

Book Review

Christopher Schulte (ed.), *Ethics and Research With Young Children: New Perspectives*. Bloomsbury Academic: London & New York, 2020; 233 pp.: ISBN 978-1-3500-7643-3, £63 (hbk)

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This edited volume brings together much needed, interdisciplinary and international work grounded in a conceptualisation of ethics with young children as situated, relational, contingent and more-than-human. The sixteen chapters report on research that builds on the tradition of childhood studies (James and James, 2012; James et al., 1998) and are unified by an ethical commitment to question ‘whose knowledge, experience, values, and context get to matter’ (p.2). Turning away from traditional humanist frameworks, the focus here is on noticing things that have long been missing from research, becoming attuned to the many ways that children express their understanding, and recognising the ‘difficult differences’ (Osgood and Robinson, 2019: 29) that come to light when researching young lives that do not conform to universalist and heteronormative models of childhood.

Rather than being organized in discrete sections, the chapters are ordered to introduce the reader ‘slowly and strategically’ (p.3) to the complexities of what a more-than-human approach might mean for ethics in research with young children. This includes noticing and valuing the remarkable in the unremarkable, challenging and extending traditional research boundaries, acknowledging the researcher’s role and subjectivity in the production of knowledge, and embracing a situated, intersectional and relational approach to ethics. Schulte invites the reader to engage creatively with the ethical worlds presented, to connect the ideas with their own thinking and to view the chapters as provocations that generate new possibilities for ethical research practice. Here, I draw out some of the key themes that cut across the diverse perspectives taken.

Many creative approaches are offered to the complexities of negotiating informed consent in research with children, and the paradoxical asymmetry

of working in a field where research ethics are founded on a humanist subject position, whilst new materialism ‘dislodges the researcher’s assumed sole responsibility for ethical action’ (Heather Kaplan, Chapter 12: 168). Kaplan reflects on ‘the sting of failure’ (p.169) when her sense of ethical responsibility led her to abandon plans for fieldwork due to low rates of informed consent, while Kylie Smith and Margaret Coady recognise the capacity of children under the age of three to participate meaningfully in consent processes (Chapter 1), and Shana Cinquemani reflects on informed consent as a process rather than a ‘single gesture’ (Zeni, 2001: 161) (Chapter 6).

Several chapters report on arts-based research with young children, including Melissa Freeman’s re-examination of 3-4-year-olds’ drawings left behind from a ‘squiggle game’ in 1980s research (Chapter 2). Revisiting these time-yellowed drawings, Freeman reflects on how meaning is the material manifestation of specific ontological entanglements (Barad, 2007) and our responses – our ‘response-ability’ – shape the particular truths we attribute to data as we play and ‘become-with’ participants as partners in research. Relational ethics are further explored by Hayon Park, in Chapter 3, who reports on her research as an artist-in-residence in a US kindergarten, where her ‘ignorance’ of popular culture regularly stunned the young children, ‘What? You don’t know *anything* about Star Wars!’ (p.37). Park adopts Jacques Rancière’s (2004) relational ethics of ignorance to discuss how pre-suppositions of asymmetry and equality are produced between adults and children in research. Candace Kuby and Tara Gutshall Rucker present their own conceptualization of sustaining relational ethics in an engaging account of their long-standing teacher–researcher partnership, expressed through poetry and by posing questions ‘that seem small’ but ‘are monumental’ (p.217, Chapter 16). Marissa McClure shares narratives from a decade of arts-based participatory research projects with young children from vulnerable and/or historically excluded populations in Reggio-inspired art studio spaces in state schools (Chapter 8). McClure grounds the ethics of doing post-qualitative, collaborative research in new materialist theory and decolonizing methodologies in her community-defined, collaborative research. She offers thought-provoking reflection on how these principles are held in tension with traditional conceptions of ethics in research with young children. Jayne Osgood also draws on feminist new materialist philosophy to problematise her entanglements as a researcher and ‘mutated modest witness’ (p.113), which heightens her sense of ethical responsibility (Chapter 9).

Throughout all the chapters, there is an emphasis on noticing and attending to children's multiple ways of knowing and being. In Chapter 4, Sylvia Kind discusses an ethics of attention in her studio-based collective enquiry with children and educators as they create, construct and compose understandings together, in and through their material encounters with translucent fabrics – communicating their knowledge and understanding in ways that are all too often overlooked:

Not being able to speak is not the same as having nothing to say, and not being able to show one's knowing in conventional ways is not an inability to communicate or an absence of knowing. (p.55)

Jaye Johnson Thiel picks up this theme in Chapter 15, foregrounding the importance of attending to the unremarkable and noticing 'the murmurings of deep and simple' moments of children's resistance to the neoliberal creed which 'usurps concepts and emotions' (p.202). Discussing how researching with young children always involves managing uncertainty, Thiel suggests it is time to attend to the small acts of young people and to notice the seemingly small moments in their lives through reciprocity and a sense of connectedness and belonging. In Chapter 13, Leslie Rech Penn reminds us that researchers must also attend closely to their own conduct and research practice. Referring to 'the detail that pricks' (p.173), the author recounts the ethical tensions of noticing how her presence as a researcher might be causing a child discomfort. In a deeply reflective account, the author queries the extent to which it is possible to foreground children's agency as researchers conjure up or leave out meanings when writing up research. Adopting Barad's (2007) diffractive method of analysis, Rech Penn revisits previous analyses to address 'the discursive apparatuses of observation, interpretation, and representation' in her own research write-ups.

Attending to detail in this way requires researchers to be humble – a theme picked up by Christine Marmé Thompson in her chapter on epistemic modesty and the importance of allowing ourselves to be surprised by children (Chapter 7), which requires early childhood researchers to work against the assumptions that are always present in our encounters with children. The need for researchers to be deeply reflective is emphasised by Sonja Arndt and Marek Tesar, who re-think the concept of 'otherness' in relation to their pedagogies of researching with young children (Chapter 14). Echoing Barad (2003), they ask how language came to be considered more trustworthy than matter in

research and point to the need to be constantly vigilant in how traditional research imperatives frame our work.

Parents feature prominently in this book. Chris Schulte presents a dialogic account of his experience of researching at home with his four-year-old daughter, drawing on concepts of remembrance and interruption to think with and about the relationships between ethics, research and play at home, where 'doing the right thing isn't always as clear-cut a matter as I might like it to be' (p.67). Laura Trafi-Prats picks up the theme of a posthumanist ethics of care in the everyday (Chapter 10), drawing on personal anecdotes from her own parenting experiences to argue that parenting studies lack a theorization of parenting as an experiment in living. Trafi-Prats reflects on how visual technologies used in research denaturalize the gaze and produce different perspectives from embodied experiences, forcing us to think differently. Bronwyn Davies ponders how a different kind of ethics – a new materialist ethics focused on intra-active encounters between and among people and things – can be 'open and alive to both human and more-than-human others, which affect and are affected by each other (p.149, Chapter 11).

Unsurprisingly, many of the contributions in this book draw on feminist theory and agential realism, particularly the works of Karen Barad, whilst recognizing the enduring influence of childhood studies. Yet, there is further work that has contributed incrementally to gradual shifts over time in how ethics are conceptualized in research with young children. This book echoes Joe Tobin's (1997) call for researchers to notice important moments that 'are too quiet for us to hear, too small for us to see [and] so apparently uneventful that they fall beneath the threshold of our attention' (p.13). It is also reminiscent of Helen Simons and Robin Usher's (2000) foundational promotion of situated ethics and the need to foster a culture of responsiveness to ethical issues in the field. These works along with many others have brought about profound shifts in how research ethics are conceptualized, and situate the unquestionably novel contribution of Schulte's important volume in a longer flow of resistance and change that is building irresistible momentum in contemporary research with young children.

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