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Micro-ethical Moments as a Part of Involving Children in Research

COLLECTION:
DESIGN, LEARNING,
AND INNOVATION

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Involving children in a participatory research design entails certain ethical challenges that require the researcher to consider how to respond and act ‘right here and right now’. All child and childhood researchers are familiar with their obligation to inform and obtain consent from parents and teachers, before involving children in research. However, even with the signed consent, the research can easily take another direction than first planned. This study explored how involving children in research forces ethical dilemmas in-situ which require a ‘right here and right now’ response from the researcher. Data from this study were gathered through the multi-method mosaic approach. Originally, this study focused on children’s learning paths as they transition from pre-school to primary school, however, when analysing the transcribed and coded data through a constructivist grounded theory, we revealed micro-ethical moments where the research repeatedly took another direction than first planned. Thus, the research topic changed focus. Based on the analysis of interview transcripts, two types of ethical considerations emerged as important when involving children in research: (1) researchers’ response in-situ when micro-ethical moments occur (2) continuing the data collection when the research topic is changing. Considering this, the results point to a need for reframing the research design which includes what we have termed ‘ethical sensitivity’ when it comes to processual aspects of data generation. The process may entail arising ethical dilemmas, which in turn may influence how the children participate in the research and the generated data.

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INTRODUCTION

Involving children in research, especially when drawing on a participatory research design, it comes with ethical dilemmas. When engaging with children in qualitative research several unexpected situations might occur (Clark, 2020), where the research easily can take another direction than first was planned for (Graham et al., 2013). Unexpected situations ‘in-situ’ require a researcher to respond according to formal research ethics in a way where they act ‘right here and right now’. Yet, there still exists a knowledge gap addressing these unexpected moments in research focusing on the researcher’s ethical response. This paper’s aim is to minimize this gap by asking: “*How can micro-ethical moments in research with children be understood from an ethical perspective and what implications does this have for the role of the researcher’s response when involving children in research?*” To answer this question, we draw on empirical examples from a newly conducted PhD study, which originally explored children’s expectations to the transition from kindergarten to school. Looking into the transcribed data several empirical examples showed ethical dilemmas within the research which had implications for the data collection, and which needed the researcher’s in-situ response. Thus, when involving children in the research, it is crucial to reflect upon such micro-ethical moments in the process of planning and implementing participatory design activities. According to existing ethical considerations, we are required to rely on written consent from parents and to respect children’s right to withdraw from their participation at any time during the research activities. However, not much attention is given to the researcher’s role when responding to micro-ethical moments happening while collecting data.

The paper will be organized as follows. We begin by introducing related work on ethics in-situ and micro-ethical moments. This is followed by a brief presentation of the paper’s theoretical perspective on lived research ethics. We then provide an overview of the research design. Our results are analysed and illustrated with two empirical examples reflecting on micro-ethical moments. In the last section, we introduce the term ‘ethical sensitivity’ as a way to capture the ‘right here, right now’ response from the researcher and the ethical reflexivity that is needed when involving children in research. We also discuss the researcher’s inclusive response in micro-ethical moments when the research turns into unexpected directions.

RELATED WORK: ETHICS IN SITU WHEN INVOLVING CHILDREN IN RESEARCH

The interest in ethical considerations when involving children in research is growing worldwide. Particularly in qualitative research in ECE (Early Childhood Education),

this approach comes with intensified ethical dilemmas (Holland et al., 2010; Spiel et al., 2018). During the last decades, many researchers have drawn attention to ongoing ethical dilemmas or issues that arise as a research process unfolds. This subject has been variously referred as ‘in-situ’ ethics (Gildersleeve, 2010), or ‘micro-ethical moments’ (Graham et al., 2016; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Spiel et al., 2020; Warin, 2011). Ethics in-situ and researchers’ ethical response in-situ are not necessarily reflected in the field of participatory research design with children (Brostrøm, 2012; Mayne & Howitt, 2015; Powell & Smith 2009). Discussing participatory research design when involving children in research, seems to take the notion for granted when it comes to the position of the child in connection to ethics (Bodén 2021, Kellett, 2005, 2010, Christensen and James, 2000, 2008, 2017). However, when unexpected situations happen in-situ, researchers can find themselves tangled up in considerations of the UNCRC (United Nations 1989), the situation, and ethical reflexivity (Frauenberger et al., 2016). This means that the researchers sometimes are placed in situations that are often politically charged and unforeseeable, leading them to experience a contradiction between the overarching ethical principles of participation and protection as well as the choices of action required in these situations (Frauenberger et al., 2016). In-situ judgements require maintaining a delicate balance between ensuring children’s right to participation and their protection from harm. This judgement and the ensuing decision-making process seem to make the research process be subjected to unexpected, ethically loaded situations. Aligned with other researchers in the field, we found these situations under-investigated in current research and methodological literature (Graham et al., 2013, 2015; Spiel et al., 2018; Christensen & Prout, 2002). In addition, there is scarce literature on the analysis of how reflexivity on ethical issues plays out concretely in research with children, when bringing their perspectives and voices into the centre of attention (Graham, 2015). Therefore, we found it crucial to develop a framework in which researchers can develop and exercise their reflexive competences and ethical judgement, and then create context-sensitive awareness of situations that call for ethical reflexivity in research collaborations involving children. This focus requires researchers to be sensitive not only to the ways by which they collect and produce data but also to their relations with participants in the research process; they must acknowledge ongoing ethical considerations (Dockett et al., 2009; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). Understanding the research design through an ethical lens suggests looking into the interaction in interviews and/or conversations with children when the research is ongoing (Spiel et al., 2020). In this paper, we address the tensions in the researcher’s response when involving children and argue that unexpected micro-ethical moments in the research process call for ethical

reflection, since these can influence the outcomes and strengths of the research in different ways.

MICRO-ETHICAL MOMENTS IN RESEARCH

While ethical dilemmas in qualitative research tend to be discussed in relation to personal implications for the participants, the researcher's response to such dilemmas rarely receive any attention. In order to grasp the ethical tensions in the researcher's response to ethical dilemmas in-situ, we draw on the concept of *micro-ethics*. Komesaroff (1995) states that micro-ethics is an attempt to develop concepts for the navigation, negotiation, responses, decisions, and relationships which exist in every interaction between human beings, and to relate these to the particular relationship between a researcher and participants in concrete research situations. Micro-ethics are considered in the field of engineering (Bittner & Hornecker, 2005), and in the health care area, where the personal position that researchers bring into collaborative situations remain present and influential to the processes and outcomes of the collaboration. This coincides with micro-ethics considerations (Komesaroff, 1995; Spiel et al., 2018; Truog et al. 2015).

In this paper micro-ethics is a 'discursive tool to allow us to talk about, validate, and better understand the ethically important moments in research practice' (Guillemin & Gilliam, 2004, p. 277). Micro-ethical moments not only provide a lens to examining ethical dilemmas happening within the research, it also contributes with an understanding for managing moral challenges that can arise in a concrete research process when data is produced and processed (Spiel et al., 2020) and as such contribute to ethical considerations on a larger scale regarding research and epistemology (Spiel et al., 2018). In this micro-ethical perspective, ethics is not only related to formal and principal ethical considerations involved in a given research design; it is also a part of a researcher's decisions on how to act and react on occurrences in-situ when conducting research. Therefore, looking at research ethics as micro-ethics in practice can be a way to address how ethical and epistemological interest may influence and potentially mutually exclude each other, especially when children participate in research (Spiel et al., 2020). Powell et al. (2016) noted that even though ethics and micro-ethics calls for reflexivity, there is 'little movement in addressing the practical difficulties of fostering and applying it' (p. 200). Despite that these micro-ethical tensions are common in participatory design; they are often scarcely reported. Research underlines that designing a framework for the position of micro-ethical moments could provide benefits for both children when being part of a study and for children more broadly considered in future studies (Powell et al., 2016). In this paper, we will discuss how the researcher could engage in these micro-ethical moments and use the term 'ethical sensitivity' to better understand how children in

these micro-ethical moments rely on the researcher's response.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON LIVED RESEARCH ETHICS

Ethical theories are necessary to consider when it comes to micro-ethics as they normally can legitimate the judgements and decisions in research (Kimmel, 1988; Eisner & Peshkin, 1990). Bayer (2010) argued that ethics is about behaving properly and doing to others what you want them to do to you. Not only formal research ethics, but also more broadly ethical theories, can be viewed as a tool to think with in qualitative research. However, this simplified way of addressing research ethics does not satisfy the deep, philosophical, and human aspects of understanding ethics as a part of people's existence and interaction. The latter argument was pointed out by Danish philosopher and phenomenologist Knud Ejler Løgstrup. According to Løgstrup (1956), our lives are always related and exposed to, and dependent on, others. We contribute to shaping and determining each other's worlds by our attitude towards each other. This interdependency requires trust in others. According to Løgstrup (1956), this trust is eminent and, thereby, given to us as an interactive and reciprocal power, demanding us to contribute to the well-being of the other person. He describes this fundamental and radical idea of interdependence in this way: 'Herein lies the unarticulated and one might say anonymous demand that we take care of the life, which confidence has placed in our hands' (Løgstrup, 1956, p. 53). This demand is inherently ethical, which is why Løgstrup termed this idea of interdependent trust 'the ethical demand.' In modern times, Løgstrup's idea of the ethical demand still lives, for instance, in phenomenological research methods like life world interviews, in which 'we must continually be aware of ethics as an ongoing reflection in the research process' (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 51). This implication makes the simplified way of addressing research ethics non-concurrent with the ways by which interaction with the (social) environment plays out in research, such as when ethical dilemmas occur within the research process. The two empirical examples in this study stressed the dilemma between formal and 'lived' research ethics and the micro-ethical moments. At a formal level, ethics in research refers to respecting the rights of the people who are studied.

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH DESIGN: THE MOSAIC APPROACH

The present study is designed to involve children's active perspective through the multi-method mosaic approach (Clark, 2017, 2020). Consistent with the UNCRC, using methods in research with children that bring the participating children's voices and perspectives to the fore is imperative. Following this assertion, this study

employed the mosaic approach to data generation to capture children's voices (Clark 2011, 2017, 2020). Alison Clark and Peter Moss (2011) are strong pioneers in developing research approaches and methods aimed at involving children in research on their own terms, thereby bringing into attention the children's voices in knowledge production. In the mosaic approach, participating children are seen as active and expressive producers of knowledge rather than informants. This approach can be understood as not only a question of knowledge production but also a way to guide researchers' judgement with respect to ethical issues concerning the UNCRC. To practice child involvement, the mosaic approach uses data collection techniques, such as interviewing and conversations, which encourage children to use, among others, video recordings, digital cameras, drawings, and games to express themselves (Clark & Moss, 2011).

As mentioned, the considerations above arose during data collection for the main author's PhD study. This paper draws from data including 25 Danish children aged 5 to 7 years (14 girls and 11 boys). Since the study was focused on transition processes from kindergarten to school, the participating children attended a preparatory school program at the school in which the children would start the actual school during the fieldwork period. The children originated from three different preschools located close to each other and the school. The main author participated in the children's institutional life, by exploring their expectations (from February to April 2019) and experiences of their transition from preschool to primary school (from April to August 2019). As the study focused on children's perspectives of their transition from preschool to primary school, participants were selected based on the assumption that following them during this period of their lives would highlight their voices during the ongoing transition process.

Since the study's premise was that children are active and competent participants in research who can express their views and experiences (Clark, 2017), the participating children were considered experts in their own lives and skilful communicators (Clark, 2011, 2017). This implied, for example, that the researcher involved the children in the decisions about how to identify important themes in their lives. In this study, the 'expert approach' to the children anticipated that many unexpected situations would arise; ethical challenges and dilemmas became quite pressing in the researcher's decision-making processes concerning how to respond. This is further elaborated below.

The purpose of using mosaic approach in this study was to create different spaces to encourage participants to use a large range of communication tools, rather than relying on verbal and written data. Therefore, it was important to include multiple communication methods,

because not all children want to record videos, draw or take photographs (Clark, 2020). In this way, the method brought together data that was derived from multiple sources and produced through various techniques to compose a nuanced picture of the phenomenon studied, hence the mosaic metaphor (Clark, 2017; Clark & Moss 2011). The diversity in methods and data types considered communication strengths of the children and focused on what they told, both orally and visually. It was also important to listen to the children in a nuanced manner, i.e. listening beyond their spoken words (Clark, 2017). Moreover, because children could not be studied as a homogeneous group, the mosaic approach considered their individual perspectives (Christensen & Prout, 2002), especially as there is not one best approach that suits all children or all contexts (Dockett & Perry, 2005). Therefore, this way of approaching the children, which is open to the many different ways by which children can express their views and experiences, relies on the researcher (Clark & Moss, 2001).

ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS IN INVOLVING CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVE IN RESEARCH

The mosaic approach considers several research ethical steps in involving children in a qualitative study. In practice, one of the first steps is to obtain a formal consent to participate (Clark, 2017). As the children in the present study were under-aged, consent for their participation was first sought through written and signed permission from their parents, and subsequently from the child in cases where parental consent had been received (Ey, 2016). Concerning the latter, the children were introduced to the study through an information brochure containing both text and pictures that described and explained the research, planned activities, and intended role of the children. The brochure aimed at ensuring that each child was provided with enough information of the research to make an informed decision about participating or not (Dockett & Perry, 2010). This brochure was based on previous research, which has shown that children find it important to receive a written consent form and give their permission by signing this form, similar to their parents (Gallagher, 2015). It was sent out to the institution in advance so that the educators could introduce the project to the children. When the researcher met the children in-situ, she read the information brochure aloud to each child. There was ample opportunity for them to ask questions, for them to understand the project and possible consequences of their participation. Following this information, they were asked to indicate whether they would or would not like to participate or whether they had not made up their minds. Their choice was put down on a consent form designed with three different smiley faces to meet the needs of the children who could not yet read (Figure 1).




I would like to participate	 <input data-bbox="1121 185 1241 315" type="checkbox"/>
I don't know if I would like to participate	 <input data-bbox="1126 389 1246 519" type="checkbox"/>
I would not like to participate	 <input data-bbox="1131 575 1251 705" type="checkbox"/>

Figure 1 Children's assent form.

If a child chose the second option (that they did not know if they would like to participate), the researcher let them know that they were welcome to participate later if they changed their mind; when a child accepted to be involved in the research, they were informed that they could stop participating in the research activity at any time (Roberts, 2017). In this study, all 25 children gave their consent to participate. No one withdrew from the research. Rather, the opposite situation occurred in which children would like to participate in the research but did not have their parents' consent. Such a situation is explained later in the first empirical example in the section below.

ANALYTICAL APPROACH THE RESULTS OF THE CODED AND ANALYSED DATA

Data analysis was informed by constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006). This means that it was the empirical data that drove the emergence of analytical concepts. Gathered data were transcribed and reviewed to find patterns in verbal and non-verbal actions as well as in the observation notes (Charmaz, 2006). In the second step, an initial set of codes (e.g., tools and procedures used, reflections, ethical concepts and references, formal research ethics, micro-ethics, etc.) was developed by inductively identifying salient features of the data. It was when coding the observations note it became clear that the notes were reflecting on those micro-ethical moments in research and how, as a researcher, to respond when unexpected situations happen in the research. Two types of micro-ethical moments emerged and refer to (1) researchers' response in-situ when micro-ethical moments occur (2) continuing the data collecting when the research topic is. Both empirical examples illustrate the relevance of ethical sensitivity within the researcher's response.

ANALYSES ON MICRO-ETHICAL MOMENTS AS A PART OF RESEARCH INVOLVING CHILDREN

In the following sections we will present two empirical examples which represent our analysis of the coded data. First, we present the researcher's response in-situ when micro-ethical moments occur looking into how the formal research ethics had an impact on those micro-ethical moments.

LEARNING FROM UNEXPECTED SITUATIONS IN RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

In the following example, an unexpected situation occurred in a group interview with four preschool children. The interview had been running for about 10 minutes when the children thought that instead of telling the researcher what they found important in their transition to school, which was the interview theme, they would rather take and then share photographs of it. All the children knew that each of them would need to take a photo, which was the big motivation for participating. They had been looking forward to this activity and knew in advance what they would like to photograph. They also knew that they were going to share one digital camera as a group, which meant that they had to wait for each other and take turns. Before the children left the interview room, they told the researcher what they would like to take a photo of, where they would like to take their photos, and why the motives should be exactly the ones they decided. Extract 1 below contains the observation notes from the conversation with one of the children, Simon (all names are pseudonyms).

Extract 1

Simon was going to take a photograph. He wanted to take a photograph of the place where he spent a lot of

time with his friends. He took this photograph of a table football (Figure 2).

Simon had just taken the first photo when two children from preschool ran after us. They called the names of the four children asking: “Can we come along with you? We would like to take photos together with you”. The four children from the group interview were smiling and asking me: “Can they please join us taking photos about how it is to start in the primary school?” (Observation note)

In this research situation, more than the four children from the group interview were interested in taking photos with the digital camera. While it might be hard to imagine how the two children’s question “Can we come along with you?” forces an ethical dilemma in the research, it is clear once the researcher realises that the two children’s parents had not returned consent forms, meaning that the two children did not have their parents’ permission to participate in the research project. Their question needed an instant response because the two children wanted to join the four children from the group interview in the research and they wanted to do that immediately. In the situation, the researcher realised that the parents of the two other children had not returned consent forms; this meant that the two children did not have their parents’ permission to participate in the research project. However, their request needed an instant response, which raised a dilemma about ethics, on the one hand, and research interests, on the other. This is elaborated in the section below.

The researcher’s response in situ

As mentioned previously, in ethical dilemmas like this one, it becomes important to focus on both the micro-ethical considerations according to children’s rights in research and to the ethical guidelines overarching the research. The request from the children required a quick response from the researcher. The researcher reflected on two choices in this situation: either to say ‘yes’ to the children and include them in the research or to say ‘no’ to the children and exclude them from the research. There are consequences for either route.

- Inclusion in the research. If the researcher said ‘yes’ to the two children’s participation in the research, the children would be included in the research but without the parents’ permission. There may be some repercussions for the researcher in taking this action. In any case, the researcher would not be able to use the two children’s photographs or their voices as a part of the research data and would have to delete the photos and possibly redact interview transcripts to remove commentary from the two children.
- Exclusion from the research. The researcher could say ‘no’ to the two children’s participation. If the researcher took this action, the two children would be excluded from the research, perhaps upsetting them and the other four children. The outcomes of the research may be impacted by the action, as the four children may be less motivated to participate than they were before the two children intervened.



Figure 2 Table soccer.

In the first choice, the researcher could accept the children's participation despite the lack of consent from their parents, knowing that the data would be potentially useless. Alternatively, the researcher could reject them, knowing that she would have done the formally right thing to do, as the research data would only include the children with their parents' formal consent. At a first glance, this should not be problematic: the two new children had no permission to participate, which should make the response easy. However, it was not only a question of acting in the balance between the children's wishes and the formal declaration of consent from their parents. If the researcher chose to reject the two children, she would practice an excluding act, showing both the two children and the four participating children that they were not wanted in the research activity of taking photos, which looked fun and involved a prestigious digital camera. The two children would be disempowered through something that they had no preconditions to understand, potentially upsetting themselves. The four participating children might also feel the same. This course of action, with its potential to upset, might cause less motivation for the four children that were allowed to participate, thereby impacting the outcomes of the data collection. Even more severely, the relationship among the six children might be harmed in a more fundamental sense in the future, putting the two rejected children in a less favourable position in the whole group. However, if the researcher chose to accept the two children in the research activity, they would participate without their parents' permission. The ethical repercussions for the researcher in taking this action could be severe since both the institution and parents could potentially interpret it as an expression of disregard of the ethical contract set up through consent forms. With respect to the research agenda, the researcher would not be able to use the two children's photographs or their voices as a part of the research data. She would have to delete the photos and possibly redact interview transcripts to remove commentary from the two children, potentially making the data useless, as mentioned above.

REFLEXIVITY IN SITU

This example illustrates how an unexpected situation both has ethical implications and consequences for the data generated. The children needed a 'right-here-right-now' response from the researcher who was challenged in-situ. Formal research ethics might harm the children's mutual relationship and the empirical work. A less formal action might harm the ethical contract with the parents and institution and the usefulness of the empirical data. This entailed that neither the formal research ethics nor the method literature (i.e., the mosaic approach) could help how to include the children in-situ. Although this study was designed to be child-friendly, empowering the participatory methods does not necessarily eliminate harm and 'ensure

ethical practice per se' (Holland et al., 2010, p. 5). Therefore, the researcher's decision on whether to include or exclude the children draws on reflexivity about respecting both the children's rights to be heard (UNCRC) and overall ethical guidelines and maintaining the research focus.

TOPIC CHANGED FROM TRANSITION TO SHROVETIDE

This section demonstrates a second empirical example of an unexpected ethical moment. In a group interview with four children, the researchers started by introducing the topic of research: transition from preschool to primary school. Following this, the children agreed that they would like to participate in this group interview and signed their assent form. The children were told that there were no wrong answers to any questions being asked and that they could stop their participation at any time. The following observation note illustrates how the research topic changed within a short time in this particular situation.

The researcher and four children were sitting in the art room in the preschool. The art room was decorated with barrels, cats, and costumes for a Shrovetide party. The children were given a consent form and read it. The researcher explained the consent form to them. They were asked to decide whether or not they wanted to participate. All the children drew a circle around the smiley that indicated they would like to participate in the research. The children were given pieces of paper and pencils to draw pictures of transition from preschool to primary school while the group interview was being conducted. At the beginning of the interview, the children were not interested in talking about their transition to school at all. Instead, they were very engaged in talking about a Shrovetide party that was going to take place in the preschool the next evening. (observation note)

This kind of micro-ethical moments is not unusual when involving children in research. Indeed, it raises a question about how to continue the data collecting when the children were not interested in talking about their transition to school at all. In this empirical example one challenge for the researcher is how to react respectfully and appropriately, not because four children really have a lot to say about Shrovetide but because they have something to say, and they think it is important. This situation puts the researchers in a micro-ethical moment where the ability to reflect, think, and respond according to how to continue this research. Spyrou (2011) states that if the researcher chose to force the children to talk, in this case about the transition to school instead of listening to the upcoming Shrovetide party, the research, from a child's perspective, could become more of an 'interrogation' or 'investigation'.

Had the researcher insisted on continuing the research by having the children to talk about the transition to school, the consequence could be that the children expressed themselves less freely and openly or preferred to stop participating in the interview. Consistent with the research design, the researcher's strategy in-situ was to continue the data collection by including the children's perspectives on what they were keen to talk about instead of trying to force them back to talking about their expectations for the upcoming transition to school. This was a choice of making space for the multiple voices in the research and giving time to listening to the children's interest in the upcoming Shrovetide party. As Warming (2011) argued that listening to a topic other than the specified research topic can, at times, build safer relationships and stronger interactions between the researcher and children. In the short term, the researcher hoped for the children to return to the topic of transition to school and in the long term, to build a relationship with the children. Consistent with what Phelan and Kinsella (2013) pointed out can children give their consent to participate in research in different ways. One of these ways is to invite the adult/researcher into their worlds, just as the four children did when sharing their thoughts about Shrovetide with the researcher. Therefore, this situation pointed to the need for ethical consideration about the nexus between method and ethics in responding to children when they choose a topic (e.g., Shrovetide) different from the research topic (e.g., transition to school). This situation is an example of how ethics is not something that is undertaken at one point in the planning stage of the research and then considered done (Bessell et al. 2017). Rather, ethics continue to be central throughout the whole research process (Bessell et al. 2017; Doyle, 2013). This empirical example reinforces the importance of responding sensitively and reflexively when the topic changed from transition to Shrovetide. However, the researcher's judgement in the micro-ethical moments cannot always be foreseen (Spiel et al., 2020) and may not seem immediately relevant when planning the research design. Therefore we will discuss the need to reflect up on ethical sensitivity in researcher response in micro-ethical moments when involving children in the research in the following section.

DISCUSSION: THE NEED FOR ETHICAL SENSITIVITY IN RESEARCH

In this section, we argue that exploring children's lives require what we termed 'ethical sensitivity' and that that relates to what Løgstrup (1956) emphasised, that is, the importance of the researcher's virtue and caring skill. Ethical sensitivity captures the caring response in-situ when involving children in research and in this case when the research is taking another direction than first planned for. Even though these 'child-centred' participatory approaches aim to reduce inherent adult-child power imbalances, the dynamics can still cause harm if

children's voices or perspectives are rendered inauthentic or meaningless (Graham, 2016, p. 83). Therefore, we highlight the importance of being ethically sensitive, which enables researchers to work productively with the tensions and encourages deeper recognition of involving children's voices to improve ethical practice (Graham et al., 2016). Ethical sensitivity points to the need for reflexivity on how to carefully involve children in research in-situ, for example, a situation that calls for either exclusion or inclusion of children's voice in research. We argue that ethical sensitivity elaborates a way to focus on ethics in the unexpected moments when involving children in research.

ETHICAL SENSITIVITY A TERM FOR RESEARCHER'S RESPONSE IN MICRO-ETHICAL MOMENTS IN RESEARCH

Drawing on Løgstrup (1956), researchers must decide on how to respond in particular situations in a way that they take responsibility for the other person. This means that according to Løgstrup (1956), researchers are obligated to respond ethically in relation to the other person, no matter who the person is or when an ethical dilemma occurs (Løgstrup, 1956). Løgstrup (1956) placed sensitivity at the heart of ethical practices and in the specific context of the moment of relationships; he offered a lens through which we may view some aspects of this close interaction between children and researchers. Inspired by Løgstrup (1956), we played with the term 'ethical sensitivity' and related this to care in the research in terms of the fact that we always hold something of other people's lives in our hands. We elaborated on the term 'ethical sensitivity' and reflected on how to respond in-situ when the research is taking another direction than first planned. This paper underlines that simply collecting children's perspectives is inadequate. For instance, in our first empirical example, the two children did not have their parents' permission to participate in the research. In addition, their request to participate took place within the relationships between them and those four children who were taking photographs. These micro-ethical moments depended on the researcher's response according to ethical guidelines and children's rights. If the researcher said 'No,' she could have excluded them and the other children from the research. Therefore, we suggest that the researcher need 'ethical sensitivity' when finding a solution in the moment, balancing the ethical guidelines and methodology when a micro ethical moment occurs. When researchers must make ethical judgements in-situ, they often cannot know or assess beforehand whether a decision is correct or even just the best available (Spiel et al., 2018). We suggest that 'ethical sensitivity' provides a lens for examining the micro-ethical moments when these require a researcher's reflexivity on how to carefully respond to children in a way where their voices are included. Ethical sensitivity lay within the reflexivity in the micro-ethical

moments and the interaction with the participants. However, a simple decision to adopt a more child friendly position would not necessarily lead to 'ethical sensitivity' since the ethical research practice in-situ is ongoing and thus continuously required by the researcher. In this way, as Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) argued, the researcher's response in the micro-ethical moments could both be a risk of trespassing or being 'too respectful' to the risk of getting empirical material that only scratches the surface. This means that responding to ethical dilemmas requires reflexivity toward unexpected situations while shaping responses in concert with ourselves, in a manner by which we can be held responsible (Paahus, 2005). This situation above is an example of how ethics sensitivity continues to be central throughout the whole research process and focuses on reflexivity, relationships, and children's rights in research (Graham et al., 2013). In the outset of this paper, we discussed the importance of how to respond to children in an ethically sensitive way when ethical dilemmas occur in the research process. Some similar situations may require forms of attention related to ethics, such as those described above where we found that avoiding harm when involving children in research which is not unproblematic. The understanding of these moments as micro-ethical can introduce ways to reflect on ethical dilemmas in an ethical sensitivity way that provide paths to respond appropriately and respectfully to children's ideas while ensuring that they are listened to, and ethical guidelines are followed. The concept of ethical sensitivity allows us to reflect upon micro-ethical moments and talk about how to respond in an inclusive way where we can validate and strengthen the understanding of those ethically important moments in research practice. An important point from this paper is that the researcher's way of responding and listening to children easily can include or exclude them from the research. The researcher must respond in the most appropriate way to facilitate and support children's inclusion in the research (Graham et al., 2016). Children who have chosen to participate in research want to share their knowledge, understandings, and meanings, and talk about what they find important in their lives.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis points to a potential challenge for qualitative research processes with children that are related to the argument of including children's experiences in the empirical material. The use of data collection methods that aim at encouraging children's voices may, as shown above, generate ethical dilemmas in the concrete encounter with children. These ethical dilemmas are termed micro-ethical moments, which require researchers to focus on 'ethical sensitivity' and the interactions between them and children that can

potentially include or exclude the latter's perspectives in research. In this way, the researcher must consider the most appropriate way to facilitate and support children's inclusion in the research (Graham et al., 2016); this was illustrated in the example situation above by avoiding excluding from the research and their friends the two children who showed interest in participating but did not have their parents' consent. Moments arise in the effort to understand the participating children's perspectives. The aim of this study was to listen to children and join them in dialogues and interactions about their ways of experiencing transition from preschool to primary school. The recording of children's conversations indicated that children would like to be heard and involved when it suits them and that their perspectives can be involved and expressed in many different ways. Particular attention was drawn to the exploration of how micro-ethical moments and unexpected situations in research with children can change the interaction in the research process. The researcher's way of responding and listening to children in-situ can include or exclude the children's voices in the research, which was illustrated in the two examples given in this study. However, one limitation of this work is that it is based on researchers experiences only, instead of emerging from a shared understanding between researchers, children and their adult gatekeepers. In working through these challenges with children, relationships between researchers and children can be strengthened and the research can be enhanced. Unexpected situations and the consequent micro-ethical moments occur often in research, but they should not be seen as limitations of research with children. Rather, they are examples of ways by which researchers' reflexivity and responses can be challenged when unexpected situations occur. Future work in this area would benefit from a more comprehensive methodological strategy that addresses the field of ethics and importance of a researcher's ethical sensitivity and judgement and choices in the research design when involving children. Our work can also be expanded in the field of ECE, as a way to reflect on how to respond inclusively with an ethically sensitive approach when micro-ethical moment occurs and when the research is taking another direction than first was planned for.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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