Tensions, assumptions and situated ethics: Attuning to the unpredictability of ethics in early childhood research participation.

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Research in early childhood settings requires careful consideration of the impact on all children in the setting, whether participants or non-participants, and evolving ethical approaches in response to children's needs. However, flexible approaches and, 'in the moment' ethical adaptations are not routinely reported as part of early childhood research. Drawing on examples from previous qualitative, observational research studies, conducted by members of The Open University early childhood research group, this article reflects upon and adds to some of the ethical challenges highlighted by Richardson (2019) in an article for this journal. These include the impact of research on non-participating children, the influence of the researcher and research tools, expressions of dissent during research, and adapting iteratively. Six considerations for ethical attunement in early childhood research emerge which could offer an 'aide memoire' for early childhood researchers and encourage more transparent sharing of unpredictable ethics in early childhood research.

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Introduction

Ethical considerations in early childhood research are widely understood to go beyond the procedural ethics of form filling and require a flexible and contextual approach (Armijo and Willatt 2022; Graham, Powell, and Truscott 2016; Lyndon 2023). However, in making decisions about ethical research with young children there are potential tensions between providing protection and facilitating participation (Armijo and Willatt 2022). Consent is one aspect that may require a flexible and contextual approach. For example, as young children are considered vulnerable participants, gaining parental consent is necessary, but adaptations may be needed to avoid procedural requirements inadvertently creating a barrier to the participation of children

from marginalised groups (Armijo and Willatt 2022). Parental consent alone, is also insufficient to ensure children's informed participation (Richardson 2019). Even gathering children's assent at the outset of a research study may not represent children's wishes throughout the research (Richardson 2019) and as the research progresses, children may show dissent in varied ways that are sometimes hard to discern (Huser, Dockett and Perry 2022).

The imbalance of power between adult researchers, whether practitioners or academics, and child participants can also lead to hidden influence on initial consent to participate and ongoing involvement in the research (Huser, Dockett and Perry 2022). Furthermore, Urbina-Garcia et al. (2023) highlight that research which aims to listen to the voices of young children is often adult-directed, and rarely involves children in research design. Even approaches to participatory research may not automatically overcome issues of power dynamics (Urbina-Garcia et al. 2023). To do so researchers must be reflexive; this involves examining ethical issues as research unfolds, being aware of both the value and challenge of authentic researcher participant relationships (Graham, Powell and Truscott 2016) and attempting to afford young children 'ethical symmetry' through evolving research approaches in context, taking their lead (Salamon 2015). Recent consideration has turned to the ethical spaces for research in early childhood settings, moving beyond a singular focus on the rights of individual young children participating in research to reflect on collective consent, peer negotiation in the research process, the impact on relationships, and the rights of non-participating children in the research setting (Huser Docket and Perry 2022; Richardson 2019).

Interested in developments in ethics in early childhood research, members of an informal research group of academics at The Open University discussed Richardson's (2019) paper in this journal *'Why haven't I got one of those?' A consideration*

regarding the need to protect non-participant children in early years research'.
Richardson (2019) argues that it is impossible to conduct research without impact on everyone in the setting and that researchers should plan ethically for all the children who will be present whether part of the research or not. Building on her argument, the group further problematised issues of participation, consent and right to withdraw, and the impact of power relations and power imbalance between researchers and very young participants, in line with a focus on respect for research subjects prioritised by the EECERA (2015) ethical code.

We agreed that reporting empirical research can focus on procedural ethics and lead to an erasure of the ethical complexities experienced during the research rather than highlighting the researcher's 'moral obligation' to those affected by their research (Richardson 2019). Further to this, the group decided to offer their own reflections and research experiences with the aim that in sharing and reflecting on ethical tensions and opportunities to cope with complexity, we can identify ways forward for ongoing ethical practices that attune with the messiness of research in early childhood. Whilst acknowledging there are other areas of ethical complexity which could be considered, the paper focuses on children's participation rights in situations where children are 'data sources' (Shaw, Brad and Davey 2011), the research takes place in their space, and the divisions between researchers and participating and non-participating children are artificially imposed on an existing setting dynamic.

We draw on unpublished examples from five of our own empirical studies which received ethical approval from the university research committees listed: Rodriguez-Leon (2020), The Open University HREC/3763; Teszenyi (2023) The Open University HREC/3763; Canning Teszenyi and Pálfi (2022) The Open University HREC 3763; Maynes (2023), Bishop Grosseteste University REC 53-52, Williams

(2009) Cardiff University SREC/198 and Edwards (2024) Wolverhampton University 1220TEUOWEDU. In each study different approaches were taken to gain informed consent from the child and adult participants in line with the EECERA (2015) ethical code. These approaches and our reflection on the ethical challenges experienced during these studies are discussed in the light of recent literature in the sections that follow, surfacing six considerations for ethical attunement in early childhood research.

Perspectives on non-participation

One concern raised by Richardson (2019) was for non-participant children who want to be involved in research activities taking place in their early childhood setting. We agree that research in settings impacts, directly or indirectly, on all the children because they are connected to the space and those within it (Johansson and Purolia 2021). Children are alert to the behaviours of others whilst seemingly absorbed in their own activities, with newcomers to the space and their equipment or belongings noted, even by the youngest babies (Salamon 2015). Researchers must, therefore, find ethical ways to respond to encounters with participant and non-participant children which operate outside their intended research expectations (Chesworth 2018; Salamon 2015). Non-participant children also influence the researcher's understanding of the setting and the research participants, resulting in a challenge for the researcher to maintain a moral obligation to respect the rights of those without parental consent, without writing out their presence.

Our own experiences led us to reflect on children who want to withdraw from research. Early childhood settings and schools are spaces in which some degree of conformity with adult expectations is expected and can therefore negotiating consent can be problematic (Kirby 2020). It could be argued that one way in which early childhood settings help children become 'ready for school' is by ensuring they fit in and

cooperate as part of a group and community. Conformity might be viewed synonymously with achievement (Biesta 2009; Kay 2018). For young children who spend significant amounts of time in these spaces, complying with adults' requests and directions is one way to elicit praise and construct an identity as a 'good' child. Research activities, especially ethnographic studies, are often designed to be as non-disruptive as possible; taking place in familiar spaces and including things children would usually do. Hence, saying 'no' can be confusing or feel awkward. Indeed, Heath et al. (2007) note that what we accept as assent from young children is, too often, simply a desire to please.

During an ethnographic study with 3-4-year-olds at an early childhood setting (Rodriguez-Leon 2020) the researcher noted the following episode with 3-year-old Lara, in her reflective journal. Lara's mother had consented to her participation in response to verbal and written information about the study, and the researcher and Lara had been introduced. In that first meeting, they spent some time getting to know one-another, and the researcher explained she would be filming children's play, but that Lara could say no if she wished.

> During the first week of data gathering in the setting, Lara was playing alone in the role-play area of the setting, she was chatting on an old phone whilst using a pen to 'make notes' (in small squiggly lines) on a small notebook. The researcher watched from a distance for a while, before approaching and asking if she could film (holding up the small camera). Lara nodded and continued with her play; the researcher filmed from a short distance away, however, Lara soon began to seem uncomfortable. Her monologue on the phone became quieter, and she soon put her props down and left the area. (Rodriguez-Leon 2020)

It was clear that Lara was withdrawing her consent, yet without the strategies or confidence to actively dissent, the only way she could do so was to walk away. On reflection, the research had disrupted Lara's participation in the free flow play at the setting and potentially caused her some mild discomfort, which surfaced the ethical considerations of 'communication' and 'space' i.e. how researchers can notice and respond to children's communication about participation during research, and how they can mitigate impact on children's familiar spaces (Figure 1).

The impact of 'things' and 'relationships' on assent

Huser et al. (2022) note that many young research participants have been agentive in devising their own methods of expressing assent or dissent, although sometimes in quite ambiguous ways. Furthermore, early childhood researchers have included some creative methods through which young children can express their wishes. Tools such as 'traffic light' coloured cards or emojis have been used to enable children to indicate their dissent to participate in research activity without needing to explain themselves verbally. These systems might be empowering, yet Kirby (2020) cautions of the negative connotations that can be associated with traffic light systems, after one young participant explained that in his classroom, being shown a red card means someone is being 'told off'. Even when designing innovative ways to engage children in discussing their possible participation in research, such as using animation, story boards or artefacts, Arnott et al. (2020) highlight the influence of many variables in supporting children to give truly informed consent. They found that carefully designed (supposedly engaging) video content was not necessarily enough to hold children's attention, and that the number of children, who was in control, and the type and position of the device on which children were first introduced to information about a research project all made a difference to how much they understood. In one instance, a storyboard presentation of

the project and the children's intended participation, was too engaging and resulted in much discussion, possibly creating a distraction from the planned research consent.

In Rodriguez-Leon's (2020) example, the complexities of video in pre-school meant children were aware of where the researcher was recording; on occasions where they wanted the toys within the space being videoed but were reticent to move in front of the researcher, recording was stopped. However, as Rose (2007) concluded, there is inevitably censorship by the researcher over what is included or omitted during the recording and then later during editing of video. Peters et al. (2020, 874) highlight 'response-ability' in videoing not only in terms of the ethical nature of data collection but the purpose and opportunity of visually telling the story of any given phenomenon. Use of visual recording in research, therefore, raises questions around the authenticity and the impact on participants and non-participant children in the setting. These reflections highlighted the need for ongoing, responsive, ethical consideration of 'things', tools or artefacts such as the video camera, the video footage, as well as the way these are used in children's 'spaces'; researchers must be mindful of the familiarity, influence and control children may or may not have over 'things' used in research and what unintended consequences these may have.

When practitioners are co-researchers; research is designed to provide the youngest of children with comfort through familiarity as they engage with the data collection methods. Practitioner expertise and established relationships are invaluable to the research process (Lyndon 2019). However, researchers may need to guard against overt enthusiasm of some practitioners to engage children in prolonged data collection activities through repeated questioning and encouragement may be problematic. Palaiologou draws attention to the need to understand participation in research as 'the

causality between adult actions and children's actions' (2014, 696). This concern leads us to consider the importance and complexity of negotiating consent in situ.

Negotiating and re-negotiating consent in-situ

In Teszenyi, Canning, and Pálfi's (2022) study of pedagogy for understanding children's rights in Hungary, written consent was gained from families through dialogue with the Hungarian pedagogues. The researcher considered this insufficient to ensure the best interests of the children (UNICEF 1989) and they adopted an approach that shifted from individual assent to what Gibson et al. (2011) explain as collective consent. The pedagogues, the children's trusted adults in the settings, explained the research in terms tailored to the maturity and capabilities of the children (Arnott et al. 2020, 807) to minimise the pressure of having to comply and conform with adult expectations for lack of understanding. The children were asked several times if they wanted to participate and help adults to understand their views, during the two weeks leading up to the research. Following data collection, the researchers returned to the children to check their understanding of the views they had expressed. Their thoughts had been made into a script for a puppet show, in preparation for disseminating findings to all stakeholders. An observation from the study highlights challenges of negotiating consent:

> The children are with the researchers and artists in a mixed-age group (4–6-year-olds). The creative director of the puppet theatre has said hello to group of children sitting around her on the carpet, recalling the names of some of the children she has already spoken to. Also on the carpet are two of the project PIs and 3 more artists, with children already settled in conversation with them.
>
> Lena: Stands up and turns to the adult: I'll be back in a minute, I am just going to meet the people you have brought with you. I don't know their names.

Timi (Adult): You said such an important thing, Lena, take a seat and I'll introduce you to everyone.

Lena(still standing): Ok, but I don't know yet what your name is.

Timi: I was just about to introduce myself. Lena, I am Timi, pleased to meet you (they shake hands)

Lena: Good to meet you.

Timi: I have already learnt something important about you. You have a white teddy bear friend at home but you are not allowed to bring it into nursery …

Lena: because if it gets dirty, mum won't be able to wash it clean. This one (showing another teddy to Timi) is easier to wash clean because it is not that white ...

Timi: So Lena, will you allow me to introduce my playmates to you and to everyone?

Lena: nodding

Timi: That lady over there sitting on the chair is Anna.

Anna: Hello everyone.

Timi: This behind you is Jenny. And that …

Lena: And is that Bence?

Timi: Yes, that's Bence. You have met, I see. That's good.

Timi introduces every adult including the cameraman. The theatre company director points to the camera and tells the children that we would like to record as they are telling the story to the group. She asks if the children are ok with this. Children say yes but Timi notices that Lena is starting to cry,

Timi: Lena, what happened?

Lena: I have only met Andras, Emma and Flora, these three people who look after us in our nursery...

Timi: So you don't know us, you see us as strangers?

Lena : I have told you... I have never met you in my life. Ever.

Timi: I am so pleased I have the opportunity to meet you and be here with you. What can we do to make it right for you?

Lena: Whatever you want to. I have seen you in the stories (referring to the puppet shows that she has seen when visiting the theatre with the nursery) and in adverts but never in real life.

Timi: We are here in the flesh, and we have brought you one of our stories.

Lena: Good. Is the camera playing it? (meaning 'recording' it)

Timi: Is that ok with you, Lena?

Lena: Where is the machiner that's recording it?

Timi: It's been switched on and doing it on its own. (Teszenyi, Canning, and Pálfi 2022)

In this example, Lena is re-negotiating her consent in-situ. This challenges our understanding of the 'informed' element of voluntary informed consent and emphasises the importance of ongoing attention to children's 'communication' about their involvement. It also highlights the ethical consideration of 'relationships' and how these can be brokered authentically between young participants and any outsider researchers. To Lena, the situated aspect of being informed is important. Giving collective consent

through a trusted adult (their practitioner) prior to our visit had been too abstract for her. This 'tender failure' at the beginning of our visit sensitised us to the significance of relationality in everyday ethics. So, in the next setting, one by one we entered children's groups together with their trusted adult, the practitioner, who introduced us to them. We did not enter children's spaces on mass again.

Almost always, data generation involves an invasion of personal privacy to a certain extent (Stake 1995), Because of the possible implications of power relationships between children and adults, researcher sensitivity to children's wishes, verbal and non-verbal clues about continued consent to participate is key. During Teszenyi's (2023) study of mixed aged grouping in Hungarian early childhood settings, she conducted observations of practitioner interactions with children. Through an informal visit prior to fieldwork, she provided verbal information about the children's participatory role as well as their right to withdraw, tailored to the maturity of the children. However, an observation from her field notes, highlights further complexities in understanding which children in any setting may wish to stop participating:

> As part of my preliminary visits prior to data generation I spent time with children creating a name label for when I come to observe. There was an assumption on the adults' part that children would stick their labels on in the morning as they arrived at nursery but this was not discussed with them. Some did stick their labels on arrival, and some did not. Then as the day progressed, I noticed that some children took their labels off if they did not want to be observed any more…By tuning into children's visual clues, I was able to remain sensitive to how they expressed consent or dissent. The first incident that drew my attention to this non-verbal clue was when a child looked me in the eye, and without breaking eye contact he took his name label off and gave it to me as if to say, I don't want to be observed any more. And he returned to the play I was

observing. (Interestingly, he did not walk away but trusted me not to observe him anymore.) (Researcher notes, Teszenyi 2023)

This child was not asking 'why have I not got one of those name labels', as suggested by Richardson (2019), rather, he exercised his right to privacy and removed the label when he no longer felt comfortable with being observed. This is another important ethical issue which in other circumstances may be less transparent. The child expressed his dissent overtly and with confidence in this incident. The child's voice was not subdued in the relationships where he may have perceived himself as less powerful than the researcher or the practitioner for that matter. He used the power afforded to him in a situation where he was indeed the one in the driving seat, not the researcher.

Considering the influence of relationships on the ethics of participation may involve developing early rapport and trust with child research participants and enable us to, privilege consent "as a process rather than a product" (Eaton 2020, 851). In this case, it gave the researcher confidence to tune into children's clues about their wishes. However, there is pressure on the researcher to interpret children's behaviour which is particularly challenging in situations where we do not know the participants, local cultures, codes of conduct, customs, and habits. Other more subtle (or not so) clues from children included:

> Two children (a boy and a girl) sat on a small bed playing with two dolls…. As I moved closer to better hear what they were saying, they turned towards the wall, showing their backs to me and lowering their voices.

> I joined children's play in the sand as they were building a castle for Puss-in-Boots. I was carrying out time-sample observations so in the in-between periods I joined in with the digging...etc. One child gradually took all equipment away from near me, then took

the last shape mould out of my hand and transported it to the other side of the castle

where they continued with the build. (Teszenyi 2023)

In another study of book-handling with 2-3-year-olds (Maynes 2023), caregiver consent

for observations of children was gathered in person through verbal and written

information. Children were asked before each observation if the researcher could watch

their play, and practitioners were consulted about any children who might be unwell or

unhappy on the day so best left undisturbed. Maynes (2023) also considered if any

children appeared to feel uncomfortable or affected by her presence and noticed, a

different, subtle form of withdrawal where observation had disrupted and changed the

course of the child's play:

> Samara (30 months) is playing in the home corner, moving between a baby doll in a
>
> pram, and the pots and pans on the shelves. She is talking quietly to her doll. She
>
> glances up and sees me observing her from across the room. She looks across at me and
>
> holds up a toy flask and a water bottle. 'Two!' she shouts. She then comes across to me
>
> as if to invite me to join her play. (Maynes 2023)

In these incidents although the response is to include the researcher in play rather than

to move away, the intensity of the play moment is broken, and the direction of the play

has been altered. The child may not feel able to ask for the observation to stop, but

instead accommodates the adult by inviting them to join them in playing together.

As mentioned in Rodriguez-Leon's (2020) earlier example, negotiating consent

through action in play is potentially further complicated using video and other

technology. Whilst encouragement to play with cameras, take photos and record small

videos with free access to the resources allows the child respondent choice in methods

of participation (Graham, Powell and Truscott 2016), in our own research such 'things'

drew children to many of the research activities (Edwards 2024). There is a danger that

a desire to participate in activity is misconstrued as a consent to be part of research. This means that monitoring assent through verbal and non-verbal communication is vital. For example, Edward's (2024) study of gendered intra-actions included activities which children could choose to complete with the researcher, taking photos, videoing, drawing and talking about what they were doing. As each child joined the activity, Edwards explained her role and what she was interested in finding out. She identified assent when children sat close by and talked to her whilst drawing, or children returned again and again to the activity bringing their favourite toys to the table. Conversely those not wishing to take part in the research but who wanted to engage with the activity were noted by their body language and position at the table, sitting at a distance from the researcher - and choosing only to complete the drawing and leave (Edwards 2024); suggesting that dissent therefore requires space for physical withdrawal (Huser, Dockett and Perry 2022).

In another study from the literature, assent to participate in videos of play was expressed through an acknowledgment of researcher presence, whilst dissent involved leading the researcher by the hand to alternative activities or children presenting a storybook to the researcher to be read (Peters et al. 2020). Such complexities of interpreting children's assent or dissent in-situ are further complicated by research-child power relationships.

Researcher power

Throughout Richardson's (2019) article, there are several points which might suggest the choices researchers make are mutually exclusive, such as choosing "between their validity of data and the moral responsibility to the children" (Richardson 2019, 9) with the implication that there is only one 'right' choice available. This ties into Clark's observations around methodologies and methods that strive for "hygiene" and "tidiness"

(2010, 230). Klein (1997) notes that everyone's everyday lives consist of contradictions and uncertainties, and yet in research we push to eliminate these. Richardson (2019) posits the importance of taking all reasonable steps to minimise the impact of the power imbalance between children and adults, but if we are looking to capture the authentic lived experiences of children then minimising or tampering with the default power dynamics within a situation would give us a skewed reality. There are power imbalances apparent between the adults and children involved in research situations, and power imbalances related to "universalist, white, middle-class, heteronormative beliefs" (Schulte 2019, 2), all of which impact on the research situation, so it may be more valid to recognise and embrace these dynamics, their impacts and effects rather than try and erase them. Mercieca, Merceica and Mercieca (2022) state that "openness to listening to early years children, necessitates the acceptance of the challenges posed by children, and, indeed, the acknowledgement of uncertainty and dilemmas as prevalent in our research" (428).

We reflected that framing the focus of ethical considerations away from a drive for an equal balance of power could encourage researchers to more openly notice and discuss the power dynamics in their chosen research study. One specific area for consideration being the influence of the researcher as 'participant', another being what external 'influences' on child participants that researchers may have included, or intentionally not considered as part of the research. For example, in a case study exploring best practice in settling new starters into nursery (Williams 2009), consent was gathered from adult 'gatekeepers', in line with procedural requirements at the time. Setting-observations were made of individual children's mood and behaviour in the first 15 minutes after arriving (Williams 2009). The researcher, focused on the response from the children and how this answered the research question about nursery practice.

However, they did not choose to consider possible external influences or their own influence on the occurrence of the behaviours, showing the power difference between children and researchers. Such examples highlight the importance of researchers considering the experience of data collection from the children's perspective, and what the lived experiences of the children are, or what they might be beyond the observation. We suggest that qualitative research which focuses on observation of children in settings but does not include any consideration of external influences should acknowledge such omission.

The notion of power as a balance frames the relationship between the child and the researcher as binary, where when one side is in the ascendance and the other is automatically in decline with the implicit assumption that the objective is to strive for equality. The idea of power imbalance also has negative connotations, but this is not necessarily the case, tact, allyship, kindness all impact on and can mediate the affect. Richardson states that:

> Children should not be perceived as the equivalent to, neither distinctive to, adults; instead they should be viewed as on a continuum, which can differ dependent on the individual concerned and other factors that require reflexivity, determined by the nature of the research, the situations and the environment. (2019, 7)

Applying this view to the researcher too may help to move away from the transactional view of power balance and imbalance towards a more nuanced interpretation. Davies (2019, 5) explores this further by asking us to "ponder how we might generate ethical encounters where both children and adults are open and alive to both human and more-than-human others, readied to affecting and being affected by the other" recognising that that situations hold a web of relationships that are also influenced by material 'things' such as cameras and other recording devices or children's toys. We would look

at power relationships between children, between participants and non-participants, so why not include the researcher. Likewise, participation is not necessarily a binary situation where a child is consenting, or not consenting, it can be viewed on a continuum (Fielding 2001; Shaw, Brad and Davey 2011). We argue that, even in research projects where children are perceived as a data source rather than co-researchers, researchers need to be aware of gradations of participation, starting from the perspective that everyone in the situation is a participant- the 'non-participants' are actually 'hidden participants'. If this is the case, researchers should also be aware of their own position on a continuum of participation and power dynamics.

Conclusion: Embracing the messiness of research

Figure 1. Considerations for ethical attunement in early childhood research.

Richardson's article proposes that, whether they are participants or not, the rights and agency of all children in a research environment must be respected. Consequently, she argues that research must involve "ethical planning…prior to research being carried out" (2019, 12) which anticipates the rights of all those in the location at the time. The usual processes of ethical application within academic institutions require upfront, detailed proposals of sampling strategies and methods, an approach which favours plans, schedules and forethought. Yet, as Richardson's (2019) research demonstrated, participatory research with children can raise unpredicted issues, take a detour, an unexpected turn or a complete change of focus, no matter how much care and preparation has gone into the planning (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008). Whilst researchers might endeavour to consider every ethical permutation of their research, they also need to be willing to adopt flexibility and an understanding that they may have got it wrong, may need to re-adjust their careful planning to be truly responsive to what children can tell us and what they know. This response reflects the messiness of

research, which is common if often uncomfortable for qualitative researchers, and largely unseen in final research articles. Donnelly, Yiannis and Özkazanç-Pan (2013, 4) argue that most published articles present an ordered narrative which omits the messy, iterative and emotional aspects of qualitative research. Embracing this messiness, even in the context of research ethics, can be a way in which we move towards a different attitude, one of "methodological immaturity" or fallibility (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008, 511) rather than certainty, and which adopts a more equal partnership with child participants and non-participants.

Our discussions and comparison of experience arising from Richardson's (2019) article highlight the importance of early childhood researchers' ethical attunement, and awareness in six key areas: relationships, things, participants, communication, spaces and influences (Fig 1). In some cases, this may be through carefully observing and responding to assent or dissent expressed in different ways. In others, it may be re-examining the researchers' focus and consideration of children's experiences beyond the immediate data collection. Unlike the premeditated nature of procedural ethics, ethics 'in-situ', or everyday ethics, throw up unexpected dilemmas for the researcher as any ethical guidance or procedure is necessarily mediated by situated local and educational practices (Simons and Usher 2000). Researchers must respond promptly and in the moment. As seen in the earlier excerpts, the visceral quality of attunement, a kind of "empathic sensibility" (van Manen 2016), was essential for the researcher to read the situation, and act in that moment, in ethically thoughtful ways, for example in response to children's expressions of dissent. Inter-listening with young children, is an essential ingredient of attunement, where "listening, speaking, and thinking co-occur", and draw on non-verbal signals, to co-create understanding, (Lipari 2014, 504). Attunement relies on the relationality of everyday ethics and, we suggest, can be

improved by time to reflect, and an intention to hone our awareness. By considering the six aspects identified in our research before commencing any study with young children, and revisiting these iteratively, before during and after the process, we hope researchers may sustain an attuned professional relationship with the early childhood setting research environment and everyone in it. Attunement is indispensable for researchers in the messiness and unpredictability of everyday ethics but is not automatically achieved. As a research group we learned from sharing and reflecting on tender failures in attunement, if the early childhood research community reflects in this way whilst researching and in reporting their research, it is hoped that we can strengthen ethical research practices to respond to the unpredictability of ethics in early childhood research participation, and honour children's rights in the process.

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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Figures

Figure 1. Considerations for ethical attunement in early childhood research.