

NEW ZEALAND JOURNAL OF INFANT AND TODDLER EDUCATION

# *The first years*

*Ngā Tau Tuatahi*



2023  
Volume 25  
Issue 1

# The *firstyears*

Ngā Tau Tuatahi

New Zealand Journal of Infant and Toddler Education

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ISSN: 1175-0529

## Waiata / Song

### Hutia Te Rito

Hutia te rito  
Hutia te rito o te harakeke  
Kei hea te kōmako e kō  
Kī mai ki ahau  
He aha te mea nui  
He aha te mea nui o te ao  
Māku e kī atu  
He Tangata, He Tangata  
He Tangata Hi

Pluck the Baby (of a flax bush)

Pluck the baby  
Pluck the baby of the flaxbush  
Where will the bellbird sing  
You ask me  
What is the greatest thing  
What is the greatest thing in the world  
I will tell you  
Tis People! Tis People  
Tis People

Adapted by Rose Pere





# Relooking at photography use in early childhood education and care in Aotearoa New Zealand

BY DR REBECCA HOPKINS

(peer reviewed)



Making “learning visible” through the use of photographs in assessment and documentation is an established and encouraged practice in early childhood education enabled through the accessibility of digital technologies and platforms. Yet, there has been very little guidance or critical discussion about photographing young children for pedagogical purposes. This article draws on theories and histories of photography to reveal and problematise issues of power and ethical tensions in the use of photographs and explores the possibilities for developing an ethics of engagement while using pedagogic photography.

The use of photography in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Aotearoa New Zealand is an everyday practice. Photographs are taken of children and then used in assessment and documentation of learning. Taking photographs of children to make their “learning visible” (Ministry of Education|Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga [MoE], 2017, p. 63) has become a normalised and common practice. New technologies have progressively made visual documentation easier to produce through personal computers, printers, digital cameras, smart phones, and digital platforms. With increased use of photographs for pedagogical purposes comes increased photography of children. This article looks to the history and theories of photography, and so provides a different way to see early childhood teachers’ use of the photograph in Aotearoa.

To do so, I draw on research undertaken while writing my doctoral thesis *The Photograph, Flusser, and Early Childhood Education* (Hopkins, 2019). The thesis made an argument for critical analysis of photography use in ECEC and advocated for development of an ethics of engagement when photographing young children. This article will discuss that position, while considering the photography of infants and toddlers in ECEC. Internationally, scholars have raised concerns that the increased visibility of children “through documentation affects children and childhood” (Lindgren, 2012, p. 330) and that the possibility of power inequality between the photographer-teacher and the photographed child perpetuates power imbalances (Flannery Quinn & Manning, 2013).

When I was a child, I was told that “children should be seen and not heard”. Mostly this was with a humorous bent, but nevertheless it made me aware of the power relationships that existed between adults and children. This saying will be used here to explore the photograph’s use in making children visible and the power at play when children are photographed for this pedagogical work. The silencing of children, while perhaps not intentional, can occur when children become the subject or object of pedagogical documentation (Hopkins, 2019). This unwanted consequence is not in alignment with the aspiration of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) that children are listened to and are empowered through their early learning. To examine this tension, I re-look at

children’s participation in documentation and assessment through the following questions and the notion of “the image of the child” (Hopkins, 2019, p. 224):

- Do I really know that children want to be photographed for documentation and assessment?
- How can I tell? Did I ask them?
- Can children access their learning stories without my help?

## Overview of Thesis

My PhD research began by examining the history of photography and the photograph and then moved to questioning the production and consumption of photographs in ECEC in Aotearoa. The research used philosophy as method to engage with the thinking of the research (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015) and to refocus on and review the normalised use of photographs in assessment and documentation. Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2015) see this method as an “engagement, an ethical relationship with thought” (p. 617). I sought to develop new ways of thinking about photography and argued an ethics of pedagogic photography must go beyond concerns of privacy, surveillance, and consent, to also consider questions pertaining to the power of apparatus behind information creation. Apparatus is used here as an “overarching term for a non-human agency” (Flusser, 1983/2000, p. 83). Looking outside of the field of ECEC, I found the work of philosopher and media theorist Vilém Flusser to offer new ways of thinking about photography and the use of the photographic image.

Flusser’s (1986, 1983/2000, 1985/2011, 1983/2013) work offered provocative arguments and a way to think about the upsurge of photographic images in the latter part of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Flusserian concepts significant to the thesis were: apparatus, information, technical image, abstraction, program, and freedom. Pedagogic photography was examined through the constructs of camera-apparatus, archive-apparatus, and state-apparatus. Digital cameras, storage platforms, and national curriculum frameworks play a significant role in how pedagogical knowledge (photographs of children learning)

is produced—these “apparatus” have an agentive power that produces photographs in certain ways (see Flusser, 1983/2000; Gunn & Reeves, 2019; Hopkins, 2019). My thesis problematised the use of images in teaching and learning in early years educational settings by asking if photographing children was in their best interests (Hopkins, 2019). In this article, I focus on one aspect of this larger project by problematising the idea that children want to participate in assessment and documentation.

Looking beyond concerns of privacy, surveillance, and consent, the research questioned how and why photographs were made, by who, and what forces were at play in the selection and sharing of information creation through pedagogic photography. To answer these questions, a critical multimodal discourse analysis (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2012; Rose, 2001) of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996, 2017) and the Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars (MoE, 2004–2009) were completed. Critical multimodal discourse analysis asks how “knowledge” is “produced, shaped and constituted distinctly in different modes; and by whom” (Kress, 2012, p. 38). So, the focus is on meaning, meaning making, agency and purpose, and the ideological and discursive—and is inclusive of multiple modes. These documents are at the crux of how teachers teach in Aotearoa, and therefore are key influences in how photography is used pedagogically. Analysis focused on how photography use was positioned within the documents for use by early childhood teachers.

### The Use of Photography in ECEC in Aotearoa

In learning story assessment, photographs are valued for the visibility they give to stories and their audiences (Carr, 2001). Mitchell’s (2008) study showed that 96% of early childhood teachers surveyed in 2007 used photographs to gather data about children’s learning. Digital technology has, as noted by Carr and Lee (2012), influenced the ways teachers write learning stories, so that they are “often, now, image based” (p. 113). Digital platforms, now commonly used in teachers’ pedagogical work, such as Storypark or Educa, provide teachers with the technology to easily unload photographic images into cloud-based storage. The recent refresh of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) called for increased use of multimedia documentation for assessment.

However, while early childhood assessment practice quickly absorbed digital visual technologies (Carr et al., 2003; Carr & Lee, 2012; Lee, 2002), it has been argued policy guiding teachers’ assessment practices lacks critical discussion of photograph use (Hopkins, 2019; Perkins, 2009, 2012). Although Carr (1998) emphasised a need for continued professional development for teachers to use learning stories as a method of assessment, there has been a lack of ongoing governmental support to the sector, resulting in limited professional development on assessment at a national level (Cameron et al., 2016).

Photography and the photograph have a troubled past, emerging from scientific discourses and unequal power relations between photographer and those photographed (Kind, 2013; Sontag, 1977; Sturken & Cartwright, 2018). Historical knowledge of photography and photograph use is important for teachers in ethical use of photography. Historically, the photograph has been used by the medical, biological, and social sciences to record and produce catalogues of human beings (Sturken & Cartwright,

2009) and the physical world at large (Blouin & Rosenberg, 2006; Daston & Galison, 2007). The use of photography during the 19th century in institutions which “documented and classified ... stemmed in part from an emerging understanding ... that classificatory systems could be used as a means of social organization and control” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009, p. 357). The use of the photograph to observe, measure, and record the human form, and its physiological and psychological functioning, has resulted in a body of knowledge which, while questionable, informs current practices employed by police and security forces for the classification of people in relation to how they look (Gates, n.d., as cited in Sturken & Cartwright, 2009).

Teachers in Aotearoa acknowledge the nature of their position in the teacher–learner relationship, aiming to teach in a way that is aware of the inherently unequal balance of power (Education Council, 2017a). When the camera is included in interactions between teacher and child, many other sites of power are added (Flannery Quinn & Manning, 2013). Photographic images, and the practice of photography, are themselves complex, imbued with power, and traversed by power relations. When photographs are collated into archives, such as Educa or Storypark, further dimensions of power become manifest (Flusser, 2011b; Sekula, 2003; Tagg, 2009), particularly when a reductive and instrumental application of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) occurs through selection from drop-down boxes of principles, strands, and learning outcomes. What stories are told about children, what learning is made visible through photographic evidence, and how these are read, are also sites of power (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Daniels, 2013).

Photography theory suggests the photographer holds more power than the subject photographed. Historically, the photograph was considered to hold a ‘power of truth’ through its ability to provide substantiation of what was objectively real (Daston & Galison, 2007). While the photograph has been discredited as subjective, and also potentially manipulative (Daston & Galison, 2007; Fairclough, 1989; Sturken & Cartwright, 2018), the truth power of the photograph is still at play when it is used as evidence.

One of the main uses of photographs in ECEC is to provide evidence of learning. When considering that teachers inherently hold an unequal balance of power (Education Council, 2017a), and the more powerful position of the photographer in the photographer–photographed relationship, the need to critically think about the use of photography in ECEC is clear. Especially so when considered through the lens of our curriculum document *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017), which promotes an image of the child that is powerful, listened to and heard, and is an active participant in their learning. The first principle, Empowerment|Whakamana, identifies the role of kaiako (teachers/adults) in “encouraging and supporting all children to participate in and contribute to a wide range of enriching experiences” (p. 18). I advocate for enabling children to take on the role of photographer and documenter of their own interests and learning as an “enriching experience” to be supported by kaiako.

### Points of Tension in an Ethics of Engagement

The “image of the child” is a discourse familiar to many early childhood teachers in Aotearoa and globally. Loris Malaguzzi (1993) reminded teachers the image, or theory and ideas, they hold of the child will inform their pedagogical actions and

relationships with children. Our image of the child impacts our behaviours, our ways of interacting with, seeing, and hearing children. The image of the child considered here is that of an infant or toddler who is an agentive and contributing member of the ECEC community, is a consumer of visual images (photographs), and is afforded their basic human rights in the practices required of teachers. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) protects the right of the child to experience a life where their best interests are foremost, where their views are heard, where they can express themselves through a range of media, and they can experience privacy.

An image of the child which sees infants or toddlers as agentive and contributing members of the ECEC community necessitates questioning how children's agency and voices are respected and integrated into the curriculum. While infants may not be particularly interested in taking photographs, toddlers often are. Both older infants and toddlers can be interested in looking at photographs, be that of themselves, their friends or whānau (family), or of places and things they are familiar with or curious about. However, early childhood teachers can take ownership and hold control of the visual data produced (Flannery Quinn & Parker, 2016). When this happens are there opportunities for children to be empowered in deciding what to photograph? Also, importantly, can children access the archive of their learning stories? With the move to online storage of children's learning stories is provision also made for children to access these independently—either in hardcopy or via a device?

Teachers in Aotearoa are required to provide assessments and documentation of children's learning. Yet, Dahlberg et al. (2013) warn visual documentation is a risky business. They point out teachers must continue to question “what right we have to interpret and document children's doings and what is ethically legitimate” (p. 164). This ethical engagement must be core to the pedagogical work they do. So, an ethical dilemma arises, as moments of valued learning are more often selected and visually documented by teachers than by children. This can silence the child's voice and further tip the balance of power towards the teacher.

A small-scale online survey, of early childhood teachers in Aotearoa, found that just over half of the early learning services participants taught at provided no access to cameras for children (Perkins, 2017). These findings raise questions about productive power and control over what is shown, and therefore can be known when photography is used in ECEC. Moreover, the question of whether children can contribute to rich multiparticipant visual documentation practices in powerful ways arises. If they cannot, the narrative of young children's learning will remain in great part with teachers, regardless of if children can access resources such as a digital camera.

But, even if children are listened to and heard, as is their right, how do we “really know that children want to be photographed for documentation and assessment?” (Hopkins, 2019, p. 224). This reveals another point of ethical tension. Teachers are required to engage in high-quality teaching, which includes assessment (Education Council, 2017b; MoE, 2017). An image of the child which considers infants and toddlers as having a right to privacy requires questioning how pedagogic photography can impinge on privacy. Does the common practice of observing children's

learning, with the objective to photograph, mean opportunities are lost to the child for private interactions and experiences? Is assent or consent asked of children before they are photographed? These questions challenge taken-for-granted ideas around photographing for assessment but are important to be considered when seeking to enact ethical use of pedagogical photography.

The benefit of using photographs to make learning visible, and so accessible, to children, families, whānau, and the ECEC community is not disputed. Research undertaken by Salcin-Watts (2019) into what qualities parents and teachers considered make great learning stories showed photographs were a valued component. Their value lay in the meaning they could contribute to the documentation of learning, and the window they provided into children's time spent at ECEC. However, it is important that children are not subjected to unwanted and unnecessary scrutiny through photography. A balance between photographing and privacy must be found. As Sparrman and Lindgren (2010) have pointed out, “children do not always want to be watched” (p. 258). This returns us to the question of our right to “interpret and document children's doings” (Dahlberg et al., 2013, p. 164). Thinking more about this shows the tension between the need to fulfil professional responsibilities and the right for children to be heard. As I have explored elsewhere, “the child's right to privacy and the option to not participate can be eclipsed by teachers' need to be accountable and to evidence teaching that meets the curriculum requirements” (Hopkins, in press).

### Considerations for Infant and Toddler Teachers

Much the same as assessment for older children, assessment for infants and toddlers is a cyclic practice that is informed by multiple participants. Family and whānau voice is a crucial aspect of this. Documentation needs to be accessible to all—use of photographs is key for infants and toddlers to meaningfully engage in documentation. However, when we photograph children's learning to make it visible, we also make the child visible (Hopkins, 2019). In the process of visual documentation there is a risk that children are “made an object in this activity” (Tarr & Kind, 2016, as cited in Hopkins, 2019, p. 192). When working with infants and toddlers this will mean listening to their non-verbal communication—are they moving away, not making eye contact, are your actions interrupting or interfering with their experiences? Infants and toddlers have rich non-verbal communication skills (Cooper et al., 2012), and being able to see and hear these requires an openness to listening in more embodied ways.

*Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) provides an image of the child which “foregrounds the mana of the child” (p. 7). An image of the child which sees older infants or toddlers as consumers of photographic images leads to questioning what images of themselves young children will be shown. *Te Whāriki* sets a broad definition of curriculum to encompass “all the experiences, activities and events, both direct and indirect, that occur within the ECE setting” (p. 7). Meaning, production and consumption of photographs are a part of the curriculum of ECEC. The images of a child produced in photographs as part of an assessment practice produce and present images to children as they are seen by teachers. How teachers see children will contribute to the types of photographs and images produced (Gunn & Reeves, 2019).

The practice of archival photography, specifically the “ways in which people are represented, arranged for the camera, made available to be gazed at, and placed in a system of signification which codes and classifies them” (Henning, 2004, p. 166), provides another perspective with which to analyse the use of photographs in ECEC. The use of photography, to make children’s learning visible, requires children to be “made available to be gazed at” (Henning, 2004, p. 166). This leads to concerns about children’s participation: are children powerful contributors or passive objects? Also, concerns for child privacy arise: are children able to refuse the assessing gaze and maintain and experience a private self? For Flusser (2011b), freedom was essentially the ability to reject, to refuse, fundamentally to say no. Carr and Kind (2016) asked teachers to consider if they had formally discussed with children if they wanted to be photographed and explained they had the right to refuse.

## Conclusion

This article has explored how photographs, archiving photographs in storage platforms, and the photographer-teacher, play a significant role in pedagogical knowledge production in ECEC. Problematisation of photography use for teaching and learning in early years educational settings was undertaken. Looking at this common practice through the theories and history of photography and the photograph, the power imbalance inherent in taking photographs is revealed. The questions and thinking shared here are a step towards relooking at how photographs and photography are used in early learning. Because ultimately, how children experience this pedagogic activity is dependent on the adults who create and maintain the culture and practices of the places children are spending their days in.

The history of photography shows photography is not a value-free technology. Serious engagement with the power relations and tensions that photographing young children creates must be attended to. In doing so the possibility of developing and enacting an ethics of engagement while using pedagogic photography becomes possible. To continue this line of thinking, consider the following questions in connection to taking pedagogical photographs: “Can they [children] say no? Did I tell them they can refuse to be photographed? Do I believe children have the right to say no to being photographed?” (Hopkins, 2019, p. 224). As important as it is to see and hear children, it is equally important for them to be able to decide not to be seen.

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