Chapter 3
Investigating Morality in Toddler's Life-Worlds

Eva Johansson

The following interaction between toddlers took place in a Swedish preschool.[1] This particular toddler group involved 16 children aged between one and three years. The children and their teachers were gathered in a large playroom. Here they could sit or jump on the two sofas, or do jigsaw puzzles or other creative activities at the tables:

> Anna (16 months) is sitting at the low table in the large playroom. She has a comforter in her mouth. Olle (18 months) comes along, looks at her and smiles. He takes the comforter out of her mouth, holds it in his hand and looks at it—still smiling. Olle's movements are gentle. Now he puts the comforter in his own mouth and takes it out again (as if he is having a taste). Anna looks at him. Then she stretches her arm out trying to capture the comforter. Olle takes a step backwards. He sucks the pacifier again for a short while. Then he takes the comforter out of his mouth, looks at it and stretches it towards Anna. A teachers come along, takes the dummy from Olle.

This excerpt raised many questions for me as a researcher, such as: How do these children experience their "wordless" interplay? What might be of importance for Olle when he takes the comforter from Anna? He uses gentle movements and he is smiling, why is it so? And what might be Anna's experiences of this kind of interaction? Is she all right with Olle using her comforter and how does she interpret Olle's intention when he stretches out the comforter after sucking it a second time? Is it possible for me as a researcher to interpret this interaction in terms of morality from the children's point of view?

What then is morality? In general terms morality deals with values and norms concerning a good life as well as how to treat others (Løgstrup, 1994). Morality

[1] This chapter involves day-care settings in Sweden and Australia. In a Swedish context, early childhood education in general is called preschool and involves children from one to five years. In an Australian context, preschool involves children from four years and early childhood education for the youngest children is often labelled "toddler group". In this text "preschool" refers to early childhood education for young children in general and involves children between one and three years in both countries.

E. Johansson (✉)
Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway
e-mail: eva.johansson@uis.no

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also involves power. According to the theory of ethics proposed by Knud Løgstrup (1994), we are given to each other, implying that power is always present in human relations. We are always locked in this relation of dependence and responsibility for the other. Moral values are here considered as qualities in social acts that children, in their relations, communicate as positive and negative, good and bad, right and wrong. The word "and" is here used to indicate that the qualities of positive and negative are not always exclusive or experienced as dichotomies. Nevertheless, values can come into conflict, which often make them visible, forcing judgments and preferences. Such values are, according to Schütz (1972), embedded in a sociocultural situation of history as a result of layers of intersubjective human experiences, of knowledge and interpretations, organized as the individual's taken-for-granted knowledge.

Two investigations of morality among children (aged 1–3 years) in different day-care contexts in Sweden and Australia are the departure for discussion. The intention was to find out values for interplay experienced and expressed by the children as intentions, meanings, judgements, wishes, desires, objections, and so on for how to act towards each other. Nineteen children in a Swedish toddler group, 10 boys and 9 girls, aged from one to three years of age, participated in one of the studies (Johansson, 1999). The daily interactions of children were video recorded across a period of 7 months. The other investigation took place in two day-care groups in Queensland, Australia (Johansson, 2009a, 2011a), and involved 19 children, 8 boys and 11 girls, 2–3 years of age. The everyday encounters between these children were video recorded for a period of 3 months. The ontological assumptions underlying these investigations were inspired by the theory of the *life-world* developed by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) and the theory about the *structure of the social world* developed by the Austrian sociologist Alfred Schütz' theory (1972). Of fundamental importance in these investigations has been the interest in understanding the youngest children's perspectives on morality.

The results from the referred investigations indicate that these young children, in very different contexts, value and protect their own and others rights (Johansson, 1999, 2009a). Furthermore, they show concern for each others' well-being. Conventional values, for example following the rules for order implemented by teachers, also became emergent in the investigations. In addition, power was given a moral value; for example, the power to assert the children's own rights but also the rights of others. Positions of power were related to age as well as physical and psychological strength.

What kind of processes and considerations lead to these conclusions and in what ways can they be said to be legitimate expressions of children's perspectives of morality? The proposition is that ontology, methodology, methods, interpretations and descriptions comprise a whole that should allow the researcher to approach young children's life-worlds and gain access to their perspectives. This is, however, a complex issue. There are lots of limitations and dilemmas to encounter as a researcher when claiming to speak in terms of children's voices, as has been the theme of this book, and certainly when these voices are, to a large extent, expressed through the body.

Life-World Theory

The theoretical framework that has influenced the investigations referred to in this discussion is, as already indicated, based on phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Schütz, 1972; Gadamer, 1996). The reason for this choice is that research within the phenomenological movement (Bengtsson, 1998) aims to understand how various phenomena in the world appear for human beings. The core idea is that objects in the world (things, events, interactions, people, culture, etc.) do not exist in themselves, but that they are phenomena and as such always appearing in some way(s) *for* someone (Husserl, 1989). Although such objects or phenomena always transcend the subject, they are present when we are born and when we die. Doing research within this tradition therefore means to try to understand how various phenomena appear for people (Bengtsson, 2007). From these thoughts we learn that getting access to the child's perspectives is a core idea in this theory. The child's perspectives can be described in terms of "that which appears" for the child, i.e., the child's experiences and expressions for meaning. Of specific interest in this discussion are following concepts drawn from the above theories: *the life-world*, *the lived body*, *intersubjectivity*, *the horizon* and *stock of knowledge*. These concepts and their relation to the actual investigations will be outlined in the following parts.

The Life-World

Two relevant questions to ask, then, are, "How can research get access to children's perspectives?" and "How can "that what appears" to the toddler appear also to the researcher?"

One precondition for getting close to the children's perspectives is our beliefs about how to understand the other. First of all, the ontological basis of *the life-world* is based on the idea that the child is a perceiving subject who is inseparable from, and in constant interaction with, the world. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes about the life-world as "that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks* . . ." (1962, p. ix). The life-world is characterized by ambiguity and is both subjective and objective at the same time. The life-world is lived and experienced, but is also taken for granted by the subject. The life-world is within us. Simultaneously it is that world towards which the subject's life is directed.

Preschool is seen here as a vital part of children's daily life and is, as such, part of the child's life-world. In preschool, children (and teachers) create a social and cultural world of taken-for-granted expectations, meanings and values that are of significance to their common life. These expectations, meanings and values are intertwined not only with society but also with children's (and teachers') various experiences in their life-worlds outside preschool.

Intersubjectivity and the Lived Body

Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes human life as intersubjective. We are intertwined in relations with other people, with culture, history and society. We are directed

towards other people, and it is through the concrete interaction with others that we are able to understand each other. According to Merleau-Ponty, we are condemned to meaning. From the beginning of life we experience and give meaning to the world. We communicate by encountering each other's worlds, by confirming or questioning each other's being. With inspiration from Schütz (1972) we learn that (inter)actions have a character of a project directed towards a goal and they are related to both past and future. The individual interprets the actions against a background of a previous stock of knowledge, i.e., layers of intersubjective human experiences, of knowledge and interpretations, organized as the individual's taken for granted knowledge. The stock of knowledge develops and changes through interactions with others (Schütz, 1972). Therefore, children's actions are understood as meaningful, and directed towards a project with a goal or goals. It is, however, important to bear in mind that even though children's (inter)actions always have a direction, this does not mean that they are necessarily consciously planned. New meanings evolve in (inter)actions, which can lead to new ways of acting, and actions might become habits since knowledge is internalised through our body, writes Merleau-Ponty (1962, pp. 142–147).

Significant in the theory of the life-world is the lived body, which is regarded as central for understanding and communication (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The other's bodily expressions, his or her gestures, emotions and words, create a whole that is possible for us to understand. This is not a question of feeling like the other; it is rather about openness towards the other's existence in the world. Still there are always parts of the other that we can neither reach nor understand, says Merleau-Ponty, since we cannot step out of our body and be the other.

> Just as the spoken word is significant not only through the medium of individual words, but also through that of accent, intonation, gesture and facial expression, and as these additional meanings no longer reveal the speaker's thoughts but the source of his thoughts and his fundamental manner of being . . . (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 151)

As per Merleau-Ponty, researchers are always part of the world they are studying, involving their various experiences, understandings and limitations. According to Schütz (1972), researchers are not only situated in the physical world of the present but also within a sociocultural history. This situation is a result of layers of intersubjective human experiences, of knowledge and interpretations, organized as the individual's taken for granted knowledge. The sociocultural situation is in one sense also the individual's disposable property since it is defined and interpreted by the individual.

The Ambiguity of Horizons

The metaphor of *the horizon* can help to visualise the complexity that is embedded in perceptions of the child's bodily being-in-the-world.[2] Hans Georg Gadamer (1996) sees the horizon as intertwined with a position from where we look:

[2] The hyphens between the words indicate that our existence in the world is impossible to reduce or to overcome (Heidegger, 1981).

> The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. . . . we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth. (Gadamer, 1996, p. 302)

The horizon is open and continually in process—yet it is related to time (history, presence and future), space (where we are) and lived body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Edmund Husserl (1989) regards the horizon as an expression of lived experience. The ways we experience the world do always have an implicit horizon, which in turn is based on our previous experiences. When experiencing horizons change, new horizons might appear, which permits new experiences and again changing horizons. What does this mean for a researcher trying to investigate young children's moral intentions?

This idea of the horizon helps us as researchers to become aware of our possibilities and limitations when searching for the young child's perspective of various phenomena in the world. In gaining insight into toddlers' perspectives of morality, the researchers' gaze and focus need to be close to the child's "horizon". This means to place oneself, literally and mentally, beside the child trying to gaze at the (same) horizon (Gadamer, 1996). Nevertheless, there will always be a distance between the child and the researcher, not least because of different lived bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). First of all, it is impossible for us to stand on exactly the same place. In addition, the researcher and the child are of different sizes. The researcher needs to kneel down beside the child to be able to come close to the child's viewpoint. Second, what we can distinguish in the horizon is intertwined with our various (both similar and different) experiences. White (2009) has argued that such a gaze is always elusive since it is influenced by the ideologies at play within the research experience. Our gaze is embedded in previous experiences, which opens up possibilities for new horizons to emerge but can also reduce the possible viewpoint (Husserl, 1989; Schütz, 1972). As time passes, new horizons will appear (Gadamer, 1996). In addition, the horizon is not static. It changes in relation to our movements and towards where we look. The horizon is always in the distance and in front of us regardless of where we head (van Peursen, 1977).

How then can horizons meet? According to Gadamer (1996), there is no such thing as one distinct horizon, since the horizon of the present is always in the process of being formed. The horizon is not only about the past and present but also about the future, representing that beyond what we can see. The horizon is embedded in layers of intersubjective human experiences, of knowledge and interpretations, organized as the individual's taken-for-granted knowledge (Schütz, 1972). This gives rise to encounters between the researcher and the young child, of both shared and disparate horizons.

Being an observer of children's interactions means per se that our horizons will always differ in one way or another. While the researcher's gaze is towards the children, the children's focus is mainly on each other. The challenge is to be bodily and mentally close to children, trying to see what they see, striving to understand their manifold communication as expressions of their life-worlds in which the researcher also takes part. Yet it is essential to be aware of the never-ending movements of our horizons and the possibilities and limitations that follow.

Application of Life-World Theory

In sum, the theory of the life-world presented here enfolds ideas about human beings and the world that informs and guides the study and the researcher's gaze. According to this theory, there are limitations in our possibilities to understand the toddler's various perspectives, intentions and expressions of meanings. The possible knowledge to reach is both complex and incomplete. We also learn from the theory that the child from the beginning of life is in communication with the world and with other people. The child experiences meaning and is able to understand other people through his or her bodily communication. Meanings are also conveyed to the child; people, places and things make references to the use and purpose of various phenomena in the world. "That which appears" (in this case moral values) for the young child is possible to be expressed (and interpreted) through the child's being, through the lived body as gestures, facial expressions, in carriage, words and emotional expressions, in a sociocultural situation and in a context in which the researcher also takes part. Yet there are always experiences impossible for children to express and for the researcher to understand. As such I argue in this chapter that it is essential for the researcher to found his or her understanding on the child's bodily being-in-the-world, when searching for children's expressions of meaning of the phenomenon at hand.

Life-world theory is therefore explorative regarding what the children may express in their interplay. Even if we search for moral aspects such as values and norms, neither content nor form of morality is given in advance. Of fundamental importance is for the researcher to create knowledge about the children's *lived* experiences of values and norms for interacting with their peers in the everyday world of preschool. The word *lived* is a metaphor to emphasize that morality is not mainly a question of critical reflection or rationality—it is lived. This relational perspective of morality is closely connected with life-world ontology. The origins of morality are considered as a result of concrete human relations experienced, expressed and negotiated in a certain time and space (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Seen in this light morality develops in concrete relations between teachers and children in their everyday life. Furthermore, children's morality is not supposed to become liberated from the context, from their own subjectivity or from the influence from adults and peers (Johansson, 1999, 2001). Although the researcher defines the goals of the study, still the studied phenomena and the meaning for the child must remain an open question.

Methodological Considerations: Creating Encounters

The philosophical perspective inspired by the life-world theory (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) creates the foundation for how to methodologically approach the studied phenomenon. The notion of the life-world helps the researcher to understand children's interactions as continuing and *lived worlds*—shared with others. In addition *the body* is pointed out as the foundation for our being in the world.

In contrast to cognitive approaches, focusing on verbal language communication now becomes broad and opens up for holistic understandings of the young child's lived and bodily expressions. This makes the theory suitable for understanding very young children since their experiences are very much expressed through body. It is also of vital importance for researchers to create lived *encounters* with children.

A Shared Life-Room

What does it mean to create *lived encounters* with children? One precondition for encounters to take place is *bodily* (where physical and mental dimensions are intertwined) *closeness* to children's interaction and their communication (Johansson, 2004). Gadamer (1996) describes this as an *intersubjective* process in which the researcher engages in dialogues with the worlds that he or she is investigating. This means moving towards the kind of perspectives that open up for the other's meaning (Gadamer, 1996). At the same time we must remember the ambiguity in our striving to come close to a child's horizon and that communication is fragile and can easily break down (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Ton Beekman (1984) challenges the researcher to create a "life room" in the settings of the study. Here the researcher must strive to create a mental and physical intersubjective space allowing for interplay between children and the researcher. With inspiration from Løgstrup (1994), we learn that people spontaneously turn to each other with trust, which imposes a demand, a moral responsibility for the other. Seen in this light, inviting children to share life-worlds and horizons with the researcher is a fragile and moral enterprise that must be built on trust and confidence. This demands both emotional and mental openness towards children's interplay and their communication (Bae, 2004; Blum, 1994; Emilson, 2008; also Stern, 2004). A mental state of totally "being there" is critical. It is fundamental to get to know the children and become accepted and involved in order to get access to the children's life-worlds. Children's (inter)actions will be interpreted but not judged by the researcher. Dialogues with children must be rooted in the children's prerequisites, experiences and understandings. In addition it is vital that the shared life-room permits children to express and defend their integrity as well as the researcher to respect to children's integrity (Johansson, 2005). The responsibility for creating this particular relation is on the researcher.

What kind of shared life-room was created in my research projects? Most often I took the position of an *interested observer* in the children's interplay (Hundeide, 2006). I would also describe my encounters with the toddlers in the various research projects in terms of being an interested and friendly—yet "different" and perhaps also a strange adult. I will come back to this.

Initially I spent time becoming familiar with what was going on in the groups. The attempt was to find out traditions for interactions, what the children (and teachers) preferred to do and spaces that they favoured. I always tried to place myself mentally and literally close to children's horizons. I usually sat on the floor, or on a small chair, close by to the children's interplay. I endeavoured to communicate my

interest in their activities, by asking for permission to be there, by watching quietly and/or enquiring the children about their ongoing activities. In this process I tried not to disturb their interaction and to be sensitive to if they wanted my presence or not. The children seemed to both acknowledge and appreciate my interest in their everyday life experiences; they approached me and invited me to look and sometimes also to take part in their activities. Some of the children extended our relation and "adopted" me. They showed that they wanted me as a friend or someone to help or play with. One of the boys in the Swedish group of children, for example, expressed his interest in different ways. He wanted to hold hands on walks and to sit beside me and he often invited me to interplay. Similar exchanges took place across in the two studies.

Communicative Artefacts—the Camera and the Chair

I video recorded interplay between children in different groups of toddlers in Sweden and Australia in order to gain insight into their perspectives of moral values. Gradually the children became more familiar with my presence. Most of the children showed interest in the camera, wanting to have a look through the lens and try the buttons. This interest was more or less frequent during different phases of the study. Some children were more concerned with what I was doing, and others expressed a certain distanced curiosity, for example, by looking at me intensively. Now and then I used a specific low chair to sit on. This chair became a focal point of shared interest between the children and me. Several times I found a girl sitting on the chair holding her hands in front of her face. I realised that she was inspired by my video recordings. Sometimes conflicts emerged between children about who had a right to sit on the chair. Both younger and older children seemed concerned with "my" chair and defended my right to sit on it, sometimes carrying it over to me. At other times a child would place a chair beside me, leaning forwards and holding toy bricks in front of her/his eyes. I used a notebook for field notes, which the children took interest in and sometimes wanted to use. They also wanted to know what I was writing. It is interesting to reflect on these moments as sharing of horizons. The artefacts became important for communication and for shared worlds.

Proximity to children's life-worlds is a matter of presence, closeness, sensitivity and respect—and this requires time. Spending and sharing time with children is fundamental to create a life-room with children, get to know them and become worthy of their confidence. Encountering children's life-worlds is not only about trust and closeness but also about sharing the researcher's own life-world with them (Beekman, 1984).

Closeness and Distance

I have described my encounters with the toddlers in terms of being an interested and friendly—yet "different" and perhaps also a strange—adult. The reason for this description is that both closeness and distance are dimensions of importance in

research with young children. I was both close to and distanced from the children's lives. What does this mean?

First of all, closeness and trust between the researcher and children are gifts to respect and care for and preconditions for doing this research. Nevertheless, it is a dilemma encountering children's life-worlds with your own, trying to understand the ongoing communication *and* to uphold a certain necessary distance as a researcher. Encounters with children should allow possibilities both "to understand" and "to explain" (Ricoeur, 1971, 1988). This implies being close to children but also a reflexive distance to be able "to see". Gadamer (1996) describes this as play between strangeness and familiarity in a hermeneutic research process. Temporal distance is a productive condition, enabling understanding. It is a constant movement and extension that will make conscious the prejudices governing our own understanding.

Second, the dilemma of closeness and distance is even more complex, particularly in a study where the interest is on events characterized by conflict and sometimes also by humiliations. The balance between approaching the children and respecting their communication and reactions to my presence is also delicate. It is important that children have the ability to possess power and also to resist the researcher's presence. This happened rather seldom during my investigations, yet there were situations when the children refused or avoided my presence by, for example, moving to another room. It is important to reflect on how the children might experience the researcher (Christensen, 2004). The shared life-room between the children and me seemed to be slightly different in relation to the different children and the interplay that we created together but also the various phases of the research project. Let us now have a look at children's ideas about the researcher and how to present themselves for the researcher.

Children's Awareness of the Researcher

An interesting discovery for me was the fact that the children reflected on what I might want from them and that I was observing them. This refers to what Hundeide (1989, p. 115; also Schütz, 1972) talks about as "the why of the situation". This means that children, regardless of their young age, give meaning to the situation, what is expected from them and how to present themselves in relation to the researcher. The children in my investigations showed their awareness of my presence as an observer and of their own behaviour. The following example is collected from the Australian study (Johansson, 2009a):

> Some of the boys in the toddler-group are playing on the slide. They climb on the slide, slide down and climb up again. They laugh while climbing. One of the girls comes along and climbs up. The boys protest loudly, they want her to go away: "It's only boys. Go!" they shout in chorus. They reiterate their message several times. "It's only boys. Go away!" One of the boys continues to shout at the girl with his face close to hers: "Go!" His tone of voice is accusing. "No," says the girl firmly and remain sitting on the top of the slide. Suddenly the boy changes his attitude. He stretches his hand towards her face and gently he caresses her cheek: "I am using gentle hands. I am using gentle hands," he says softly.

> The he climbs down goes up to me the observer and says: "I am using gentle hands. I am using gentle hands." He sounds satisfied and climbs up the slide again. Meanwhile the girl has left the slide.

From this example it is striking that this two-year-old boy certainly was concerned with my presence and that he wanted to present himself in best possible ways for me. He even bothers to climb down from the slide and describe his actions—seemingly assuring himself that I have understood his intentions correctly.

It has often been claimed in research that children quickly forget about the camera and the researchers gaze (see, for example, Johansson, 1999; Heikkilä and Sahlström, 2003). This idea needs to be nuanced. The above-mentioned example implies that on the one hand children are aware of themselves being observed and that they also relate to this kind of situation. This illustrates that children possess power *and* make choices for how to approach the researcher. On the other hand, children seem to be more open minded and relaxed in relation to being observed as compared to adults. Sometimes they also seemed to both ignore and forget my presence.

Becoming Exposed

Emotional and mental presence has been proposed as perquisites for getting access to children's life-worlds (Emilson, 2008). It is, however, not obvious that the researcher will get access to children's life-worlds just because he or she is present, writes Davis (1998). As already suggested, there are lots of limitations for a researcher when claiming to present the voices of young children. Not least due to the fact that children's perspectives are multiple, and their lifeworlds are both ambiguous and full of nuances (Johansson, 2001, 2003, 2011b).

In addition, proximity to children's life-worlds is not always positive from a child's point of view. A camera can easily be experienced as a threat to integrity. Young children are in a subordinated position to adults. They have few possibilities to question the researcher's interpretations and maintain their own integrity. It is therefore essential that the researcher shows respect and consideration for the child's integrity. The dilemma is complex particularly in a study where the researcher's gaze is directed towards events characterized by conflict where humiliations sometimes are inevitable. Therefore, the presence of the researcher, from a child's viewpoint, is not always welcomed. Sensitivity for the child's integrity and how the methods used by the researcher might affect the child is fundamental when one is claiming to understand the child's perspectives. The dilemma is complex since transgressions of integrity often become visible for us only after they have happened (Johansson, 2005). Continuous reflexivity is critical in every phase of the study to help researcher to be more sensitive to situations where encounters are fraught with difficulty or humiliation, which is sometimes the case when groups of very young children are together in social settings (Larsson, 2005).

Doing research on moral issues in children's life-worlds is about experiences (the child's and the researcher's) of good and bad, positive and negative, right and

wrong. Children (just as adults) both support and humiliate each other (Johansson, 1999). Power is an important dimension in toddler's life-worlds and their morality (Johansson, 2006; Löfdahl & Hägglund, 2006). In order to gain insight into children's perspectives of moral values, I have video recorded events where children might have experienced a loss of dignity. I have observed children hurting and insulting each other (but also how they support and comfort each other). A central question to ask is when to stop the camera and to interfere in children's interplay. In some cases I did—in many others I did not. From the beginning I was very clear in encouraging the teachers to interact and interfere as they normally do. In certain situations I realised that a child needed support from adults. Therefore, I told the other children to get help from their teacher. My ambition was not to interfere. The bases for this decision were several: first of all, to be able to keep on the investigation, second, I wanted to avoid judging the children's interplay and third, I wanted to avoid being an "ordinary" teacher for the children. The decision was not easy, and I often reflected on my role as an adult in the group of children and what this role might have contributed to with respect for moral issues. Let us now look at one example from the Swedish group of toddlers (Johansson, 1999):

> Emma (32 months) closes the door to the doll room. Josefine (41 months), Lisa (32 months), Per (34 months) and Sebastian (19 months) are with her in the room. Per is sitting on the mattress. The girls are jumping around and singing. Per walks over to Sebastian who is standing by the door and taps him on the head saying nicely, "He can be in here," Per repeats, "He can be in here." But the girls object. Then Per taps Sebastian again and says (more determined now): "You can't be in here. Go out." Then Per's voice changes and he screams, "Pang! Pang! Pang!" Sebastian complains a few times, turning around, looking at the others and out the window in the door. Per sits down on the mattress and asks the girls: "Should we pang at him?" "Yes," answers Emma and follows Per to the door. They "pang" towards Sebastian and the children outside. Emma opens the door. "Go out," she says to Sebastian in a decided tone. He goes out. Per follows him. "Out!" he says, pushing Sebastian in front of him.

A multiple set of values and dimensions occur in this interaction. On the one hand, Per seems to understand and consider Sebastian's perspective. Per shows sympathy and concern for his younger friend. The value of care is expressed in Per's whole bodily being, in gestures, tone of voice and words. On the other hand, the relation with his friends of same playgroup and same age seems more important. Per does not get approval from the others for his idea to let Sebastian remain in the room. This seems to lead Per to change his mind and his attitude towards Sebastian. A possible interpretation is that it is more attractive to play with friends of similar age group than to play with younger children. From approaching Sebastian with a friendly tone of voice and gentle gestures, Per now adopts a more distant and powerful attitude. He participates with the others in defending the right to the play and to keep the younger ones outside. Sebastian is pushed out of the room. The value of rights seems now to be prevailing.

The value of power also comes into sight in this interaction. Per (and later Emma) push and scream at Sebastian. First of all, the strength in Per's actions towards Sebastian might be inspired by the others' presence. The studies referred to earlier showed in various ways that sharing of worlds seemed to give children

strength. Second, children seem to prefer to play with children with more influence than others or themselves. Children can give up an agreement to play if this wins them permission to share worlds with friends in a more powerful position. These dimensions of power are probably also involved in this interaction. It seems important for Per to get approval from the others on how to act.

The children in these investigations show, in various ways, that their relations do not always build on equality in position (Johansson, 1999, 2009b). Being quick, strong and older provide power and can also result in certain privileges and rights. The children seem to possess a lived awareness that their rights are related to power. Hierarchical positions restrain negotiations of rights between children because the agreements are already settled. Towards some friends there is no use in defending or negotiating for asserting rights. Sometimes rights and sharing worlds with others belong to certain children because of their position.

Dimensions of Good and Bad

The interaction above is about dimensions of good and bad in children's life-worlds. First of all, Sebastian (but also Per) is in a vulnerable situation. Because of his position as younger, smaller and powerless compared with the others, it seems difficult for Sebastian to assert any rights. His possible choices of actions seem restricted. His existence in the group relies on the benevolence and decisions by the others. Second, Per also appears to be in a dilemma and his possible choices of action seem limited. Because of his desire to share worlds with others, he is constrained by their decision. This is essential knowledge about young children's moral lives and preconditions for their very existence. If the existential wish to share worlds with others means that children first of all adapt to others, it is easy to imagine that this might be a serious impending moral dilemma. We can also notice that Lisa and Josephine remain in the background and their intentions are difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, this encounter implies that there is a risk that some children from a very young age become a tool for others' wishes. Do we as researchers (and teachers) dare to see this and to relate to this dilemma? Exclusion of such information, in my understanding, is to reduce the complexity of young children's lived worlds. Describing ambiguities such as both positive and negative dimensions in the life-worlds of children is the responsibility of the researcher and is therefore a different role from the teacher who possesses a (normative) responsibility to interfere in children's encounters.

All the same, the dilemma is complex. When situations where young children are in a vulnerable position are being observed and described, the researcher needs to carefully reflect on the extent to which this event might contribute in important ways to knowledge about children. Constituting closeness with children's life-worlds also means letting oneself become exposed. This implies scrutinizing what you take for granted and the encounters with children that you are contributing to or hindering as a researcher. "Hiding" behind a camera without interfering in children's interplay contributes in one way or another to the interaction going on. The ambiguity in

creating encounters with children is both fundamental and delicate. The dilemma is that research is also a matter of (analytical) distance from children in order to be able to see and understand. There is constant need for a dialectical shift between closeness and distance throughout the research process. I tried to capture both good and bad in children's life-worlds at the same time as reflecting about my responsibility as a researcher and showing respect for the participants in the investigation. This is a difficult position—being an interested and friendly, yet "different" and perhaps also a strange, adult.

My proposition is, however, that ambiguity and complexity, involving dimensions of good and bad in children's life-worlds are important to observe and describe. If not, important knowledge will be lost, and the complexity in children's life-worlds is reduced. The ethical responsibility to respect children's integrity, in this regard, relies heavily on the researcher.

Analysing Life-Worlds: Hermeneutic Interpretations of Moral Interactions

The methodology is inspired by hermeneutics where understanding is thought to be reached through interpretation (Heidegger, 1981). The assumption is that understanding rests upon the historical situation where the person is situated in and her/his previous understanding, including knowledge, as well as her/his pre-judgments (Gadamer, 1996; Heidegger, 1981). Understanding involves creating and recreating the studied phenomenon, which also means that the researcher describes something *as* something: "To understand a text is to follow its movement from sense to reference, from what it says, to what it talks about" (Ricoeur, 1971, p. 558). This dialectic relation between "to understand" and "to explain" has been described by Ricoeur (1988, pp. 29–77). In the process of *understanding*, the aim is to recreate and interpret *children's actions* in terms of their meanings and intentions for interactions in the context of preschool (van Manen, 1990). These meanings are related to a situation and a lived world. The children's interactions are interpreted as their voices and their perspectives of positive and negative, good and bad, right and wrong regarding their own and others actions. In the process of *explaining*, it is essential to try to *clarify relations*, similarities and differences in the children's interplay and to do this in a way that makes moral values visible in a holistic way. The "whole" possesses a potential (power) of meanings beyond the parts but is closely related to them. Meanings are interpreted in a given context, and they are interconnected with preschool as a cultural and social world. Through this the researcher is able to say something about a moral world created by the children where their actions are *explained* as *moral values* and *norms*. This means that children's actions encompass a meaning beyond their intention with the action. The researcher is trying to recreate what children's actions can inform about moral values. Ricoeur also labels this phase as innovative. This creative phase demands both distance and critical analyses (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 59).

Initially all encounters in data were examined to identify *ethical situations*. An ethical situation always involves interplay, which supported or opposed the child's own or the other's interest, wishes or well-being. Ethical situations often involved value conflicts and negotiations about values or norms for behaviour. The analysis involved finding structures and relations within and between all the ethical situations. The children's actions were interpreted against the background of the situation and the entire data material, in other words all ethical situations. Themes were generated that represented meanings of children's actions towards each other, as *moral values*. Finally the themes were analysed with respect to ethical theories, earlier research within the field, and to theoretical concepts. This dialectical movement between "to understand" and "to explain", as the hermeneutic circle, worked together during the whole process of interpretation. To understand the whole you need to consider the parts; yet there could be little understanding of the parts without considering the whole.

Recreating Ethical Situations

Let us now look at an example of an interaction in the Swedish group of toddlers. What is characterizing the descriptions of interplay? How can this interplay be fruitfully interpreted as expressions for moral meanings?

First of all, the description below is not a pure description—it is an interpretation and a recreation of an (frozen) interaction at a certain time involving young children, their teacher and a researcher in the context of a certain preschool (Ricoeur, 1971). The following example is presented with a *short introduction* of the central issues, followed by the description (ethical situation) and a more detailed *interpretation*:

When a friend acts in a way distinct from what he or she usually does, the children seem to understand that something might be wrong (Johansson, 1999). In these situations the children can show concern and interest, eagerly looking at the other seemingly trying to understand what has happened:

> Emma (32 months), Olle (22 months) and Björn (22 months) are bathing in the plastic tub in the washroom. The children are playing vigorously in the water. Björn puts his face in the water, sits up, and puts his hands up to his eyes. "Did you get some water in your eyes, Björn?" asks the adult. Olle and Emma stop their play and watch Björn. Emma pulls Björn's hands away from his face. "Peek," she says with a light and encouraging tone of voice. The adult rebukes her. Björn puts his hands up to his face again. He sits still and quiet. Then Olle leans towards Björn with his head to one side, saying "Peek, peek-a-boo," and laughing. Emma starts to play with the water again and Olle joins her. Björn sits for a while with his hands to his face. Eventually he drops his hands, but continues to sit still, looking serious. Olle looks at him again, leans forward with his head to one side and says with an eager voice: "Peek."

The teacher announces that Björn might have water in his eyes. Maybe she inspires Emma and Olle to become interested in Björn's predicaments. Nevertheless, the children seem to be captured by a lived experience of their friend's abrupt and existential change. Suddenly Björn becomes motionless and quiet, covering his eyes with his hands. The minute before he was joyfully playing in the water and now his whole body being seems transformed. He remains still and silent. The other children

gaze intensively at him, seemingly trying to understand what has happened. The children's bodily communication implies that they realise that something in this situation (with Björn) is wrong.

The interplay seems to challenge children's involvement in the other's situation. Through this we can learn that unexpected and surprising events can inspire children to strategies aiming to change the situation and the other's experience. Emma tries to communicate with Björn: "Peek" she says with an enthusiastic tone of voice. She pulls his hands from his face. Emma's interaction implies that she experiences that something is wrong with Björn. She tries in a playful manner to create contact and cheer him up. Olle also communicates with Björn. "Peek, peek-a-boo," he says. He sounds eager, and he laughs. Olle's intention seems to be to change the situation, to make Björn happy and become involved in the play all over again. With his bodily being (leaning his head, closely gazing at Björn and a happy tone of voice), Olle communicates concern for Björn.

The example allows for important insights in young children's moral life. Values of concern for others' well-being seem to be communicated between the children. It might be the very existence of their peer that captures the children and inspires them to act in order to support their friend. Both children show responsiveness to Björn's situation. They communicate that they want to change the situation and make their friend happy and "as usual" again. Trying to create contact and involve the other in play is such a strategy.

Consideration When Recreating the Interactions

What is important to consider when recreating the interactions? To begin with respect for children's integrity is fundamental in all phases of the investigations. The descriptions need to be carefully worked through and children respectfully described. My claim is that these situations should be and can be interpreted from the perspectives of all children involved in the interactions. The concepts drawn from the theory of the life-world served as tools for descriptions and analyses, for example, the *complexity of the lifeworld*, *the lived body*, *intersubjectivity*, *meanings* and *horizons.*

I have tried to look upon and describe the interactions as a whole—as a *lived meaningful world* (van Manen, 1990). This makes the descriptions more or less look like narratives. The example above is a short narrative illustrating an ethical event, trying to capture the essential meaning expressed by the children from the beginning to the end. Children's interplay is described in a straightforward manner without valuing their interaction. (This does not hinder a critical discussion of moral intentions and meanings in the context of preschool and in relation to previous research and theories of moral development.)

Moreover, these descriptions of events need to take into account the *children's bodily being* and communication. In the above-mentioned example, several references are made to children's bodily being, their gestures, tone of voice and gaze. This demands multiple reconstructions of the events. The choices of words to

describe this event needs to be both *rich* and *solid* to recreate what is going on (van Manen, 1990). The researcher makes these choices. This is an extremely delicate process that takes a lot of time and effort. Becoming familiar with the totality of data as well as the parts was critical to be able to recognize similarities and differences of the situations and the children's various experiences and expressions. The researcher has to repeatedly look at the videos, trying to find meaning (van Manen, 1990) and discover what the situation is all about from the perspectives of the involved children, listening to the children's voices, looking at gestures, words, emotional expressions, and so on. I tried as much as possible to quote children's expressions. This was a decision based on two motives. On the one hand, the choice was ethical and aimed to show respect and give room for these young children's particular ways of communicating. On the other hand, it was also a choice to allow for meanings based on the children's premises where content and ways of expressions are regarded as a whole. I also aimed to try to recreate emotional expressions and shifts in the interactions. This was certainly of interest in the earlier example since the emotional shift seemed to be of specific importance to these children. I struggled a lot in how to describe gestures, movements, etc. The issue was to capture lived interactions and not to fall into a trap of behaviouristic descriptions. This meant to give voice to young children involving the wholeness of their interaction and their existence. Constantly I reminded myself that all *intentions are not possible for children to express* nor are they possible to interpret.

In the process of interpretation, recapturing the lived experience of sharing a *lived room* with the toddlers is important (Beekman, 1984). Looking at the videos took me back again to the interactions and gave me a sense of "being there" (Emilson, 2008). The ability to return to the field notes is also supportive. In field notes the researcher's lived experiences of the situation is described, using key words documenting experiences of significance, etc. In my field book I described the above-mentioned situation as surprising, and the emotional character shifted from joy to seriousness. In the above-mentioned example it was essential to try to capture and describe the emotional shift in the children's interactions.

During the whole analytic process I have used *alternative interpretations* (Ödman, 1979). This means that the researcher tries to offset their own interpretations by asking counter questions. This strategy helped me to new interpretations. Repeatedly looking at the videos led to new insights. Nevertheless, I have left some interactions without asserting one single interpretation. We can notice this in the interpretations in the earlier statement: "Maybe she inspires Emma and Olle to become interested in Björn's predicaments." Such reservations allows for alternative interpretations of children's interactions. As a researcher you have to come to reasonable (reliable) conclusions about the research phenomenon and you also need to argue for the relevance of those conclusions (Larsson, 2005). This means that the interpretations must be justified through coherence and logic between the parts and the whole of the data. Internal logic means that interpretations are not allowed to be in disagreement. External logic means that interpretations and data are related, well founded and supported in the totality of the empirical data (Ödman, 1979). It is also critical that the interpretations seem logic to the

reader. The importance in hermeneutics is, however, to admit that *research is about interpretations* and not about the truth (Heidegger, 1981). Accepting interpretation as way to understand also means to approve to the idea that a phenomenon can be interpreted differently. There is always someone behind the interpretations.

Initially the descriptions were extremely long and detailed narratives that covered several pages. To make these narratives readable, it was necessary to *condense the text without reducing the complexity of life-worlds*. This complex step was taken later in the process of analyses, when the conclusions were more or less settled. The description presented above was recreated over and over again with the aim to show important and lived moral dimensions in these children's life-worlds. It was also important that the narratives could say something about relations, differences and similarities on moral dimensions beyond the children's intentions. In this process, references to ethical theories, previous research and implications for practice were of importance.

Getting Close to Children's Horizons—Knowledge, Power and Responsibilities

In this chapter I have discussed conditions for doing research with the youngest children in preschool. The life-world ontology has been proposed as useful when creating knowledge about the lives of very young children and in claiming to speak in terms of children's voices. Certain concepts described in this ontology (the life-world, the lived body, the horizons and intersubjectivity) have been suggested as helpful perceptual tools for the researcher's gaze and for the methodology as well as for the descriptions and interpretations of young children's interplay. Through the life-world theory it can be established that morality *may* be seen as a part of young children's lives and also that children possess ability to experience and express moral values in their interaction and through their bodies. It is, however, important to remember the ambiguity, complexity and learning aspects of these experiences. Getting close to children's horizons is a complex issue, surrounded with ambiguities to encounter. This is certainly the case when children's voices are, to a large extent, expressed through body and the phenomenon is about toddlers' views on morality.

Doing research with the youngest children in early childhood settings demands from the researcher both specific knowledge and specific ethical responsibility. Conditional to research of this nature is knowledge about children, how to communicate with children and how the research process might open up for or hinder encounters with children. This is also a matter of power. Davis (1998; also Farrell, 2005) proposes that it is the researcher's responsibility to empower children in research. In line with Løgstrup (1994) I suggest that power is communicated in all intersubjective processes but is certainly more complicated in research with toddlers. First of all, young children have limited opportunity to insight in the consequences of investigations and their participation. They have limited (although not infinite) admission (possibility) to claim their own integrity and their own interpretations in relation to the researcher. Even though young children possess

power, they may refuse to participate and claim their integrity. In such cases it is up to the researcher to be open to and respect this kind of communication. Notwithstanding can the issue of (sharing) power be taken for granted. It is not evident that research involving children's perspectives asserts power to children. This demands a critical discussion about what power is and what kind of power children can have in the research process.

Through a life-world phenomenology, the complexity of young children's perspectives grounded in their various life-worlds is important to describe. On the one hand, the life-world is related to the experiencing subject. On the other hand, the life-world is social and shared with others. The life-world is in process—we are simultaneously situated in history, in the present and in the future. The research presented here indicates that morality is an important part of these young children's life-worlds; they seem deeply engaged in moral issues, show concern for each other, defend their own and others rights and use power to both support and humiliate each other. We must also remember the complexity of the child's (and the researcher's) morality and that all moral dimensions are neither possible for children to express nor possible for the researcher to understand. It is a huge challenge for researchers with an interest in the youngest participants in the educational system to carefully scrutinize how and in what way very young children's voice can be heard and adequately interpreted in research.

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Commentary to Eva Johansson: "Investigating Morality in Toddler's Life-Worlds"

Gloria Quiñones

The philosophical underpinnings of this chapter are based on moral dimensions: how they are experienced and expressed by young children and how Eva investigated these with young children. Morality is portrayed in the chapter in terms of the values and norms associated with how we treat others—our acts, relationships and communication. This chapter provides an opportunity to consider the researcher role accordingly.

Eva uses the ontological concepts inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty of *lifeworlds* and Alfred Schütz's theory of *the social world* in everyday encounters with young children while video recording them. The theoretical concept that I found very interesting and that appears throughout the chapter was *the child's perspective*. According to Eva this was understood through an interpretation of the child's lived experience and expressions, which gives meaning to the idea of morality.

As Eva defines it, the life world is concerned with the ways in which the young child perceives the world and how the life-world is both subjective and objective. As such, the world overrides the subject—yet is lived and experienced *by* the child. I found this idea relevant to my own work on *vivencia*s since the subjective lived emotional experiences of the child were also central to my inquiry. It seems that, regardless of what philosophical stand we take, ideas of the researcher and the researched *merge* when we are committed to finding ways of giving meaning, understanding and interpretation to the young child's experience.

Eva comments that the ontology of life-world relates to how we develop knowledge about the world as such about things, events, interactions and people. In her research emphasis is placed on the child's perspective, including the child's experiences and expressions of meaning, and how this is understood through philosophical interpretations of *the lifeworld*, lived body, *intersubjectivity* and *horizon*.

According to Eva the life-world is therefore subjective and ambiguous. Through intersubjectivity the "other" is always present in how we, as researchers, make meaning of the young child's world through the child's expression, gestures, emotions and communication. Eva reminds us that it is not just that these experiences and expressions are visible in the physical world but that they are also evident in the intersubjective human experience. Paying attention to experience reveals the ways in which the individual makes sense of and interprets his or her world.

The philosophical orientation towards notions of being and interpreting the life-world bears synergy with the dialectical relationships found

in *perezhivanie—vivencia*. The lived, ongoing emotional experiences in cultural-historical theory are also central to inquiry. The child and the researcher and those around them are seen in both approaches as offering important clues about how the child is experiencing aspects of life. In our research these were focussed on homework, while in Eva's study episodes of right or wrong are under scrutiny. The way to understand the child, it seems then, is how we as researchers understand him or her subjectively by interpreting these lived experiences that we have the privilege to be part of through the research encounter.

Another philosophical idea that I found important when researching with young children was the idea of the *horizon*—what a beautiful word to express the child and the researcher "being-in-the-world". This is a strong position for theorising and unites the child and researcher's world while, at the same time, signalling difference. As the child gets closer to the researcher, the researcher gets closer to the child. This closeness creates familiarity yet the researcher is, at the same time, a stranger.

The idea of body size in the *horizon* is inspiring for researchers of very young children to think about, as it introduces the idea that the child and the researcher "share a life-room", which brings this intersubjective interplay between the researcher and the child. This is important in understanding the child while observing or filming because the researcher is encouraged to recognise the fact that they and their research subjects are being together in the world of the toddler. This idea of how *horizons* meet, theorized by Eva, encourages researchers to consider how "both shared and disparate horizons" are present in the process of researching with toddlers.

I think there is a lot of potential in the idea Eva introduces related to the concept of *manifold*. Here she seems to suggest that the child's perspective is simultaneously concerned with mind, body and life-worlds. In accepting this notion the researcher needs to find ways of increasing her awareness of the young child's communication as expressions of meanings and life-worlds. Eva suggests, and indeed demonstrates, that this manifold process needs to be taken into account at all the phases of the researcher process—during, in and after the researcher leaves the field:

> It is essential for the researcher to found his or her understanding on the child's bodily being-in-the-world, when searching for children's expressions of meaning of the phenomenon at hand.

For Eva, then, it is critical to consider the child's body as a means of expression, particularly when researching the young child. This tenet echoes with the research described by Marilyn and myself, but for Eva the researcher is invited to consider their activity a *moral* enterprise rather than merely a means of gathering data. The researcher therefore relies on his/her own interpretations of the "child's bodily being-in-the-world"—not as truth, but

as an intersubjective phenomenon. Thus to study "morality" also relies on the meaning the researcher gives to what the child is communicating and expressing through "lived body as gestures, facial expressions, words and emotional expressions".

The concept of *shared life-room* unites the idea of creating an "intersubjective space" between children and the researcher, emotionally, mentally and physical. This is important when being with the young child as it becomes an integral and moral endeavour! As this evolves, it unfolds throughout all the phases of the research design. I think Eva has strongly demonstrated her research directions in the "shared a life-room" with young children through being interested not only in her research intentions but also with those of the children. Being present in the everyday lives of children demands the researcher consider all these interrelationships.

A question that came to my mind on reading this chapter was how we might resolve the dilemma of the researcher's power and influence in research. Eva draws on an example in which the researcher's presence and his awareness of the researcher caused a toddler to change his attitude to another child playing with him on the slide. At first, the toddler didn't want the girl to climb the slide, but when he is aware of the researcher's interest, he changes his attitude. I wonder how we are able to interpret those meanings and how we sense this change of attitude? This and other similar examples are discussed in light of the importance of the researcher's intervention (intentionally or otherwise) in the life-world of the young child, and the implications of this. These are moments when the researcher needs to be sensitive both with the child and with the research goals. As Eva explains, being *sensitive* is essential and the field decisions that are taken, as a result of such insights, are important. For example, the researcher needs to choose when to stop the camera or indeed if stopping the camera is desirable. I find this very important for researchers to take into account when they are "new" to or not familiar with video-observing methodologies.

Overall, I felt that Eva was able to show the complexities in understanding the young child and the researcher being together with children throughout all the phases of the research process—being in the field, leaving the field and making meaning of the interactions between children. When recreating the interactions I could imagine the situation because Eva's descriptions of events were detailed. Being familiar with the data is essential to understanding the child. Eva reminds us of this:

> Becoming familiar with the totality of data as well as the parts was critical to be able to recognize similarities and differences of the situations and the children's various experiences and expressions.

Familiarity with the data is essential for any researcher. However, the reporting of bodily expressions is always constructed by the researcher and

then by the reader who imagines these situations. Eva's careful and detailed recreation of the events and the interactions offers an example of how this might be possible in ways that respond to her moral entreaty.

There are commonalities throughout our research with young children—such as remaining close to what we lived and trying to understand the young child both ethically and respectfully while being sensitive to interpretations of expression and communication. I think Eva has portrayed this complexity not only from the child's perspective but also from that of the researcher both in the field and after the field. This is especially true when understanding and analysing data while remaining morally responsible and maintaining the "lived approval" from the children while observing them.

I enjoyed and learnt from this chapter. As a result I am inspired to be morally responsive and astutely aware of myself as influential when video observing when relating with children and, most importantly, in maintaining a respectful stance towards the young child in research.