my hesitation allows difference to emerge as Anton comes alive as protecting me, but also as needing protection. The encounter shows children as both strong and vulnerable – not one or the other. Instead of seeking to observe and represent things as they are (St. Pierre, 2021), becoming-with may then enable something new to emerge. Anton is included not as an object of observation – as he might be if I had entered the playroom as an observer without an invitation – but as a co-producer of knowledge who invites the researcher into his world. This invitation challenges the observer-observed divide, constituting the relationship instead as one of mutual dependence. The moment in which Anton protects me makes visible the interrelatedness through which knowledge and response-ability emerge. Read through this lens, the example foregrounds that researchers are ethically accountable for the agential cuts through which some relations are enabled and others excluded, and for how these cuts shape who can act, speak and matter within the research encounter.

In striving to remain both open and accountable to the relations that emerge through the research process, I am aware of my adult responsibility to take care of the children, while also seeking to listen slowly and allow the children to show how they engage in becoming-with a world that is continuously iterated (Bergstedt, 2024). Rather than constituting a problem to be solved, this requires an ongoing ethical attentiveness in the research process.

Methodological manoeuvres

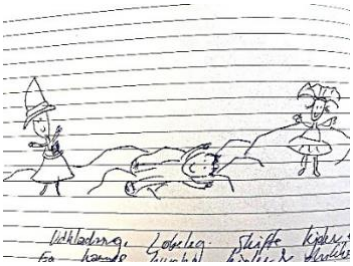
Within an emergent methodology, methods arise contextually as what I refer to as *methodological manoeuvres*. I use this term to emphasise the dynamic, ongoing and situated character of methodological practice. These manoeuvres are not fixed in advance but emerge through continuous engagement with the research process and are inseparably entangled with ontological and epistemological commitments. In this section, two methodological manoeuvres are presented involving a field book and a handmade bag. In different ways, both help the researcher and children to co-produce knowledge and become response-able, while the field book and bag co-produce agency in the entanglements of human and non-human agents (Barad, 2007). These manoeuvres emerge in intra-actions within the child's world and therefore cannot be planned; they would take other forms in different settings. The examples also show how a field book can be understood as a material-discursive agent that comes to matter in different ways depending on the intra-actions in which it enacts.

The book

During fieldwork, my field book functions as a central site of knowledge production. It is where I write what I notice while participating with the children. Yet the field book is not simply a repository of documentation; it also actively shapes the forms of knowledge that become possible. Because I write using characters, symbols and punctuation marks that are inaccessible to children aged 0-5, the field book enacts an agential cut that limits their ability to affect the written accounts through which our co-produced knowledge emerges. Østern et al. (2023) argue for a performative understanding of 'languaging', according to which language does not simply describe reality but actively shapes and enacts it. This perspective encourages researchers to engage with research phenomena through new forms of expression.

I therefore started sketching alongside my field notes. Using simple lines and drawings, I can approach children's world in other ways than through words (Keller, 2011). The purpose of sketching is not to document moments or represent reality (Waterhouse, 2023). With an agential realist approach, it offers another way of intra-acting with children's world. The drawings allow children to 'read' what I put in my

book. They also allow events from children's everyday life to intra-act with the children, as the following encounter with Ella, aged 2, shows:



We're eating lunch. I'm sitting next to Ella. She looks up at me and says, "Book. Dress, Ella, look." I ask her, "Do you mean that you want to look in my book and see that you wore the dress last time I was here?" "Yes." "You can do that after we've eaten, Ella. I'd really like to show you." When Ella has finished eating, Jenny (an adult) comes to collect her, bringing her sleeping bunny, Lina, and says that she's going to take a nap.



(…) Later, when Ella wakes up, she's ready to dress up. She immediately wants to put on the green dress with the flowers and then brings over various other dresses. I ask her if she'd like to look at the drawing of her in the book. "Yes." We find the page showing her dancing in the green dress with a doll in her hand and wearing high-heeled shoes. "Doll," she says. She fetches a doll and comes back happily (fieldnotes, 04/09/2025).

The drawings thus give Ella an opportunity to intra-act with the knowledge being produced. Here, the field book redistributes who and what can participate in the research process. Rather than requiring Ella to engage in knowledge production on the researcher's terms, the drawing enables a different form of response-ability. Through her intra-actions with the field book, what becomes important for Ella can affect the knowledge produced. In this way, the research process becomes responsive to concerns that emerge within Ella's engagements, opening possibilities for knowing otherwise.

The sketching idea partly emerged one day when Ella started to draw in my field book. She drew across the lines, disrupting the structure and system that ordinarily organise a field book. In doing so, she helped me set my adult logic aside and see the field book differently.



Ella, who's been busy preparing food in the kitchen, now approaches me and says, "Hi." She sits down and says, "Book." She opens the book, takes my pen, and clicks it open. She then begins drawing across the pages while repeatedly saying, "Ola, Ola." She points at me, prompting a response, and I say, "Anna." She repeats, "Anna," smiles, and points at me again (fieldnotes, 06/01/2025).

The field book, as a material-discursive agent, enacts a moment of emergent listening, allowing Ella to come alive not as an 'observed child' but as one who invites me into her world. The drawings did not grant me 'access to her perspective', nor did they 'represent a perspective within her'. Instead, the entanglement with the book generated a moment of surprise through which something different could emerge, enabling Ella to become the one 'taking notes'.

Children can also take an interest in the field book. During my fieldwork with a group of children aged 3–5, they often asked if they could write in my book. On one occasion, "Alina joins Ellie and starts digging with her. Suddenly, she comes over to show me that she's found gold and asks whether I can write it in my book" (fieldnote, 15/01/2025). It also occurred on my first day of fieldwork with the youngest children, aged 0-3, while I was eating with Ella:

> I ask a couple of children if I can sit next to them. Ayse shakes her head. Anders also refuses. Ella nods, so I sit down next to her (...) Ella shows me her fork, her pasta and her meat (which she chews and spits out). She shows me how she dips the pasta in the sauce. When we've eaten for a while, she wants to get down. Jenny (an adult) asks if she's lost something. But she walks purposefully to the highchair behind us, where I've placed my book and pen. She says, "Book", then picks up the book and pen and hands them to me. She looks at me and says: "Gasses". I answer, "Yes, that's right, I had my glasses with me before". She repeats insistently, "Gasses". So, I fetch my glasses. She then takes the book, flips through it and points. "Do you want me to write?" I ask, moving the pen in the book as if I were writing. She nods (fieldnotes, 10/12/2024).

By asking permission to sit with the children, I increase the possibility of both participation and refusal. However, this request also becomes part of an ongoing intra-action in which Ella and I share a meal. When Ella climbs down to retrieve my field book so I can document the episode, agency emerges through the entanglement of bodies and material-discursive agents. It allows Ella to reshape the research process by inviting me to engage in a particular way with my book and my glasses. In doing so, she participates in re-configuring how knowledge is produced and documented within the research encounter. Although the field book opened possibilities for new insights, I gradually came to recognise that it also intra-acted in less enabling ways.

The bag

During my fieldwork, I always carry my field book with me. In the beginning I kept it on my lap and noted what the children were doing and saying, as well as my own experiences and perceptions. This locked me in a position of looking at the children rather than becoming with them. The continuous practice of documentation positioned me as an observer of the unfolding intra-actions, rather than a participant within them. As Gunnarsson and Bodén (2021) argue, research calls for engaged participation rather than distant observation. The field book, however, helped enact a researcher-child relation in which I became primarily accountable for documenting events rather than responding within them, thereby limiting my possibilities for becoming response-able to the children's ongoing engagements. This became particularly clear on one occasion:



Conrad and Anton are constructing a kind of waterway on a hill. "Do you want to work with us?" Anton asks as I approach. "I'd love to," I reply. The boys fetch pipes and dig the soil with shovels. I can get a shovel, but I realise that I can't dig and hold my field book at the same time (fieldnotes, 28/04/2025).

In the intra-action of the children, the soil, the shovel and my field book, it became clear that I needed to free my hands to participate in an engaged way with my whole body. So, I went home and sewed a shoulder bag, with just enough space for a book and a pen. The bag allowed me to switch between documenting and participating as each situation required. When an invitation came up, I was ready to engage in the moment, not forced to look for places to put my book and potentially missing the moment. This may sound banal, but being response-able means making oneself available to the diverse forms of response that may arise in the fieldwork as intra-actions unfold (Juelskjær, 2019). The bag also expanded the children's opportunities to intra-act with the knowledge being produced:





Ella starts moving all the pieces of chalk from the bucket into my bag. Eventually, she picks up the book to make more space for the chalk. "What are the chalks for?" I ask. She smiles at me and continues her work. Once all the chalk is in the bag, she smiles (satisfied?) and starts putting them back in the bucket. She looks very happy and moves on (fieldnotes, 22/09/2025).

Ella's moving chalk from the bucket to my bag and back again can be understood not as an action to be interpreted, but as an intra-active event through which meaning materialises. Rather than awaiting explanation, meaning emerges through the entanglement of the bag, Ella, the chalk, the playground and me. My first impulse to ask why showed a desire to stabilise meaning. But Ella's smile resisting such closure and invited an openness to the not-yet-known. This moment calls for emergent listening that attunes not to extracting meaning, but to following how matter and meaning come to matter through material-discursive events. In this sense, knowledge is not produced about the child, but within intra-actions of human and non-human forces. The encounter thus becomes a moment where children's creative engagements take shape beyond pre-existing assumptions, e.g. how a bag should be used. It becomes a space where the

materialities participate in configuring possibilities for playing and becoming, enabling children to be co-constitutive participants in the ongoing production of the(ir) world.

Staying with the not-yet-known

The preceding empirical examples are connected by the ways in which they emerged through children's invitations, drawing the research encounter into unanticipated relations and possibilities: invitations to enter a cushion playroom, retrieve my book and glasses, dig with a shovel, or engage with a researcher's bag in unexpected ways. These invitations did not provide access to children's perspectives. Instead, they invited participation in children's world. Responding to such invitations enables researchers to become-with children, opening up spaces for forms of knowing, sensing and relating including those that exceed established adult logics of recognition and interpretation.

Building on these considerations, my PhD research engages with the prevailing emphasis on early detection and intervention in ECEC settings and with how children's perspectives emerge within the entanglement of children, pedagogues, materials, spaces and discourses. With an agential realist stance, it does not provide a children's perspective on early intervention practices. Instead, it approaches children's perspectives as emerging phenomena, through which we can attend to children's ongoing becoming with a world that changes iteratively. These processes entangle with the prevailing emphasis on early detection and intervention, for instance when intervention approaches, such as concepts and methods, enact agential cuts (un)enabling certain ways of knowing, being and acting.

In this article I have engaged methodologically with enactments of producing knowledge with children. This requires response-ability rather than adherence to pre-given methods or expectations. The methodological manoeuvres that arose during this study, sewing a bag and sketching in my field book, were context-specific responses to the particular relations and possibilities that emerged. In a different setting, involving different children, pedagogues, materials and spaces, other responses would emerge. Accordingly, following children is understood not as a methodological technique for accessing or representing their perspectives, but as an ethical commitment to engaging with what unfolds through processes of becoming-with children's world. Within this framing, the 'with' is understood as an ethical response-ability to stay with moments of not-knowing while remaining open to children's co-production of knowledge.

I hope this article contributes to ethical, methodological and epistemological discussions about how we can work with children in research - and not on them.

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