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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





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Continuity and change

BY TAMAR WEISZ-KOVES



Tēnā koutou. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa.

A warm welcome to the second online publication of The First Years Ngā Tau Tuatahi.

Thank you to those who have given positive feedback about moving the journal online. One of the main benefits of moving the journal online is that not having to cover the cost of printing means we can make the journal freely available to a wider readership. It is exciting to see that our number of readers, both within Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally, is growing as a result. Diversity is also reflected in the range of local and international authors who have contributed to this issue, inspiring us to think about infant and toddler care and education from multiple perspectives and sociocultural and historical contexts.

Additional changes to this issue of *The First Years Ngā Tau Tuatahi* include updating the look of the journal and adjusting its formatting to make it easier to read online. Most notably, we have cut the number of columns from three to two to reduce the time readers spend scrolling up and down pages. We hope this makes for a smoother online reading experience.

Over the past year, we have also updated the journal's [webpage](#) and reinvigorated our [Facebook page](#) as ways of keeping in touch with our readers in between publications. Much thought and collaboration has gone into making these changes. At the same time, we have endeavoured to maintain continuity and stay true to the essence of the journal, which is to provide a professional space for those interested in infant and toddler care and education.

Moving Landscapes

This editorial is entitled “Continuity and change” to reflect the moving landscapes within which we teach and how we respond to these. In addition to the Covid pandemic, the past few years have posed multiple challenges to teachers. In Aotearoa New Zealand, these challenges have included extreme weather events,

teacher shortages, increased compliance requirements, rising costs, concerns around the affordability of the pay parity scheme, closing centres, and uncertainty about what the outcome of the upcoming general election will mean for the early childhood sector. Such challenges require teachers to draw deep on inner resources in order to be resilient, problem solve, and adapt to change—sometimes at short notice—all while maintaining our focus on quality for children and families.

These challenges raise questions about what anchors and sustains us during periods of uncertainty and change. What threads consistently weave through our lives, giving shape and meaning to our experiences and identities? Bernstone (2022) reflects that uncertainty and complexity are two conditions that impact decision-making in an increasingly globalised (and digitised) world. How do we prepare ourselves, and the children we work with, to approach uncertainty and change and make decisions with a sense of courage, optimism, and agency?

Overview

Key themes in this issue, which may offer useful anchors during periods of uncertainty and change, include relational pedagogies, the importance of play and holism, and placing children at the heart of ethical decision-making.

The emphasis on teaching with heart, responsive relationships, and the importance of children's play comes through strongly in the first piece; a moving tribute to Pennie Brownlee, who passed away in September. In this tribute, Dr Sue Stover shares her experiences of Pennie as a transformative, creative educator and advocate for young children, with more than a touch of magic about her. Pennie Brownlee has had a significant influence on early childhood education, both in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally; encouraging parents and teachers of young children “to do our best” and make space for “children to be children” (p. 5).

A second heart-felt tribute to Pennie Brownlee is written by two of her close friends and collaborators. Lisa McKimm and Kimberley Crisp describe Pennie as a natural advocate and outstanding educator, artist, writer, singer, dancer, and nature-lover—whose work was a calling. They lovingly recall their time with Pennie, including collaborative endeavours; highlighting her outspokenness and many of the highly influential contributions Pennie made to parenting and early years education. Her contributions include 11 articles published in *The First Years Ngā Tau Tuatahi*, on a range of subjects close to her heart. For a full list of these, refer to p. 7.

Our deepest condolences go out to Pennie's family and friends along with gratitude for her life's work.

The first peer-reviewed article aligns well with Pennie Brownlee's emphasis on responsive relationships and young children's rights to play and be. In "Planning for fully embodied play to support development, learning, and wellbeing in birth-to-3-year-olds", American authors, Professor Mary Benson McMullen and Dylan Brody, remind us that the first three years of a child's life pass quickly. They assert that we need to pay attention to infants and toddlers in the present, respect their right to play, and give them space to "just be". Benson McMullen and Brody advocate that teachers plan responsively around the holistic notion of young children's fully embodied play as it is fundamental to their overall development, learning, and wellbeing. As part of their discussion, Benson McMullen and Brody discuss significant challenges and introduce their model of four ages from birth to the age of 3. They also provide templates, examples, and strategies intended to support early childhood teachers' practices with, and alongside, infants and toddlers.

The next article, "Dr Emmi Pikler and her revolutionary approach to infant care", continues the theme of the importance of play, holism, and responsive, relational pedagogies. In this piece, Ruth Mason—a RIE® Associate, parent educator, and journalist studying to be a Pikler pedagogue—aims to promote awareness and deeper understanding of Pikler's key ideas. Mason provides sociocultural and historical context for the development of Pikler's approach to infant and toddler care in post WWII Budapest, Hungary. Her discussion is supported by examples of respectful interactions between caregivers and infants and toddlers and draws on the voices of people who worked closely with Dr Emmi Pikler.

Next, Associate Professor Jacoba Matapo, Dr Tafili Utumapu-McBride, and Salā Pafitimai Dr Fa'asaulala Tagoilelagi-Leota present their findings and analysis from a two-year Teaching and Learning Research Initiative Study. Entitled "Indigenising infant and toddler pedagogy in Aotearoa New Zealand: A Samoan pedagogical framework for pepe meamea", their article presents the co-designed pepe meamea pedagogical framework. In the study, this framework was used to transform the way teachers work with Samoan infants and toddlers and promote their cultural wellbeing and belonging within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. In the process, the authors highlight the benefits of cross-sector partnerships and cross-cultural mentoring between aoga amata (full immersion Samoan centres) and English-medium early childhood education (ECE) centres.

The following three New Zealand based articles focus on teachers' use of a range of digital technologies—photography, video, and mobile phones—and the ethical considerations involved.

In "Relooking at photography use in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand", Dr Rebecca Hopkins draws on her doctoral thesis to critique the everyday practice of early childhood teachers photographing children for the purpose of documenting their learning and making it visible. Hopkins raises concerns about problematic power relations and tensions that photography involves, pointing out that photography is not value-free. Drawing on the history and theories of photography and the photograph, Hopkins encourages readers to think about our practices critically and ethically in relation to pedagogical photography. In doing so, she explores the possibility of developing and enacting an ethics of engagement while using pedagogic photography. Hopkins's exploration of an ethics of engagement resonates with the two following articles focused on video observation and teachers' use of mobile phones.

In their article, "Relational ethics-in-action: Learning from naturalistic video observations of infants, toddlers, and their teachers", Alice Chen Jia, Dr Maria Cooper and Dr Kiri Gould also focus on ethics and the documentation of children's images; this time through the lens of research and video observation. In this piece, the authors assert that the role of ethics is key to ensuring research integrity and enacting care and respect for research participants. Within the context of a University of Auckland research project on the implementation of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), lead author, Alice Chen Jia, presents examples of relational ethics-in-action that arose as she conducted video observations of infants, toddlers, and their teachers. Her discussion highlights possibilities and complexities associated with conducting video observations with infants and toddlers, the importance of building trusting relationships, and gaining children's assent on an ongoing basis.

In the previous article by Jia et al., Alice Chen Jia expresses her preference for using an iPhone for recording video with children on the basis of its size, convenience, and high quality of sound and visual images. This point leads in well into the introduction of a voices from the sector piece by Jane Dixon, Jaana Long, and myself called "Out of the staffroom into the centre: Early childhood teachers' use of mobile phones". In this piece, centre managers, Dixon and Long, share their experiences of teachers' using mobile phones as part of everyday centre practice. Discussion highlights why and how teachers in two centres are intentionally using mobile phones and the associated benefits, challenges, and ethical considerations. I introduce and conclude this article with the intention of provoking awareness, reflection, and healthy debate around teachers' use of mobile phones in early childhood education. Links to readings are provided which readers might like to follow up on to further inform their thinking on this subject.

Following is a review of Dr Helen Hedges's book, *Children's Interests, Inquiries and Identities: Curriculum, Pedagogy, Learning and Outcomes in the Early Years*, by one of her former PhD students, Daniel Lovatt. In this review, Lovatt provides a chapter-by-chapter overview of Hedges's book, which draws on decades of her research into children in the early years. In this culminating work, Hedges challenges the reader to go deeper with their understandings of children's interests and proposes new principles for

understanding children’s learning. Lovatt says to “expect to be challenged and inspired” (p. 41) when you read this book.

The final piece informs readers about a fellowship that has been launched in memory of Tony Holmes. Tony Holmes was a co-founder of Victoria University’s Institute for Early Childhood Studies in Wellington, New Zealand and a devoted teacher and educationalist. Contact details are provided for readers to learn more about this fellowship.

Acknowledgments

Before bringing this editorial to a close, I would like to thank the many people who have been involved in reviewing and proofreading submissions for this issue. My understanding of how much work goes into publishing a journal has increased exponentially through the experience of being lead editor—thank you to Louise Gorst for your generous mentoring into the role. Thank you to the UoA marketing team for sharing graphic designer, Craig Berry, and to Craig for the many hours that he has put into formatting the journal. And of course, thank you to the authors who have contributed to this edition; it takes courage to put your writing forward in a public forum.

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*He whakatauki. Ehara taku toa i te
toa takitahi. Engari, he toa takitini.*

*Success is not the work of one but the
work of many.*

Tribute for Pennie Brownlee

BY DR SUE STOVER



There was more than a little magic about Pennie Brownlee. Her creativity workshops shaped generations of Playcentre parents—including me. Forever afterwards, I described her as the best adult educator I've ever experienced. She was that rare combination of being extraordinarily well-organised, well-resourced, and also responsive to the humans that gathered around her. "Is an hour a day enough creative time for a three-year-old?", one participant asked. "Your best is enough", Pennie replied. We left her company feeling challenged, upheld, and transformed. We could do our best.

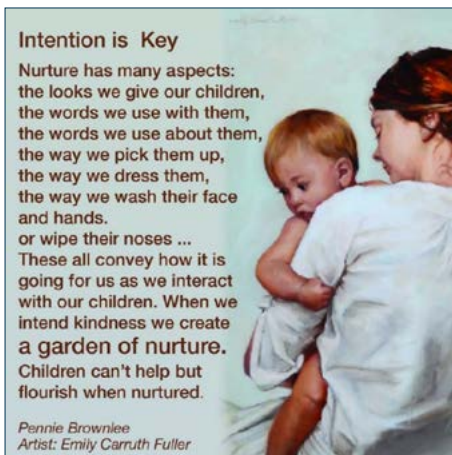
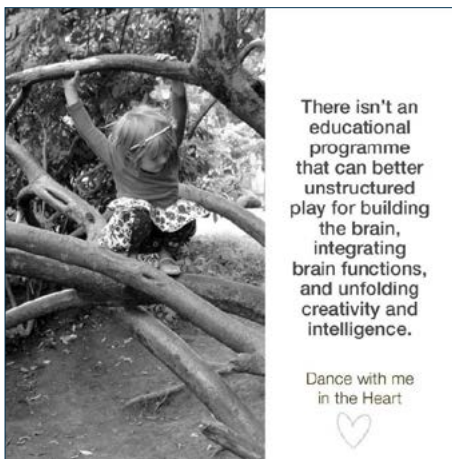
Her book *Magic Places* (1990/2015) landed on the shelves of early childhood centres all over the country. In it she mapped out the creative process—starting not with paints or glue—but with real experiences out in the community, exploring the natural world, climbing on a tractor or a fire truck, caring for a baby. Her respect for children was huge. Her ability to re-think her own position was also huge with later editions of *Magic Places* creating space for co-construction of art, especially between adult and child—a space that she had earlier discouraged.

Later books drew her readers into the responsive relationships with infants, and into the primal drive for children to play: *Dance with me in the Heart* (2014) and *The Sacred Urge to Play* (2017). Their titles reflect Pennie's willingness to bypass the fully rational and to lean into the spiritual.

Pennie's ability to express deep ideas was profound. Yes, she could write well—powerfully and succinctly—but her ability to express ideas visually positioned her as a communicator par excellence. And her message came again and again. Make space for children to be children—don't institutionalise and commercialise childhood. We need to keep hearing that message.

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- Brownlee, P. (2015). *Magic places: the adults' guide to young children's creative art work* (4th ed.). Ako Books.



Note. Source <https://www.facebook.com/DanceWithMeInTheHeart>

Pennie Brownlee

MAY 1947–SEPTEMBER 2023

BY LISA MCKIMM AND KIMBERLY CRISP



Lisa McKimm,

Lead Parenting Coach at ParentingWorx

I am missing my friend Pennie Brownlee already. We farewelled and celebrated the amazing human being that she was just a few days ago in her hometown of Thames. I first met her 35 years ago when I attended her Women's Self Esteem course. She was a person who commanded the attention of a room, whilst only using a peaceful energy and quiet voice. Her lessons were deeply thought-provoking.

I was hooked, and over the next few years I attended more of Pennie's courses whenever I saw them advertised. As time passed, we grew a friendship and a deep trust in one another. To enter her circle of trust was no small thing—she protected her privacy fervently.

Pennie was simply a wizard at creating moving and inspirational classes. She couldn't have made a class boring if she'd tried. Her attention to detail was legendary. If you check out her Facebook page [Dance with me in the Heart](#) you will see what I mean. One-liners—paired with beautiful art in colour matched fonts. Her opinions and ideas succinctly added are worth gold. It was typical of Pennie to want to offer access to a learning resource and spend literally thousands of hours on it ensuring that it was of the best quality for the reader—all for free.

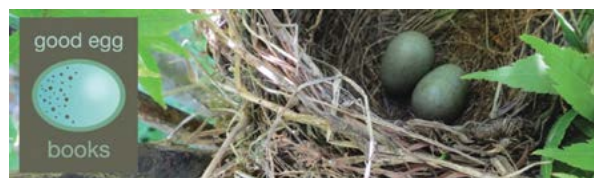
That's who she was—generous with her time and her gifts. She always made the time to answer questions sent through her pages and ensured her reply was well considered. She embraced the everyday Kiwi vernacular and was always authentically herself: "You couldn't dream this stuff up could ya!"; "Ooh, we're lucky little buggers, eh!"

When people ask, "Who influenced your work?", we are often drawn to mention internationally renowned writers and thought leaders. Most of the influencers that I admire, I was introduced to by Pennie. But the one I admire and have been influenced by the most was Pennie herself. She elevated the standards that I aspired to, and I have seen no one anywhere in the world do it better than she did.

One of the first writers Pen introduced me to was Louise Hay. She wrote of the body's connection to our emotions, thoughts, and words. I recall Pen coming back from Bali after a holiday with her arm in a sling. "What happened to you Pen?" I asked. "That's the last time I get to a flippin Friday and announce that I feel like I've been run over by a bus! I got to Bali and guess what happened?!!" We actually laughed quite a bit about that. "Oh dear", I replied, "You'd better stop saying people are a pain in your arse".

If you haven't read any of Pen's articles or books—then run straight off to find some. They are like Holy readings if you are

working with infants and toddlers (or even older children): *Magic Places* (1990/2015); *Dance with me in the Heart* (2014); and *The Sacred Urge to Play*, co-written with Kimberley Crisp (2017). All are available through her site [Good Egg Books](#). Her Facebook page [Dance with me in the Heart](#) is one of the best in the world. And you will find 11 fabulous articles listed at the end of our tribute that she wrote for *The First Years Journal Ngā Tau Tuatahi*.



Note. Source <https://www.goodeggbooks.co.nz/>

Kimberley Crisp,

ECE Professional Development Coach

Pennie was well known and well respected for her advocacy and NO MINCING of words when it comes to the rights of children. She was LOYAL to the bone and there was no compromise when it came to those things dear to her heart. She was fearless and unrelenting when it came to the biological needs of children. Her unapologetic advocacy was well remembered from her keynotes at conferences that sent shockwaves through the audience. Pennie never felt she needed to be liked for what she was saying. She needed people to hear, act, and respond. The strong exterior was matched with a marshmallow interior though. Like a chocolate covered marshmallow—you had to know her to know she was one of life's biggest softies and her heart was SO GENEROUS.

Pennie would always put children and people and planet before her pocket—if the cause was good, she would say, "Come on Kimberley let's do it, they need it".

Pennie was HUMBLE never wanting centre stage despite often finding herself there. She had NO EGO it was never about her, always about the "kids". Pennie had a wonderful way of creating workshops and conference experiences that ALWAYS took each person a foot deeper in their thinking and softened the hearts of all those in attendance. Pennie's work was never just that of WORK—she literally had a calling, and she took it very seriously—she lived all she taught. Her workshops on nature were so pivotal for people because she was a NATURE LOVER, and I mean the closest thing to David Attenborough that people would meet. Pennie could get you staring into a shell for ten minutes and you would fall in love with not only the shell, but the meditation you found yourself in. Honestly, this woman was not only able to support people to fall in love with the natural world and see

children in an entirely different and respectful way, but she would have them dancing and singing while they did it. People would come away with new knowledge that not only expanded their mind but fully embodied the new information at a cellular level. Pennie's skill at delivering information was exceptional. The artistically curated environments she set up were always a nod to her belief that beauty was what supported the soul to grow. She created profound experiences for learning.

We had three world trips together all of which had The Pikler Institute at the HEART of them. Traveling together around NZ co-facilitating, Pennie used to say to me, "This is neat, eh!". We used to say Pennie delivered the WHY, and I shared the HOW. Each time she would read something I wrote, she would whip me up a few memes that were beautifully created with her artist eye.

Pennie supported us all to know what it meant to really be an Advocate for our earth. Who else could get a room of a thousand to gaze at a pinecone and literally fall in love with the miracle of life and be in awe and wonder of nature's gifts? Pennie was authentic to the CORE, and she did not need to speak loudly to get her point across. She merely stood in her belief and people felt it!

From Lisa and Kimberley

When her long-time friend, Gail, stood to speak at Pennie's farewell, she talked about Pennie's activism over the years. Organising a protest march and being pushed down the main street of Thames in a hospital bed to save the local hospital (it worked, they still have one), advocating for women's right to a voice, and supporting the establishment of a Women's Refuge in Thames.

Pennie was a natural activist. Always following her inner compass of conscience. She saw her classes in the same light—a form of activism—and facilitated learning in them with the same ardent commitment.

Pennie was introduced to the philosophy of Emmi Pikler around 2002 at an Infantastic Conference in Christchurch. It fitted perfectly with what she believed and expanded what she knew. Never one to do anything by halves, she set off to Budapest—her first trip of three—to learn at the feet of the experts. Kimberley was on those trips with her, as were others. Emmi Pikler had already passed away by then, but in her place—carrying on her mother's work at Lóczy—was her daughter, Anna Tardos. Pennie returned to NZ, and after some time assimilating all that she had learned, she set to work designing new educational opportunities for New Zealand-based parents and early childhood practitioners. She combined her Pikler learnings with the ideas of great poets, musicians, philosophers, artists, neuroscientists, biologists, and ancient indigenous wisdoms. Distilling and blending complementary knowledge like this was her forte. She expertly matched pieces to create unforgettable lessons.

She developed **Baby'space** primarily as a parent-and-infant class. Later with Kimberley she created **PlaySpace** and these two courses later became **Dance with me in the Heart, Levels 1 and 2**. These were for both parents and early childhood educators.

In 2010, when Pen and Kimberley were chewing the fat, they had a eureka moment, "We should run a conference about Play!" It expanded from there and five friends gathered at Pennie's house to start hatching the idea. David Spraggs (genius in outdoor play and

the importance of gathering at the fire), Natasha Kibble (genius practitioner in early childhood and exemplary parent), Kimberley Crisp (genius in professional development, centre owner and practitioner), Pennie (genius at everything) and me, Lisa McKimm (whose job it was to bring in the family focus and hold the whole thing together with laughter). After much brainstorming, we named our baby *The Sacred Urge to Play*. Our first conference ran the following year, in 2011. All up, we ran seven of them over the next few years, always based at the very special Tauhara Centre in Acacia Bay. *The Sacred Urge to Play* became a defining experience for all of us in some way. I honestly don't think there's been another conference like it—anywhere. People felt deeply bonded to the ideas and to each other. There were always tears at the closing time. Pennie and Kimberley then co-wrote a book that was spawned from this called *The Sacred Urge to Play*.

Pennie loved everything on the Planet. Except for cats. She didn't like cats at all. She would find it funny that we are mentioning that. We'll always love you Pen.

Kimberley and Lisa

Articles that Pennie Brownlee Published in The First Years Ngā Tau Tuatahi

2022 – "Children's play and virtual reality"

2013 – "In the Land of Opportunity: Pondering on children's ears and mother-tongues in early childhood"

2012 – "Possums or possibilities: Pondering children, culture and cultural imports"

2010 – "Getting to know you: The art of settling"

2008 – "'Bang bang! You're dead' - pondering on guns in children's play"

2006 – "A moving weekend: Lessons from movement educator Ute Strub and SpielRaum educator Andrea van Gosen"

2005 – "Natural reading, reading nature: The critical role that literacy skills play in building a sense of belonging to, and in, this world"

2004 – "Checking the 'story-eggs' we have about children, the basic ingredients to our current situation"

2004 – "Wonder fuels a love affair"

2002 – "A magic place: Taking time to consider the crucial role of aesthetic environments on our children's development and well-being"

2000 – "Computers and Playcentre: Are they compatible?" (co-written with Stuart Guyton)

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Planning for fully embodied play to support development, learning, and wellbeing in birth-to-3-year-olds

BY PROFESSOR MARY BENSON MCMULLEN
AND DYLAN BRODY

(peer reviewed)



The purpose of this article is to promote fully embodied play to support development, learning, and well-being of birth-to-threes in childcare. The authors begin by identifying problems facing birth-to-3-year-olds. They then share their perspectives as American early childhood educators about how fully embodied play addresses needs, motivations, and development in holistically and integrated ways across multiple domains. The authors show how the “whole child” principle is supported by their perspectives and definitions of “children’s rights,” “well-being”, and “embodiment”. They articulate how needs and motivations are prioritised and change over the first three years of life. The authors present their model of four ages from birth-to-three, providing templates and examples showing how to use this information to guide planning. Throughout, the authors stress their view on the importance of focusing on the “here-and-now” (i.e., the present) to ensure birth-to-threes in childcare have positive experiences and interactions each day as opposed to focusing exclusively on readiness for the future.

“This time in their lives is just a whisper, a brief moment in which they can enjoy the richness of a childhood space” (Bos & Chapman, 2005, p. 4).

Indeed, as this quote suggests, childhood comes and goes ever so quickly—especially the first three years. Characterising this as a “whisper”, however, belies the monumental nature of what occurs during this period. The depth and breadth of the growth, learning, and development that occurs during this brief span of time is simply breath-taking. As we describe in our book:

In less than three years of living on this earth, very young infants—who depend on others to move them from place to place and whose main methods of communicating are robust cries, endearing smiles, and gazing into the eyes of others—become children capable of, among many other things, planning activities, having favorite friends, running, jumping, twirling, climbing, and speaking in full paragraphs. (McMullen & Brody, 2022, p. 6)

In this article we share our perspectives and recommendations as American early childhood educators and scholars on the importance of fully embodied play experiences for birth-to-3-year-old children and consider teachers’ roles as keen observers and thoughtful play partners with and alongside them. We frame our ideas around a child’s rights perspective that supports the rights of children to play and enjoy each and every day to the fullest, and we consider contemporary challenges to achieving this. We detail the changing needs and motivations of children over the first 36 months of life, and we suggest ways to support them holistically by considering all aspects of their growing and changing selves. And finally, we provide practical advice about how to engage in intentional planning for fully embodied play in first years settings.

Challenging Times for Birth-to-Threes

Too often in our contemporary societies, very young children are not given time to just be themselves and to just do what they do naturally—play! Adult concerns and activities often distract and interfere with the natural rhythms of childhood. We identify three specific challenges that we have experienced in our decades of study and practice with very young children that cause us deep concern. Each challenge described prioritises adult goals, needs, or desires over those of children.

Hurried—Focus on the Future

David Elkind (1981,2006) coined the term “hurried child” to describe children being forced to grow up too fast and too soon. We borrow Elkind’s term to identify “hurried birth-to-threes” which, likewise, prioritises the future at the expense of life being fully lived and honoured in the present. In the United States (U.S.) we are witnessing a pushing-down of school-oriented knowledge and skills into preschool and further, into the infant-toddler period. Misinterpretations of brain research and worries about later school “readiness” have resulted in teachers feeling compelled to actively and deliberately “teach” our youngest children to achieve developmental milestones (McMullen, 2010) as well as academic content (Butcher & Pletcher, 2016).

Warehousing Birth-to-Threes—Focus on Convenience

On the opposite end of the spectrum from “hurrying birth-to-threes” is what we call “warehousing”. Too often we have encountered the practice of placing non-mobile and even mobile infants and toddlers into some kind of device to restrain them and restrict their movement (e.g., swings, slings, strollers) for much of the day. These devices give children little or no freedom,

essentially parking them for the day. Teachers who engage in such practice likely do so with the best of intentions—to keep children safe and from hurting themselves or others. However, such practices greatly underestimate the capabilities of birth-to-threes, squander opportunities to support their growth, development, and learning, and disrespects their rights to live a happy, content, and engaged life (Gerber, 2003; Lansbury, 2023).

Virtually Ignored Birth-to-Threes—Focus on Distractions

Sadly, many of us have seen this—adults handing electronic devices to children or placing them in front of screens to distract and occupy them. On the flip side, it is all too common to see adults (including teachers!) on their own electronic gadgets, paying attention to something on a screen, or talking with or texting others on their phones. These virtual ways of interacting take teachers' time and energy away from the important business of observing, conversing with, and supporting children's play and other needs (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2023).

These three problems show a prioritising of adult agendas with little attention paid to the needs, motivations, and interests of children. Hurrying, warehousing, and ignoring birth-to-threes violates their basic human rights as identified by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; rights to play, be happy and healthy in the “here and now”, make choices, and have their voices and opinions heard and validated (United Nations, 1989). As play advocates, we wish to reclaim the centrality of play and playful relationships in the everyday lives of our youngest children as an antidote to the largely adult-driven world they live in today. We suggest a “flipping of the script” away from these harmful interactions towards embracing a focus on “being”. By this, we mean a focus on the present, not just in preparation for the future, but so that the moments we spend with children each and every day are lived fully and well. We help to achieve this goal by attending to the overall well-being of babies. We define well-being as the “... general state of being and feeling well in terms of physical and psychological health and safety, emotional stability and soundness, and overall satisfaction in activities and relationships” (McMullen et al., 2016, p. 262).

The dual focus on being and well-being does not mean we ignore the preparation of children for the future, but rather that we concern ourselves with creating positive lived experiences in the present. Vygotsky, as cited in Brennan (2014), defined lived experience as what results when the brain processes the moment both cognitively and emotionally. Thus, lived experiences are those that make a deep and abiding impact on a person, in this case the very young children in our care. Helping these children achieve well-being through strongly positive lived experiences in the beginning of life lays a firm foundation for the future (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000).

A Holistic Perspective

Along with endorsing a children's rights perspective and a belief in supporting the being and well-being of babies, our beliefs about play are informed by Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), the dominant guiding philosophy for early childhood care and education in the U.S. (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020). Specifically, for the purpose of articulat-

ing our beliefs for this article, we embrace the DAP principle of the “whole child” as a holistic perspective undergirding our definition of “fully embodied play”. This perspective, just as it sounds, is about seeing children as whole and complex beings in which any one area of growth and development impacts and is intricately intertwined with all others. For instance, a child is not just seen for their cognitive abilities, or some physical-motor accomplishment, or for any isolated attribute, but for all of what is going on with them in terms of growth, development, learning, and well-being at any given point in time.

This supports our belief that well-planned and thoughtfully executed play experiences in first years settings foster the development, learning and well-being of the whole child. This is accomplished at any given time by simultaneously: addressing as many of the traditional domains as possible (i.e., cognitive, physical, social, and emotional, etc.); engaging as many of the child's senses as feasible (i.e., touch, smell, sight, taste, proprioception, and vestibular); and seeking practices that are culturally sustaining and affirming. To support healthy and optimal development, learning, and well-being each and every day and to lay a strong foundation for the future, teachers need first to understand the nature of the developing child during the first three years. We break this down into four ages from birth to three.

Four Ages From Birth-to-Three

The child changes more rapidly during that brief “whisper” of time that is the first three years than at any other time in life (McMullen, 2013). And throughout that relatively short period, what they need and what motivates them to learn and move forward changes along with their growing and developing brains and bodies. Recognition of the distinctly different needs and motivations from birth to age three helps teachers to act intentionally and proactively to plan for fully embodied play experiences. We characterise four distinct ages from birth to age three including young infants, mobile infants, toddlers, and twos. We caution teachers that although this provides a guideline for planning, as they are certainly aware, *all children are individuals who grow and develop at their own rates*—there is no “one-size-fits-all” for children's growth and development. Thus, only approximate ages in months are given in our model of the ages from birth-to-three.

Understanding these four distinct ages can help teachers plan meaningful play in first years rooms. We offer this idea to encourage teachers to support individual children as they are in the here and now as well as in recognition and anticipation of how their current needs and motivations will likely change. In Figure 1, we provide approximate ages in months for the different periods signified by changes and reprioritisation of their needs and motivations as indicated by the largest of the four circles. Observant practitioners will note these shifts in individual children over time, changes due to interrelated factors in their growing, maturing, and developing minds and bodies (McMullen, 2013).

Changing Focus of Needs and Motivations from Birth-to-Age-Three

Note that although we identify a dominant need and motivation as the primary focus for each of the four ages, the three other needs and motivations remain strong driving forces as well. Thus, children need and are motivated by security, discovery, autonomy, and identity throughout their first three years; it is only the relative strength of the energy of the mind and body over time that shifts. For example, even though a 2-year-old may focus more energy on identity, they still need to feel the sense of security that was so important to them in early infancy and remain motivated by needs related to discovery and autonomy.

Fully Embodied Play

We promote fully embodied play as the best way to meet the needs of the “whole child” in early years settings. But what does this mean? According to Levin (2018), to fully embody something means, “you have a full body, felt experience of that thing ... you don’t just know something as thoughts or mental understanding, but that you also feel it as it occurs within the sensations of your body” (para 5). This is echoed by Bednarski (2021) who said to fully embody something is, “... to find wholeness, harmony, and coherence between all facets and dimensions ... the full integration of all aspects of you” (para. 4). While these writers were speaking about adults, as authors we have adopted this term to describe the type of play we value for birth-to-threes. Thus, fully embodied play connects and nourishes their whole being. This notion, supported by psychological theories of “embodied cognition” (Shapiro & Stolz, 2019) and brain research (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2000) reflects our stances on children’s rights, a focus on being and well-being, and an understanding of the importance of positive lived experiences.

The Role of Teachers

As early childhood educators we are taught that for something to be “play” it must be initiated and carried out by a child (or children) free from adult involvement. Teachers are expected to prepare the environment, provide appropriate materials, and remain nearby ready to engage only if needed. But does this view of play fit well with what positive lived experience of play and playfulness actually look like in first years settings? Consider the following scenario

from the book *On Being & Well-Being in Infant/toddler Care & Education: Life Stories from Baby Rooms* (McMullen, 2022):

From where I sat, cross-legged on the floor in the corner, I saw the care teachers and children busily occupied throughout the baby room. Near the book display shelf, I spotted Sue reading quietly but animatedly on the floor with three babies. They were snuggled up close to one another, all eyes fixed on the Goodnight Moon bunny. I looked over at Dan, grinning to myself at the image of this very tall man sitting on an impossibly small chair in front of two short highchairs. I watched as he spoon-fed two little guys what looked like mushy squash, and my grin widened as I saw them respond with messy-faced smiles to something Dan was saying. My attention was then grabbed by giggles coming from over by the big windows. Here, Cary was captivating the attention of a small group of three babies who swatted gleefully at the bubbles he blew. From my vantage point, sunlight reflected off the bubbles, resulting in a rainbow of colors. (p. 75)

Is what is described in this vignette play? We say yes, although it was not technically “play” as defined by noted play scholars (e.g., Brown, 2010; Elkind, 2007; Sutton-Smith, 2001), it was certainly “playful”. We argue that, with birth-to-threes in group settings, we need a broader understanding of what constitutes play to include other types of positive playful engagements.

Every day, teachers delicately balance strategies and make decisions about when and how much to engage—if at all—with birth-to-threes in play and playful experiences. The decision should largely be based on how to ensure the children teachers support have positive lived play experiences and that children feel comfortable, safe, and happy, and experience joy, self-satisfaction, and wonder in their activities and interactions (Jung & Recchia, 2013). Our belief is this is best achieved through engagement of the whole child through fully embodied play. Below we describe aspects of the teachers’ role in facilitating fully embodied play including knowing individual children and applying appropriate levels and types of support for shared play.

Knowing Birth-to-Threes as Individuals

Through ongoing and careful observation and interaction, teachers come to know the birth-to-threes in their first years settings as unique individuals while simultaneously gaining a sense of the nature of the group as a whole. The level of knowledge develops best in programmes that prioritise relationships. Relationship-based approaches allow time and space for children and adults to develop trust and understanding of one another (Raikes & Edwards, 2009). Knowing individual children means that teachers understand their likes and dislikes and the ways they communicate, verbally and non-verbally. This allows them to be sensitively responsive to each child, meeting their needs and requests for engagement in a timely and individually appropriate manner (McMullen, 2013).

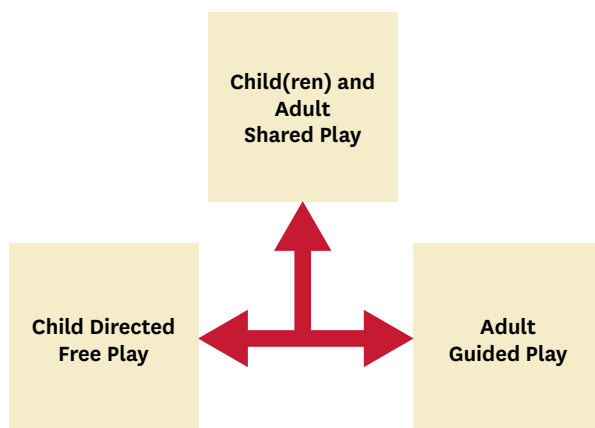
Observant teachers who have come to know each child in their group as an individual will notice how each typically engages with play materials, other children, and adults in the environment. They will continuously evaluate the environment and make changes to furnishings and play materials to address the range of needs and motivations of all the individuals within it. Such attention and deep knowledge help teachers prepare for and anticipate how to support each child's next steps.

Providing Appropriate Support

Providing appropriate levels and types of support occurs as teachers make in-the-moment decisions about when, how, and how much they should personally engage with one or more children at any given time (Shin & Partyka, 2017). Pyle and Danniel (2017) describe what they call a "play continuum" to describe the amount of direct involvement between adults and children. We have adapted this idea, as shown in Figure 2, identifying three main levels of teacher involvement along a "birth-to-three play continuum" including from child directed free play, to child(ren) and adult shared play, to adult-guided play.

Figure 2

Birth-to-Three Play Continuum



Free Play

At the beginning of our adapted play continuum for birth-to-threes is free play through which the child has the most autonomy in what, when, and how they do things. Still, with very young children, the teacher must remain close by, ready for children who may need to reach out to them or who may simply want to make eye contact and check in. Birth-to-threes thrive on spending unstructured play time in a well-organised environment in which they have easy access to multisensorial play materials that address their needs, interests, and motivations (Shin, 2021). Such materials encourage them to play in ways that are personally meaningful and to take the next small steps in their personal development and learning journeys.

Sharing in Play

There are numerous ways that we suggest that teachers can share in the play experiences of birth-to-threes. The key is to not be overly intrusive so as to interfere with their sense of enjoyment in discovering and accomplishing things on their own. These shared play strategies include playing alongside babies, modelling for them, and scaffolding their play. Although not free play in all cases, shared play experiences should still be initiated and led by the child with the adult following their lead.

Simply playing alongside birth-to-threes, companionably, with little or no direct communication, allows teachers to extend and encourage their learning through play. This social learning is a powerful tool as you sit with children sharing experiences together. While playing alongside the children, teachers should take opportunities to engage in joint attention with one or more of them (Degotardi, 2017) by using small quiet gestures to point out something or to encourage looking at things together. Also, because birth-to-threes excel at observing and imitating those around them, teachers can use this to model ways of doing things and solving problems (Bandura, 1976). By this, we do not advocate calling direct attention to what the teacher is doing and performing a demonstration. Rather, we encourage teachers to simply play with toys and other resources as they sit companionably near the children in parallel play.

Scaffolding is another strategy teachers may want to use when sharing play experiences with birth-to-threes (Gillespie & Greenberg, 2017; Williams et al., 2010). Through scaffolding, teachers provide suggestions, tools, and just the right amount of support to help a child learn, discover, or achieve something that they may not have been able to do on their own. As we said in our book (McMullen & Brody, 2022):

This might look like placing certain play materials just out of reach of a young infant, which encourages them to use their core muscles and practice their hand-eye coordination as they reach for what they are interested in. You are scaffolding when you add hand motions to a familiar and beloved song while singing with mobile infants, offer materials for a toddling child to hold as they work on steadying their steps, or say words such as open and twist when 2-year-olds use containers with lids at the sensory table. (p. 19)

Guiding During Play Directly

There are times when it is helpful or even necessary for teachers to engage directly in the play of birth-to-threes, but we argue that such episodes should still occur in a positive, pleasant, and thus “playful” manner (McMullen & Brody, 2023). And of course, any such direct engagements should be entered into with respect and sensitive responsiveness. For young infants and any children who are non-mobile, teachers will need to directly engage with them in play experiences. Teachers should observe closely what attracts these children’s attention and either bring them to those items or bring the play materials to them, adjusting the environment or position of the child to allow them to explore comfortably. Direct engagement also occurs when teachers wish to convey facts or they want the children to experience something new or to see objects differently, whenever they would be unlikely to be able to do this through their own exploration (Dean & Gillespie, 2015). Also, teachers regularly provide direct guidance during play to communicate expectations and appropriate behaviours in the setting and to keep children safe.

Planning With Intention

In this section, we share ideas for how to plan for fully embodied play and what to keep in mind when setting up enriching play environments. We define the idea of “play affordances” and provide a list of ones to consider, including a key affordance—play materials. Then, we provide sample templates as a tool for teachers to adapt when they engage in intentional planning for fully embodied play.

Whether planning for free play, shared play experiences, or an adult-guided playful activity, play affordances are those things that teachers have in their settings that allow play as they envision it to occur (Gill, 2012; Martin, 2017). Taking stock of play affordances is an important first step in intentional planning. Teachers should consider the affordances currently in their settings (e.g., large uninterrupted blocks of time in the schedule, sufficient space, appropriate play materials), identifying those that need to be improved and those that are missing, but deemed important.

Planning Experiences

In Figure 3, we provide a template we created for teachers to use or adapt as a planning guide for selecting play materials that support various domains of development, learning and well-being. We also provide examples. Please note that teachers will need to plan based upon their knowledge of the real children, context, and play affordances available to them. In this example we identified a range of play materials to support three different domains of development, learning, and well-being. These include the cognitive, social-emotional, and physical domains, with a couple of ideas put on the template for each age. For the planning guide template shown in Figure 4, we switch the emphasis, showing how one single play material—baby dolls—could be used in different ways to support the changing needs and motivations across the four ages of birth-to-three. Also note that in both Figures 3 and 4 we use examples representing plans for free play and shared play experiences.

Figure 3

Sample Planning Guide Template for Selecting Play Materials across Domains



Figure 4

Planning Guide Example for Addressing Specific Domains Across Different Ages



We selected baby dolls as the play material for the example in Figure 4 along with the domain “social and emotional” as the focus for planning fully embodied play experiences. It is often helpful to start planning around one specific domain. When teachers start with one targeted domain, more often than not, they find other domains of learning, development, and well-being are also supported. For example, although for the example in Figure 4, we focused on how we might use baby dolls to target the social and emotional domain, these activities also facilitate: cognitive development inherent in being able to engage in pretend play; small motor development as exercised through the dressing of the dolls and feeding them; and large motor skills and senses of coordination and balance that are practiced by pushing the dolls in a stroller.

Conclusion

The first three years seem to be over in a blink of an eye, a brief “whisper” of time. Yet, it is a time full of rich opportunities to support the development, learning, and well-being of the very young children with whom we share our days. We must remember that the lived experiences of birth-to-threes—how they process and experience these cognitively and emotionally—impacts them not only today, but well into the future. Let us make each day count and show birth-to-threes they are worthy of our full attention and respect.

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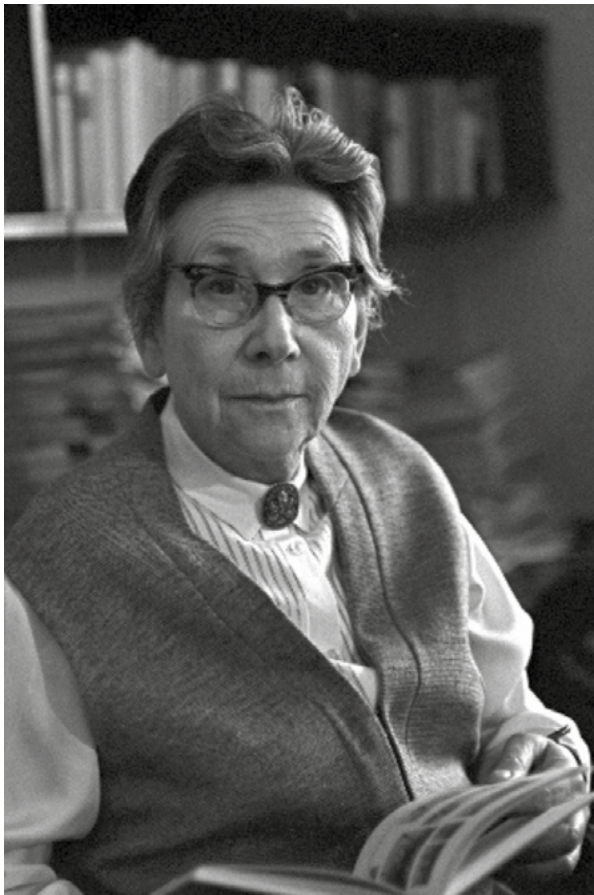
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Dr Emmi Pikler and her revolutionary approach to infant care



BY RUTH MASON

Dr Emmi Pikler's revolutionary ideas about infant and toddler care have been spreading around the world since the 1930s. Through this article, Ruth Mason aims to deepen readers' awareness of Pikler's approach to caregiving which proved highly effective with children in the orphanage she founded in Budapest after World War II. This article provides historical context for the development of Pikler's approach. It explains how Pikler prioritised a warm, sensitive, and friendly relationship between an infant and their caregiver, freedom of movement, and autonomous play as the keys to a child's wellbeing. Examples of Pikler's research and caregivers implementing Pikler's ideas are shared to advocate that children and adults benefit when Pikler's ideas inform adults' behaviour and relationships with infants and toddlers.



Note. Image of Emmi Pikler shared with permission from the Hungarian Pikler-Lóczy Association, Archive.

Dr Emmi Pikler's trailblazing ideas, which continue to revolutionise childcare practices around the world, are not as well-known as they could be. This article will describe Pikler's main ideas, their sources, impact, and implementation in childcare settings, hoping to inspire early childhood professionals new to them as they have inspired countless others over decades.

Underlying and informing Pikler's ideas is a view of infants as competent communicative human beings, ready to connect, understand, and cooperate almost from birth. The ideas and ways of being with infants described below are predicated on this way of seeing our newest humans.

Primary Caregiving and Continuity of Care

Emmi Pikler (1902–1984) was a Hungarian pediatrician who received her medical training in Vienna. I will talk more about the influence of her training and the spirit of the times on her thinking later in this piece, but I will begin by focusing on her radical principles—many of which we consider best practices today.

First and foremost, Pikler stressed the importance of the relationship between infants and their caregivers and the need for babies to each have a primary caregiver with whom they develop a special relationship and on which they build their sense of security. Infants' primary caregivers are the ones who change their diapers, dress them, feed them. In a day care or orphanage setting, they move with them when they move on to the next room for as long as possible (this is called continuity of care).

Today, the United States's Department of Health and Human Services promotes primary caregiving as a best practice in infant and toddler settings and publishes a related [resource guide](#) (n.d.). The importance of primary caregiving is also advocated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, n.d.), and the *Program for Infant and Toddler Care* (PITC) (Lally, et al, 1992).

It is also considered best practice to have continuity of care, a principle Emmi Pikler put into practice at Lóczy, the infants' home she founded in Budapest in 1946. Pikler's influence has led orphanages and day care centres around the world to reorganise so that babies can develop meaningful relationships with a limited number of primary caregivers during their time in the centre. Without this primary relationship, none of her other principles can be put into effect.

In her final lecture, Pikler (1978) said "... the personal relationship essential for the social development of the child can only develop if the group of children and the caregiver team are constant. This has been our target at the Lóczy Institute from the very beginning."

Freedom of Movement

Some see the idea of allowing a baby freedom of movement as one of Pikler's main contributions to the field of infant development and care. She advocated letting infants move as they please in a safe space and discouraged putting them into any position they cannot get into themselves. Pikler's daughter, the psychologist Anna Tardos, who directed Lóczy from 1998–2011 said:

Free movement is the core of the entire approach. This was a revolutionary idea and even today, it is difficult to accept. It triggers a lot of tension in parents and professionals if someone tells them not to sit the baby up, make them stand, teach them to walk. (A. Tardos, personal communication, 2017)

In *Peaceful Babies, Contented Mothers*, Pikler (1944/1994) wrote in detail about the natural development of movement in a young infant and how important it is to let the infant lead that development:

A child bends, stretches herself, makes minimal movements like a caterpillar. This slow and gradual stretching and reaching is one of the most important stages in the motor development of the infant. It goes on for months. During this time the asymmetry of the trunk with which the child is born disappears. Through these natural movements the spine becomes straight; the trunk becomes elastic, flexible and muscular. I cannot emphasize how important this stage of development is. (Translated in Roche, 1994, p. 8)

Pikler's recommendation to place babies on their backs runs counter to today's recommendations of "tummy time". Pikler conducted an experiment into the effects of raising babies on their tummies. However, she stopped the experiment early on at the insistence of the caregivers when it became clear the babies were not as comfortable or content (Pikler & Varga, 1980).

Free Play

Freedom of movement is intimately connected with the importance Pikler placed on free, uninterrupted, self-initiated play. Today, early childhood teachers mostly understand the value of free play, so I will not go into detail about Pikler's ideas on the subject. But what does uninterrupted mean? It means trusting the child and respecting their play to the extent we do not prompt, suggest, demonstrate, or give positive feedback—unless the child is looking to us for a response. Many early childhood teachers not trained in Pikler® or RIE® feel a need to direct play, make suggestions, or play with the child. What can they do instead? This is one

place the Pikler® approach's emphasis on observation comes in. Pikler Institute staff teach caregivers to have an observing stance whenever they are with or near a child—during play as well as during care routines. Through observation, the caregiver learns about the child and the child feels the warm glow of the caregiver's attention.

Judit Kelemen, former Lóczy caregiver and current group leader at the Emmi Pikler Day Care Center in Lóczy, said:

The most important task of the caregiver to support play is to create a very good relationship in the care situation. Second is to provide the right toys. Third is to provide an organised daily routine that gives enough time for playing and enough time to finish what they are playing with...In free play, a child can learn what he can't learn from adults. (J. Keleman, personal communication, 2014)

Mindful Caregiving

In the film, *Lóczy, a Place to Grow* (Martino 1996), the contrast between the exquisitely attuned caregiving of the Lóczy nurses and the rough, impersonal handling of babies in Romanian orphanages is heartbreaking. Sensitive caregiving is the basis of the Pikler® approach, for without it, babies would not have the security to move and play freely. While the nurses, as Lóczy caregivers were called, learned all the caregiving gestures and practiced them on dolls before they were given a baby to care for, they managed to internalise them and make them their own so that they are completely authentic.

In this approach, each care routine—diapering, bathing, feeding, dressing, putting to sleep—is seen as an opportunity for building the relationship between baby and caregiver. The caregivers have a deep interest in and empathy for the baby's experience. They take their time; they move slowly—at a baby's pace. They make eye contact and use a gentle, yet firm touch. They tell the child what they are about to do before they do it and wait a moment for a response. They pause occasionally in order to follow the child's interest. Some Pikler® professionals liken these moments to a walk in the woods in which you stray off the path to smell the flowers. The Lóczy psychologist, Eszter Mózes calls this shared attention: "The adult also follows the direction of the child's attention, so her attention is alternately focused on the objects of his attention, and on the care operations" (E Mózes, personal communication, 2014).

And the care is not done to but with the child. The caregiver elicits participation, for example by asking even the youngest infants to hold out their arm so the caregiver can put a sleeve on. While a new-born will not understand the words, if they are repeated during each dressing session, by four months or so, babies will begin to lift their arm. Caregivers trained by Pikler do their best to implement these practices in their day care centres. This may involve changing schedules and routines to allow more time for caregiving.

This type of caregiving has lifelong benefits. "It is during the care in the first few weeks and months of his life when the infant acquires his first experiences that will be crucial for the later development of his personality," writes Mária Vincze (2007, p. 40), who was a Lóczy pediatrician and assistant director.

The paradigm shift here is seeing the care routine not as a task to get through, but as a chance to be together and enjoy each other. Perhaps that is the most striking feature of Lóczy caregiving: the caregivers and babies look like they are having fun.



Note. Image of a Lóczy nurse caring for an infant shared with permission from the Hungarian Pikler-Lóczy Association, Archive

Pikler's Background, Inspirations, and Influences

Born Emilie Madeleine Reich in Vienna in 1902, Pikler was the only child of an Austrian mother and Hungarian father who moved with her to Budapest when she was six. Her mother was a kindergarten teacher and her father an artisan who manufactured baking implements.

During Pikler's medical studies in Vienna in the 1920s, Europe was awash in post-World War I progressive ideas. She was influenced by the confluence of Marxism, psychoanalysis, the back-to-nature movement, and the new education movement that viewed the child as autonomous. The new education movement had roots in the mid-18th century thinking of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and aimed for social change through education; it also influenced Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, and Janusz Korczak.

Pikler's pediatric training at Vienna's University Children's Hospital under the guidance of Professor Clemens Von Pirquet, was also a major influence. Professor Hans Salzer, a pioneering pediatric surgeon at the Mauthner Markhof Hospital, taught her the importance of gentle touch. She referred to them as her first teachers. "Under their influence, she came to the view on physiology and prevention which would determine all of her later professional activity," wrote Lóczy pediatrician, Judit Falk (1994, p. 38).

Von Pirquet, who coined the word "allergy" and whose work contributed to the skin tuberculosis test, regarded babies and children as people and conveyed that attitude to his trainees (Gallardo, 2009). He taught his medical students to engage children in conversation, explain what was going to happen, and to elicit their cooperation, all elements that entered Pikler's child-rearing philosophy.

At the Children's Hospital, Pikler also noticed the children of wealthy families whose nannies closely supervised them suffered more injuries from accidents than children from poor families who were able to run free.

These influences, along with her astute observation skills and insightful nature—some say her genius—led Pikler to form revolutionary conclusions about what babies need to thrive. "She broke the traditional ways of educating and bringing up children and created a whole new world. And she showed people a brand-new path" said Éva Kálló, a Lóczy pedagogue for 40 years (E. Kálló, personal communication, 2017).

Emmi met György Pikler, a doctor of economics, educator, and mathematician who later became head of Hungary's Statistical Office, in Vienna during her medical studies. His belief that children should learn at their own pace influenced Pikler. The couple spent a year in Trieste, Italy, where Emmi noticed that young children allowed to move freely on the beach had better posture, were more active, graceful, confident, and aware in their movements than other children. The Piklers decided to allow their first child, Anna, born in 1931, to develop at her own pace. She became the first "Pikler baby".

Lóczy

When World War II ended, the Budapest municipality asked Pikler to open an infants' home for war orphans and babies whose parents could not care for them. Pikler quickly replaced the experienced caregivers she had hired with young high school graduates from the countryside who loved babies and were more open to learning a novel approach. Their training was long and careful, with constant supervision and support. The Lóczy nurses, captured on hundreds of hours of film and starring in the sensitively directed documentary *Lóczy, a Place to Grow*, (Martino, 1996) are exquisite in their handling of the infants: attuned, sensitive, communicative, and above all, clearly enjoying the relationship. And everyone—even the pediatricians—was required to spend some time working as caregivers.

Anikó, a young caregiver interviewed in the documentary, speaks in the film about the deeper sources of some caregivers' ability to treat children with respect.

Respect is extremely important but very few people can actually show it. Maybe it is those people who have learned it at home, who have received it from their parents... It is possible to learn how to give respect without getting it from home, but it is very difficult. It requires a lot of time, practice and experience and continuous awareness of your own actions and constant self-control... (Martino, 1996).

The result of all this training and support is extraordinary. Watching Martino's documentary, one is struck by the exquisitely attuned way the Lóczy caregivers engaged with infants, using their hands, voice, eyes, and intention. The French psychiatrist, Myriam David, who authored a book about Lóczy after visiting the infants' home called these caregivers "artists serving humanity" (David & Appell, 2001). The care the infants—some of whom were abandoned on Lóczy's doorstep—received was a form of therapy whose aim was to help parentless babies, at risk for many problems, grow into well-adjusted children and adults.

In 1972, the World Health Organization (WHO) funded a study of 100 children who had spent their early years at Lóczy. The study demonstrated that Lóczy “graduates” did not display any of the common detrimental characteristics exhibited by children raised in institutions—known as hospitalism—and as adults led normative, productive lives (Falk & Pikler, 1972).

As a result of the WHO study, the Hungarian government designated Lóczy the National Methodological Institute for Residential Nurseries and asked Pikler to supervise all of Hungary’s orphanages and to train their staff to raise the level of care. Pikler took young caregivers and other Lóczy staff members on daylong visits to other orphanages, often stepping back to allow them to express their knowledge and experience.

Lóczy housed 2,500 children during its 65-year history. But in 2011, the infants’ home lost the last of its many battles for survival. The Hungarian government decided that all orphaned babies would be better cared for in foster families. Today, the Pikler Institute staff run, document and conduct research in the Emmi Pikler Day Care Center, teach at Lóczy and abroad, and organise Lóczy’s voluminous archives. This includes meeting protocols, and the developmental diaries of children who had lived at Lóczy, to document the development of the approach.

Research

Pikler and her colleagues published more than 65 studies—most between 1960–1990—on gross motor, language and social development, psychological examinations of infants’ manipulation activities, the development of joint activities, and much more. Many studies over the past three decades (Lally & Mangione, 2017), show brain development in infants is directly related to the caregiving attitudes and activities of their caregivers. What happens in those years affects one’s later emotional, social, and cognitive development and functioning, as Alison Gopnik et al. (1999) summarise in their book *The Scientist in the Crib*.

Although these studies did not exist when Pikler implemented her ideas, it seems she intuited this relationship. She knew from her own observations and experience that sensitive caregiving affects a child’s sense of security and their emotional development and that these relate to brain development.

Implementing Pikler’s Ideas in Childcare Settings

The following vignette exemplifies a caregiver implementing Pikler’s ideas in her interactions with a toddler.

Before naptime, Niki, a caregiver at the Emmi Pikler Day Care Centre in Budapest, takes a blanket from a cupboard and turns her gaze to the play area where she catches a 14-month-old’s eye. Lily (child’s pseudonym) drops the toy she is playing with and runs to Niki.

Lily follows Niki to the adjacent changing room and climbs a small stool onto the changing platform, surrounded on two sides by high bars, its back against a window open to the play area. Everything Niki needs for the diaper and clothing change is near at hand.

Talking softly, Niki tells Lily what she is about to do before she unbuttons the buttons on her overalls. She holds the overall strap and looks at Lily, who understands from her

two months of experience in the centre that she is being invited to help by taking the straps down, and she does so. The routine continues with Lily helping and Niki narrating her actions and asking for the toddler’s help as she looks at her with affection. Niki’s movements are slow, and her speech is soft and understated. Lily’s eyes are locked on Niki’s, quietly following her every word, movement, and suggestion. When Lily is dressed in her summer sleeping gown, Niki gives Lily her stuffed bear, holds out her arms and Lily reaches to be picked up. She immediately puts her head down on Niki’s shoulder as her caregiver carries her out to the yard and her crib, puts her down and says a few words before she leaves to get the next child ready for nap. Lily goes right to sleep.

This vignette illustrates unhurried, respectful, and joyful communication between the child and her caregiver.

The Pikler® Approach in New Zealand

New Zealand has been particularly open to the Pikler® approach with over 400 people having attended certified RIE® or Pikler® trainings and courses. Both RIE® and Lóczy teachers have conducted training in the country (S. Smith, personal communication, 2023; A Rutkai, personal communication, 2023). “... [Pikler and Gerber] have become a feature in professional development, at conferences and in the general discourse of early childhood care and education in Aotearoa New Zealand” (MacKenzie, 2011, p. 27).

Jean Rockel, a researcher in infant-toddler curriculum at the University of Auckland and the inaugural editor of *The First Years* journal, has described Pikler’s ideas as a respectful philosophy that aligns closely with the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whariki* (Ministry of Education, 2017). She said, “Many early childhood centres have adopted a philosophy of respect and at the heart of this are the ideas of Emmi Pikler” (J. Rockel, personal communication, 2017). Additionally, Rockel asserts that Pikler’s ideas are useful for resisting the practice of “tummy time”. Furthermore, the notion of adults learning from children resonates with the Māori concept of “ako”, which is about “the teacher being a learner, and the learner being a teacher” (J. Rockel, personal communication, 2017).

Conclusion

Janet Gonzalez-Mena, RIE® Associate and author of the popular book, *Infants, Toddlers and Caregivers* (2021) said in a Pikler USA (2015) video that she wishes Pikler’s work was more widely known:

The results of it are incredible. In a day when orphanages tended to ruin children, Dr Pikler figured out how to put infants in an institutional setting for their first three years and make them come out OK. That information still needs to be spread around the world today...we have a lot of babies and toddlers in childcare and we are still figuring out how to do that well. And we can use all the help we can get. (Pikler USA)

It is my hope that this article contributes to deepening early childhood professionals’ awareness and understanding of Dr Emmi Pikler’s ideas.

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Indigenising infant and toddler pedagogy in Aotearoa New Zealand: A Samoan pedagogical framework for pepe meamea

BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JACOBA MATAPO, DR TAFILI UTUMAPU-MCBRIDE, AND SALĀ PAFITIMAI DR FA'ASAU LALA TAGOILELAGI-LEOTA

(peer reviewed)



This article presents findings and analysis of a two-year Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) study that involved cross-sector partnerships between Aoga Amata (Samoan early childhood centres) and English-medium early childhood education (ECE) centres. In the first year, the study engaged Samoan cultural experts, faiaoga (Samoan teachers), and Samoan researchers in the co-design and conceptualisation of a Samoan pedagogical framework for teaching Samoan pepe meamea (infants and toddlers) in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand. Six Aoga Amata (full immersion Samoan centres) co-designed the pepe meamea pedagogical framework in the first year. In the second year, English-medium ECE centres joined and partnered with Aoga Amata in cross-cultural mentoring relationships to employ the pepe meamea pedagogical framework to transform the way teachers work with Samoan infants and toddlers. The article presents the framework through five key ma'a tatāo (securing rocks/touchstones). This framework promotes the continuity of Samoan pepe meamea cultural wellbeing and belonging.

Introduction

Our approach to the research intentionally sought to give precedence to Samoan indigenous knowledge systems, values, and practices through a co-design process with our research partners. This process that we had collectively chosen prioritised relationality to support both collective and individual contributions to and engagement within the study. We open by positioning the research within Samoan onto-epistemology alongside methods of postqualitative research. Following this, we present the demographic landscape of the Samoan population within Aotearoa New Zealand and the significance of strengthening Samoan pedagogies in ECE for Samoan New Zealand-born tamariki (children). Finally, we share the process by which the touchstones of the pepe meamea framework emerged and were refined through talanoa (culturally located dialogue) and lalaga (Samoan weaving) and explains how the framework can be used to shape culturally sustaining Samoan pedagogy.

Prioritising Samoan Onto-Epistemologies

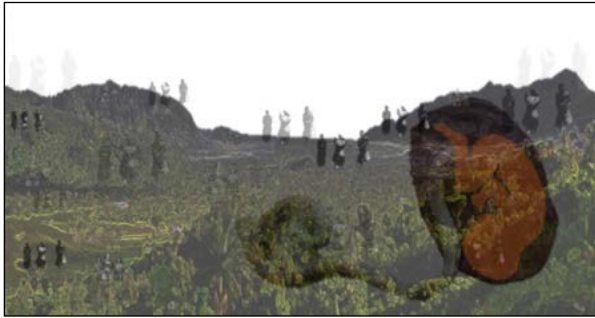
Tui Atua (2005), a respected figure in Samoan culture and a former head of state, sheds light on the complex nature of Samoan indigenous knowledge. He highlights the challenges in comprehending these knowledge systems due to their unique relational and ontological nature. By emphasising Samoan onto-epistemology, Tui Atua questions the dominance of Eurocentric ontology. Through his scholarship, Tui Atua calls into question the process of thought itself and its relationship to Samoan spiritual, ecological, cultural, and social spheres of knowing (Tui Atua, 2005, 2009a) in which the movement of knowledge is never static. It is the movement of thought that generates new assemblages: knowledge is embodied in and with the world, tied through relational ecological systems (Matapo & McFall-McCaffery, 2022; Tui Atua, 2005). The tensions for sustaining traditional Samoan cultural knowledge through inter-generational oratory tradition have become increasingly problematic due to the change and flux inherent in migration, cultural shifts in local society, and the penetrating forces of capitalism and neoliberalism upon Samoan epistemologies (Anae, 2016; Matapo & McFall-McCaffery, 2022; Muaiava, 2022). The Samoan onto-epistemologies we prioritised in our conceptualisation of the pepe meamea pedagogical framework are illuminated and investigated through our postqualitative approach to inquiry. We hope to generate connections for you, the reader, to experience the research with us in sense-knowing—through our storytelling, imagery, and poetry—as we seek to open generative spaces for understanding beyond representationalism or interpretivism (Matapo, 2021a).

Why Postqualitative Inquiry?

Postqualitative research offers several advantages for indigenising education because it acknowledges different forms of knowledge, decolonises research, emphasises ethical considerations, engages with interdisciplinary approaches (St Pierre, 2015), and encourages reflexivity. Undertaking postqualitative practices can address the limitations of traditional research paradigms and support a more inclusive and respectful approach to researching and teaching indigenous knowledge systems. As Samoan researchers, we embraced diverse paradigmatic perspectives and both indigenous and Western epistemologies throughout our work. By combining Samoan indigenous thinking with a postqualitative approach to inquiry, we discovered new possibilities to transform and envision research in unique ways. The modes of expression used supported a postqualitative position to contest the power of representation through textualised language alone (Pennycook, 2018). Throughout this article, imagery and poetry help express emergent and established understandings of pepe meamea. Jacoba's digital image and poem express our conceptualisations of pepe meamea.

Figure 1

The Intergenerational Reach of Pepe Meamea



Pepe meamea

We knew you before your birth
Your value in collective worth
In dreams of the living, you bind
The past, present and future divide
Like the fanua we walk
and whispers of ancestors talk

You are imagined in form
The weaving that adorns
Belonging; your birth-right
Inheritance and foresight
Intergenerational reaching
You come into being

Note. Image and poem by Jacoba Matapo.

Why Pepe Meamea Pedagogy in ECE?

The majority of Pacific peoples living in Aotearoa New Zealand today were born here. The highest proportion (48.7%) are Samoan, most of whom are New Zealand-born (Ministry of Social Development, 2016; Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Most of the Samoan-New Zealand population live in Auckland (65%), and although gagana Samoa (Samoan language) is the third most common language spoken in New Zealand, only 44% of New Zealand-born Samoans are proficient users of the language (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020). Given the steady growth (27% increase between 2013 and 2018) of the New Zealand-born Samoan population (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020), this research is critical to informing future directions for culturally sustaining Samoan pepe meamea pedagogy in Aotearoa New Zealand ECE.

Samoan language maintenance for Samoan peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand has, for over 35 years, been supported within early childhood education through community and collective efforts of Aoga Amata (Utumapu, 2013). The first Aoga Amata was established in Wellington in 1987 with the specific purpose of grounding the Samoan language, culture, and spirituality to foster the wellbeing, identity, and culture of Samoan children (Ete, 2013). Aoga Amata were inspired and established by the hopes and dreams of the pioneers who journeyed from Samoa to

Aotearoa New Zealand (Ete, 2013). Today, Aoga Amata make up only 1.04% of the national total ECE licensed centres (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2023), which means a relatively small number of Aoga Amata are available to Samoan families. The majority of Samoan children (and Pasifika children in general) are enrolled in English-medium ECE centres (MoE, 2015).

In addition to the limited number of Aoga Amata, other implications for culturally sustaining pedagogy are the influence of international ECE discourse, that typically perpetuates Eurocentric notions of infant and toddler development and pedagogy. Rameka and Glasgow (2015) have argued that within an Aotearoa New Zealand ECE context, normative infant and toddler pedagogies give very little attention to research regarding Pacific ethnic-specific philosophy and pedagogy. Examples include human development theories and developmental milestones that exclude different ontologies (ways of being) relevant to indigenous Samoan perspectives. A concern raised by transnational Samoan scholars is that infant and toddler pedagogies adopted within ECE are not always conducive to Samoan collective understandings of being and personhood fundamental to wellbeing, belonging, and identity (MoE, 2017; Toso & Matapo, 2018; Utumapu-McBride, 2013). In the spirit of identifying, enhancing, and sustaining cultural pedagogies that affirm Samoan indigenous knowledge systems, this research took a unique collaborative approach. It actively facilitated cross-sector partnerships in which experienced faiaoga (Samoan ECE teachers), as cultural experts, supported and mentored non-Samoan ECE teachers to transform their practice with pepe meamea.

Navigating Samoan Onto-Epistemology Within an Aotearoa New Zealand Context

Samoan peoples growing up and identifying as Samoan-New Zealanders brings complexity in subjectivity, particularly as they navigate Samoan culture and epistemology outside of their ancestral or heritage lands (Anae, 1998; Matapo, 2021b). To nurture Samoan identity, culture, language, and spirituality through the ECE years, this pedagogy must incorporate Samoan onto-epistemology (Kesi, 2014; Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2018; Utumapu-McBride, 2013). Onto-epistemology combines ontology and epistemology, showing that knowledge is intertwined with what we know. It argues that our understanding of reality is shaped by our interaction with the world, not just subjective thoughts. Samoan onto-epistemology highlights the significance of Samoan indigenous knowledge, cultural contexts, perception, experience, and interpretation in shaping understandings of reality (Matapo, 2021a).

As Samoan researchers engaging in indigenous research within an Aotearoa New Zealand context, we navigate complex relationships. We acknowledge that our relationship with tangata whenua as the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand is an important part of our collective efforts. Through our ties across Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa (Pacific Ocean), we share whakapapa (genealogy) with Māori people. As tauiwi (non-indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand), we are also partners who seek to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We also acknowledge the complexities of relationships with research partners and within the early childhood context. Finally, we acknowledge our connections to each other, as researchers and activists supporting Pacific early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Although distinctively different, our researcher

positionalities share a common purpose; in this article, you will hear us speaking individually and collectively. We employed the Samoan practice of *tuasi le vā* (upholding the inter-relational space) as a relational research tool within the study to nurture the longstanding relationships that have been at the crux of this project.

Our aspirations as researchers working alongside teacher-researchers were to activate Samoan onto-epistemologies in the research, to navigate the cultural spaces of relationship and to uphold the ethical collective responsibilities grounded in Samoan indigenous knowledge systems, all with the aim of developing culturally sustaining pedagogy for Samoan *pepe meamea*. Ethical cultural responsibilities included, honouring *tapu* (sacred) knowledges by excluding specific *tapu* knowledges in documentation and ensuring the co-design process was supported by our cultural advisors through their *fa'amanuiga* (blessings/approval) (Tuagalu, 2008). The following research questions underpinned our study.

Research Questions

Year One research questions (specific to the Aoga Amata ECE context):

1. What is *pepe meamea*, and how is it grounded in Samoan indigenous knowledge systems and ontology?
2. How is *pepe meamea* pedagogy understood and practised within Samoan Aoga Amata communities?

Year Two research questions (relevant to Aoga Amata and ECE centre partners):

3. How effective are cross-cultural mentoring partnerships between Samoan Aoga Amata and English-medium ECE centres in fostering culturally sustaining pedagogies through the indigenous Samoan framework of *pepe meamea*?
4. How has teacher engagement with Samoan indigenous knowledge systems and the framework of *pepe meamea* transformed pedagogy to enhance the cultural wellbeing of Samoan infants and toddlers?

Aoga Amata and English-Medium ECE Centre Partners

In the first year of the study, Samoan conceptualisations and philosophy of *pepe meamea* were explored within six Aoga Amata in Auckland. This exploration led to the development of a Samoan glossary with 189 Samoan concepts inspired by Samoan onto-epistemologies of *pepe meamea*. The *pepe meamea* pedagogical framework arose from the 189 concepts, as co-designed with *faiaoga* and cultural advisors. Through ongoing *talanoa*, the many years of experience and collective cultural intelligence of all participants influenced the emergence and framing of the key concepts of the pedagogical framework. In the second year, Samoan teachers, Samoan elders (knowledge custodians), and non-Samoan teachers were involved in learning, alongside researchers, specific holistic Samoan *pepe meamea* concepts and practices to refine, activate, and transform teaching practice. In the second year of the study, the original Aoga Amata and their partner ECE centres were selected so that they could be matched within the same communities. Our goal in doing this was to strengthen local cross-cultural mentoring partnerships and to

generate an extended community of inquiry (Tagoilelagi-Leota et al., 2022). The study facilitated a continuous co-design process that required ongoing collaboration, negotiation, and flexibility.

The following table introduces the twelve early childhood centres from which our partnerships were built. With their consent, we have included their ECE centre names and partner centres.

Table 1.
Early Childhood Education Centre Partnerships

Aoga Amata ECE centres	ECE Centres
Seugagogo Aoga Amata	Otahuu Happy Feet Childcare
Fotumalama Aoga Amata	Toddlers Turf
Taeaofou i Puaseisei Preschool (Raglan Street)	Immanuel Preschool Mangere East
Fetu Taiala Aoga Amata	Pukeko Preschool
Tumanu Ae Le Tu Logologo Aoga Amata	Inspire Early Learning Papakura
Taeaofou i Puaseisei Preschool (Winthrop Way)	Barnardos Early Learning Mangere

Talanoa and Lalaga: Conceptualising Pepe Meamea Through Samoan Weaving

The Samoan, Tongan, and Fijian practice of *talanoa* encourages diverse thinking through dialogue, storytelling, and openness (Farely & Nabobo-Baba, 2012; Matapo & Enari, 2021; Vaioloti, 2006). It fosters the co-creation of knowledge and resists rigid control. We utilise *talanoa* as a relational practice to engage in dialogue and address pressing issues. In research, *talanoa* challenges binary oppositions and allows for varied relationships and perspectives. Throughout the life of the study, *talanoa* was frequent and ongoing, creating space and time to revisit experiences and illuminate new insights pertinent to Samoan conceptualisations of *pepe meamea*.

Teachers-researchers-elders-weavers, all part of the *talanoa* assemblage, engaged in *lalaga* (Samoan weaving) while activating *talanoa*. Doing both, intergenerational voices, hands, and *laufala* (the pandanus leaves) conceived and reconceived the intricate multiplicities of collective meaning-making with human and non-human worlds (Matapo & Enari, 2021). The *laufala* (leaves used for material) were prepared in Samoa by village members and then shipped to Aotearoa New Zealand, through Falelaga Village, a Samoan community-based organisation that supports the revival of Samoan weaving in Aotearoa New Zealand for the benefit of Samoan communities. Using these materials, the embodied and relational engagement within this project extended beyond the immediate research partners: Samoan *laufala*, hands, soil, history, and genealogies were entangled within the *talanoa* weaving events.

The Fala Pepe: The Samoan Baby Mat

The research events brought together faiaoga, master weavers, ECE teachers, and elders to learn about the cultural importance and technique of weaving a fala pepe (baby mat). Traditionally, the fala pepe was woven by the mother or grandmother either before or during the mother's pregnancy. Weaving the fala pepe before conception or during pregnancy creates a connection between the weaver and the pepe meamea (baby) through love (alofa) and acts as material manifestation of gafā (living genealogy). During the first year of the study, during and after the weaving sessions, faiaoga described how the weaving experience extended their conceptualisations of Samoan intergenerational weaving practices. Faiaoga learned concepts to implement lalaga as a relational and pedagogical practice. The following image (Figure 2) presents the lalaga of the fala pepe.

Figure 2

Fala Pepe (Samoan Baby Mat)



Note. Image by Jacoba Matapo.

Alongside faiaoga, we, as Samoan researchers, reflected on our experiences of lalaga. Through talanoa and lalaga, the significance of the fala pepe having its own relational-entities emerged, illuminating the human and non-human interactions concomitant in the wellbeing of pepe meamea. From a collective perspective, we wrote:

Through lalaga and the fala pepe (baby mat) or fala ola (mat of life), which was coined during our weaving event, our cultural knowledge experts, alongside weavers, shared pedagogical insights of the mat—the mat as a teacher of the child, the mat that holds the stories of the collective, the mat that binds the child to their ancestors and land, the mat that shifts and moves with the child's day to day experiences encouraging their cultural wellbeing as Samoan.

Jacoba Matapo shares her personal story and the significance of engaging lalaga of fala pepe in her own cultural journey:

The falelalaga weaving event was deeply spiritual and personally meaningful. My mother, who is 72 years old, attended with us, sharing her experiences of childhood in Samoa and the tough transition to life in New Zealand. My mother is the eldest in her aiga, and she shared stories of responsibility and her critical role within the collective. She talked about her experiences of lalaga with her mother and the particular skills her grandmother passed down. My mother shared connections to other practices of Samoan pepe meamea wellbeing, such as the fofō pepe (baby healing massage) and how the fala or woven mat is central to the healing process of fofō. From the falelalaga weaving event, I have started a lalaga with my mother to be handed down to my first grandchild one day. I am bringing the lalaga into my home so that our intergenerational stories can continue and be woven with care and love into the fala for the wellbeing of the child (that is yet to come).

The talanoa and lalaga from which the fala pepe and the pepe meamea pedagogical framework emerged could perhaps both be said to have been anchored by ma'a tatāo.

Ma'a Tatāo—Securing Rocks

Pictured in Figure 2, ma'a tatāo (rocks to secure) are often collected by tamaiti (Samoan children) from the river to hold the fala pepe in place as it is being woven. Ma'a tatāo secure the direction of the weaving and support the weaver to manoeuvre the threads. The ma'a tatāo, everyday resources used in multiple ways, are fundamental to the integrity of the workmanship of the mat. The flexibility with which they can be moved while retaining their purpose—"to secure"—corresponds to the adaptability of and cultural security associated with the use of a fala pepe within an ECE context.

The pepe meamea pedagogical framework sets out to ensure that pepe meamea, who are the future carriers of Samoan culture and traditions, withstand the winds of change. The framework is mobile, like the fala pepe, to follow the pepe meamea. Figuratively, the ma'a tatāo, as shown in Figure 3, hold the pepe meamea pedagogical framework in place.

The Pedagogical Framework of Pepe Meamea

Five recurring Samoan pedagogical concepts emerged from the experiences and collective indigenous wisdoms of faiaoga shared through ongoing talanoa and lalaga in the first year of the study. These are depicted as ma'a tatāo holding down an unfinished fala pepe (Figure 2). The spaces between the strands of laufala are also integral components of the framework, and the unfinished fala pepe symbolises the potentiality of the unknown—the multiplicative and emergent relationships that are unified by familiar culturally-grounded Samoan onto-epistemological strands. The following image depicts the five Samoan pepe meamea pedagogical concepts that emerged from the experiences and collective indigenous wisdoms of faiaoga, as illustrated below.

Figure 3

Pepe Meamea Pedagogical Framework



Note. Image by the authors.

The presentation of the touchstones of this pedagogical framework does not set out to be prescriptive but rather to inform a reflexive and culturally sustaining process.

Tofāmanino

The term tofāmanino refers to Samoan philosophies of existence (Motusaga, 2017). As a traditional practice, tofāmanino involves an ancient form of communication with ancestors, whereby the high chief attains ancestral wisdoms through sleep or dreaming. The pedagogy of tofāmanino acknowledges the inherent strengths of pepe meamea and recognises the significance of them accessing ancestral knowledge and wisdoms through intergenerational practices. For teachers, tofāmanino can be fostered through intergenerational storytelling within the family, through song, dance, cultural artifacts, and wellbeing practices, all aimed at sharing cultural knowledge and philosophies.

Faiva o Fa'atufugaga

Faiva, a term originally used in reference to the exceptional expertise possessed by Samoan navigators and fishers (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017), is now commonly used to denote the mastery of skills and competencies. In the ECE setting, faiva o le fa'atufugaga encompasses pedagogical skills, including the ability of fa'atufuga (strengthening capacity) of children to be immersed in gagana Samoa (Samoan language), cultivating language and cultural competencies. Within the ECE context, faiva o le fa'atufugaga involves teaching cultural skills and fostering appreciation and understanding of Samoan relational ethics.

Fa'asinomaga

Fa'asinomaga, a cultural birth-right in Samoan identity, is connected to cultural rights, heirs, genealogy, village heritage, and protectorate relationships. According to Tui Atua (2009b) fa'asinomaga is “a person's designation” (p. 154). Implementing fa'asinomaga pepe meamea pedagogy in an Aotearoa New Zealand ECE context recognises the importance of sustaining pepe meamea fa'asinomaga. This approach acknowledges the spiritual

life of pepe meamea by respecting the collective aspirations of the family. It involves sharing ancestral stories, honouring sibling relationships, and integrating fa'asinomaga experiences into children's learning and assessment.

Agatausili

Agatausili emphasises the significant role played by the Samoan cultural values of alofa (love), tautua (service to others), and fa'aaloalo (respect) in promoting the wellbeing of pepe meamea. Aga refers to the conduct exhibited, and tausili denotes the hierarchical importance of behaviour. The enactment of Samoan values and traditions through agatausili profoundly affects the overall being of pepe meamea. Agatausili is expressed by fanau/aiga (family) and caregivers through gentle handling, cradling, comforting, and physical touch. Within the ECE environment, agatausili—put into practice by attentive and caring faiaoga who grant pepe meamea the freedom to explore and move on fala pepe, engage with their natural surroundings, and access cultural resources and materials—cultivates experiences that reflect the Samoan way of life.

Paepaega (Lotoifale)

The paepae is the fundamental base of a traditional Samoan fale (open house). Traditionally, it consists of a sturdy platform of smooth black rocks sourced from a nearby river. Within the framework of pepe meamea pedagogy, paepaega highlights the responsibility of faiaoga to profoundly understand the contextual aspects of the lived experiences of pepe meamea and fanau (Tagoilelagi-Leota et al., 2022). This comprehension encompasses the interconnected human and non-human realms of pepe meamea and lays the groundwork for faiaoga's pedagogical interactions which strengthen relationships and facilitate decision-making that is in the best interest of pepe meamea and their fanau. Additionally, paepaega, as applied in ECE, reflects critical awareness of the political and social factors that impact the community and the centre environment. The following section introduces another concept evident in the teacher mentoring relationship.

The Emergence of Fenū: Samoan Cross-Cultural Mentoring Relationships in ECE

Through active cooperation and dialogues between faiaoga (Samoan teachers) and early childhood education (ECE) teachers, a new idea of cross-cultural mentoring emerged, fostering strong partnerships in the project. These connections were established among cultural advisors, teachers of varying age and ethnicity, and individuals in different roles within ECE, such as supervisors, managers, cooks, teacher aides, and non-qualified assistants, working in different regions.

During the lalaga research fono (weaving research meeting), a new term—fenū—arose. Fenū is the name for the spare strip of laufala (pandanus leaf) used in weaving. The fenū is essential for maintaining the structure and finishing the woven mat, added strategically to ensure resilience. Likewise, the cross-cultural mentor-mentee relationship necessitates thoughtful consideration through attuned and unhurried opportunities for the preservation and acquisition of cultural practices. The fenū must match the replaced strand's qualities and size, much like a mentor should meet the mentee at their level of cultural competence. The fenū reinforces the strand near its end, and the mat cannot be completed without it.

The fenū concept in mentoring implies mutual obligations, thereby challenging traditional perceptions of the “mentor and mentee” roles. Instead of seeing English medium ECE teachers as subordinates or novices, the Samoan teachers encouraged their ECE counterparts to reciprocate the fenū role. In this model, both mentor and mentee are seen as strong contributors with valuable knowledge about infants and toddlers. A faiaoga from Tumanu Ae Le Tu Logologo Aoga Amata reported that, to her, “fenū is about the process.” Fenū symbolises the mat’s aspirations and the responsibility to maintain strength and balance for the upcoming strand.

Along with fenū cross-cultural mentoring relationships, we encourage ECE teachers from all backgrounds to approach discussions about pepe meamea pedagogy (Samoan teaching methods) with aiga and fanau (families and extended families) with an open mind. This requires understanding Samoan early childhood ontologies rooted in ancestral traditions and wisdom, which might be distinct from conventional ideologies or Western child-rearing practices. It is crucial for non-Samoan ECE teachers to grasp the intricacies of their Samoan communities regarding cultural access and ambitions. For instance, not all families speak the Samoan language or have access to aganu’u (knowledge of village customs and protocols). Conversely, some families may be hesitant to freely share indigenous knowledge and customs due to their tapu (sacred) nature.

Conclusion

This pepe meamea framework presents faiaoga/teachers with a culturally sustaining approach to teaching infants and toddlers that diverges from the pedagogies that prevail in normative early childhood education discourse. The research from which this framework emerged explored culture and meaning through frequent and ongoing talanoa and lalaga, and the weaving practices shared and experienced by all involved in this study yielded rich metaphors through which to conceive and practice pedagogical methods for pepe meamea. The five ma’a tatāo (symbolic touchstones) presented here offer early childhood teachers secure foundations from which to transform their teaching practices and foster collaborative engagement with pepe meamea and their families.

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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 multiparty 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. Tarr 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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Relational ethics-in-action: Learning from naturalistic video observations of infants, toddlers, and their teachers

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(peer reviewed)



In the context of researching the real lives of infants, toddlers, and their teachers in early childhood education, the role of ethics goes beyond being an institutional requirement to being the key to ensuring integrity of the research, the researcher, and respect and care for the research participants. Written from the perspective of the lead author, this article explores some of the relational ethics-in-action that were identified when she was filming infants, toddlers, and their teachers, as part of a University of Auckland research project on the implementation of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017). Exploring these ethics-in-action highlights the possibilities and complexities of naturalistic video observations with very young children in early childhood settings.

Introduction

With a heightened focus internationally on impactful early childhood education (ECE) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023), and the common phenomenon of children aged birth-to-3-years attending ECE, there is a growing interest in how infants and toddlers fare in group-care settings. This rising interest emphasises the crucial role of ethics in research involving very young children, including the need to address inherent assumptions, explore possibilities, and navigate complexities. This article examines some of the ethical aspects of research involving infants, toddlers, and their teachers, from literature and first-hand experiences. In creating this piece, we engaged in collaborative dialogue to reflect on the relational ethics involved in ensuring no harm came to the infants, toddlers, and their teachers involved in our project. This article follows Powell and Gooch's (2017) emphasis on interrogating the growing focus on infants and toddlers in the context of "our personal, social, moral and political lives as researchers" (p. 34).

The Research Project

The purpose of our qualitative collaborative project was to explore the ways teachers promote the revised learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) with children in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand. There is little guidance yet for what these outcomes might look like in everyday practice, so real-world examples are helpful for teachers to consider the professional and theoretical knowledge underpinning the outcomes. Therefore, alongside our goal to disseminate knowledge useful to researchers and teachers, we aimed to create research-informed audio-visual and textual teaching resources for our early childhood-focused programmes at the university. Supported by our faculty's Nurturing Research Collaborations grant, our research team comprised five academic researchers, three research assistants who were mentored by the academic researchers, and consenting teachers and infants, toddlers, and young children (with parental consent) from three ECE settings: two education and care centres, and one kindergarten in Auckland. This article foregrounds the lead author's learning in relation to her ethical conduct with infants, toddlers, and their teachers in one of the centres.

The Matter of Ethics

Research involving infants, toddlers, and their teachers in real-world settings demands a strong focus on ethics. Researchers often face moral dilemmas about ways to gather data while keeping those they are interested in physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe. Importantly, they must remember to view all participants, including infants and toddlers, as real people

deserving of respect and care, reflecting a “a reciprocal contract to care” (Powell & Gooch, 2017, p. 36). Observing teaching practices guided by curriculum frameworks, especially within the fluid, complex environment of ECE, can be a challenge. Researchers’ presence can influence actual practices and sway subsequent understandings of effective teaching and learning. This complexity necessitates a reflexive approach to ethics in situ, recognising our own subjectivity, and staying open to what can be learned beyond what is already known about “good” research in ECE.

The project received ethical approval from the University of Auckland’s Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC). Engagement with this process required the research team to consider how agreed upon ethical principles would be applied to the research design. These matters were ensuring that all managers, teachers, and parents had clear and accessible information to make an informed decision about participation in the project (informed consent, voluntary participation, and parental permission), respecting the privacy of each participant (confidentiality and careful use/storage of the data), and prioritising the well-being and safety of the participants such as through non-intrusive observations (minimising harm and ensuring well-being). It also triggered important conversations about how to approach the project and relationships with the teachers, children, and families involved in the filming.

Beyond the anticipatory process of formal ethics approval, there were also micro-ethical moments (Graham et al., 2015) that required in situ responses from the research team. Spiel et al. (2020) describe micro-ethics as mundane and everyday moments, including everyday interactions between individuals that are, nevertheless, ethically significant. Attending to micro-ethics involves ethics-in-action, nuanced responses required by researchers as ethically charged moments arise during the research process. Ethics-in-action engage with the messiness and unpredictability of actual ethical situations encountered during fieldwork (Rutanan et al., 2023) and highlight the need for ongoing, situated reflexive approaches to ethical decision-making.

Reflexivity, a fundamental principle of ethical decision-making, is described by Graham et al. (2015) as the capacity of the researcher “to be conscious and give account of their actions” (p. 334). Reflexivity throughout the research process fosters an ethical mindfulness that assists researchers in gaining insights into dynamics that are unfolding, including a self-awareness of their previous experiences and values. We posit that illuminating the micro-ethical moments that occurred in the context of an unfolding research project including infant and toddler participants has the potential to feed forward into broader understandings of what ethical conduct means for anyone working with infants and toddlers.

The micro-ethical moments reported in this article occurred in the developing relationship between two researchers and their infant and toddler (and their teacher) participants. Rutanan et al. (2023) point out that infants and toddlers continue to be marginalised in discussions about children as research participants because their non-verbal participation is challenging to conceptualise and theorise. From their work with children with disabilities,

Spiel et al. (2020) argue that research with children from marginalised groups requires careful attention to issues of power and responsibility. Infants and toddlers, as a group, have specific characteristics and needs that require consideration throughout the research process and are especially relevant in situ. Infants’ and toddlers’ ways of participating, and of giving or withdrawing consent, require continuous interpretation by adults who are still developing trust.

Ethics-in-action are first and foremost relational ethics because ethical decision-making is grounded in the relationship between the researcher and participant and acknowledges their interdependency in the research process (Rutanan et al., 2023). Researchers need to be aware of the power differences inherent in these relationships, and how these differences actively shape what occurs during the research process. In our project, we found that researching with infant and toddler participants required us to think beyond standard ethical principles and assumptions, recognising the fundamentally different ways that infants and toddlers are “heard”, “seen”, and respected as research participants.

Spiel et al. (2020) note that ethical decision-making at this level often remains “tacit and implicit” (p. 46) in the reporting of research. They suggest that including these considerations in the reporting process can offer diverse perspectives and insights to the field. Reflecting on and illuminating moments of ethics-in-action from our project reveal the fluid and complex nature of research with early childhood communities, the unique considerations of naturalistic research with infants and toddlers, and how the subjectivity of each researcher comes to bear on in situ ethical decision-making. We hope these discussions will be useful more widely, particularly for teachers and those working with infants and toddlers in a range of ways and contexts that inevitably involve everyday ethics-in-action.

The Approach to Ethics

A central voice in this article, Alice (research assistant), worked closely with Justine (academic researcher) to complete the filming in one centre. Alice shares her experience of filming infants and toddlers in this setting, and the ethical possibilities and complexities this experience raised for her. Alice’s experiences highlight the importance of a relational approach to ethics-in-action, including an awareness of the reciprocal ways in which the relationships between children, families, teachers, and researchers influence each other. Alice’s reflexivity as an emerging researcher is also evident as she gives account of her actions in order to foster an ethical attitude during the research process (Graham et al., 2015). To do this, Alice reflects on her previous assumptions about infants and toddlers and draws on her identities as a researcher and an infant-toddler teacher to help her engage in an ethically mindful way in relation to each scenario.

Alice applies the idea of ethical symmetry in research with infants and toddlers. Ethical symmetry refers to the attitude of forming the same ethical relationships with children as if they were adult participants while simultaneously respecting and being responsive to children’s unique developmental stages and surroundings (Salamon, 2015). This attitude corroborates the idea that infants and toddlers are “smaller, younger and easily misinterpreted by



others” (White, 2011, p. 191). However, they are “powerful and agentic” (p. 191) at the same time and can make an authentic contribution to the research. Importantly, the notion of ethical symmetry encourages a shift from seeing infants and toddlers as research objects to people who are co-generating knowledge with adult researchers.

We may never fully understand what a child thinks. However, Alice made efforts to gain the perspectives of infants and toddlers in the research. As suggested by White (2011), infants’ and toddlers’ voices can be viewed “as plural, corporeal, dialogic, visual and aural; and as an intersubjective research quest with our youngest that is in constant flux” (p. 185). Alice carefully observed and tuned in to infants’ and toddlers’ various ways of non-verbal communication through their cues, gestures, vocalisations, and language of the body (Cooper et al., 2012). Co-authors and research project leaders, Maria and Kiri, engaged in collaborative dialogue with Alice about these experiences to consider the ethical possibilities, complexities, and learning involved.

Alice’s Story

I was involved in the Te Whāriki project as a research assistant. One responsibility of mine was to generate data by taking videos in an infant and toddler centre, supported by an academic researcher. When I was an infant-toddler teacher, I favoured taking videos to record valuable moments of children learning, playing, and growing. In particular, I enjoyed watching these videos with the toddlers, which seemed to strengthen our relationships and help them revisit their experiences. Sharing the videos with their parents, whānau, including their families overseas involved them in their children’s learning experiences and deepened my connections with them. Also, I preferred using an iPhone to film, rather than a camera or iPad, since an iPhone is small and handy, and produces high-quality images and sound.

From a researcher’s perspective, the use of video allows me to replay footage back as many times as I need to, for a better understanding and to interpret data. Additionally, videos provide opportunities to document and analyse children’s learning and development, including infants’ and toddlers’ non-verbal communication and language, facial expressions, and body movements (Cooper et al., 2012).

Although I kept institutional ethics in mind when I entered the centre, I did not have a deep understanding of why “applying ethics principles in practice is a complex and dynamic process that requires critical reflection throughout all stages of research” (Flewitt & Ang, 2020, p. 31). This filming experience has since influenced my understanding of ethics-in-action when undertaking naturalistic video observations of infants and toddlers in an ECE setting. I present two situations I encountered. For each one, I engaged in further collaborative discussion with the project leaders to make sense of these experiences in relation to my learning about research ethics.

Scenario 1: The Value of Building Trusting Relationships

Spending time thinking about different ways to establish trusting relationships can benefit researchers and participants and contribute to minimising the disruptions that the research may bring to participants (Flewitt & Ang, 2020). To build trusting relationships with teachers Justine and I were invited to attend one of the centre’s regular staff meetings to answer teachers’ questions about the project. At this meeting, we also asked teachers to introduce the project to parents and children and then organised an online session (using ZOOM) for parents to ask their own questions and have them answered.

Once we had consent from participants, Justine and I scheduled a half-day visit to the centre for familiarisation. In negotiation with the centre leader, we decided to arrive at the centre as soon as it opened in the morning. We thought that meeting children and their families in person during the drop-off time would be beneficial to building trusting relationships.

Although we had consent to proceed, we planned to be flexible in relation to videoing the infants and toddlers during the familiarisation visit. An hour or so into our visit, we realised the children were settled with our presence in the centre and with me using my iPhone to film the physical environment. Would it be possible to start filming children now? Or maybe I could begin with filming child Jake (pseudonym), who showed an interest in me, and actively invited me into several pre-verbal, gestural conversations. So, we asked the centre manager and teachers whether it would be appropriate for us to begin videoing children in this situation. After getting their agreement, I started filming the infants and toddlers that teachers pointed out we had consent for.

Before going to the centre, I had assumed that filming infants and toddlers would be difficult. However, the unexpectedly short period of familiarisation challenged my assumption. As a former infant-toddler teacher, I still remember how some infants or toddlers would burst into tears when they saw new parents visiting, making it difficult for them to ease into their sleep or mealtime routine, let alone deal with strangers taking videos of them. Hence, I thought I would see a similar situation. Also, I was unsure how long infants and toddlers would need to feel secure in my presence and let me film them. However, the infants and toddlers in the centre appeared confident, highly adaptable, and quickly and smoothly resumed their routines after seeing and meeting us, two strangers, in their environment.

I have since learned that personal assumptions are one of the influencing factors in ethical planning and decision-making (Flewitt & Ang, 2020). Hence, researchers need to be aware of them. It is also common for personal beliefs or values to be challenged or maintained during research. Indeed, “Methods that treat children as knowledgeable, capable, and agentic are now *de rigueur*, but suffused with challenges that researchers may not always perhaps consider or report” (Hedges, 2022, p. 60). With these ideas in mind, I understand now that rather than view my prior assumptions and subjectivity as a failure, my previous teaching experience supported me to be more sensitive and responsive to the infants and toddlers in the centre. Nonetheless, Hedges (2022) would suggest that in the role of research assistant, not a teacher who has a different way of interacting with children, I need to stay open

and reflective about “my role, intentions and methods” (p. 62) in the setting and how my assumptions can affect data generation.

In addition to thinking about the assumptions I brought to my filming of infants and toddlers, I contemplated why the infants and toddlers had responded to us in the way they did despite us being strangers. Based on the centre’s high teacher-child ratio of 1 adult to 3 children, and my observations of the patient and peaceful interactions between teachers and children, I realised that the effort in establishing trusting relationships with teachers and children’s parents helped in some way to differentiate us from strangers.

As previously mentioned, for the familiarisation period, we made the deliberate decision to spend time in the centre during their morning drop-off time to introduce ourselves to parents and children. The trust-building activities with teachers and parents helped introduce us to “the setting” before we met the children. Then, as we interacted more with the teaching team in their room, children witnessing our friendly communication and interactions with their teachers and parents likely helped children to feel at ease with us in their space.

Scenario 2: The Importance of Seeking Ongoing Assent From Infants and Toddlers

Baby Ollie (pseudonym) was around 11 months old. When I stood nearby to begin filming, he was lying on his tummy on the mat, his eyes looking down, and stretching and kicking his legs. I started videoing him, thinking this would be a valuable clip for the research. Immediately, Ollie turned his head to me and found me. He smiled at first, with his mouth making a “si-si” sound. I smiled at him, waving my hand to greet him. However, he suddenly stopped smiling, making sounds, kicking his legs, and just stared at me. Mindful of his demeanour, I continued filming but was ready to pause if needed, making the same “si-si” sound to connect with him in a friendly manner. Ollie still stared at me without any response. Was this Ollie’s way of telling me he was unsure of my presence? Had I interrupted his flow of thought? Or had I just become a focus of interest for him? Did he want me to stay or go? I then decided to stop filming and come back later.

I believe infants are “competent and confident learners and communicators” (MOE, 2017, p. 5) and respect their diverse forms of communication, such as their non-verbal language, gestures, and cues. Although Ollie did not cry, I realised my presence and the action of filming may have interrupted his exploration of body and sound. The belief in putting children and their agenda first, no matter their age, and being unsure of what Ollie was thinking or feeling, influenced my decision to stop videoing Ollie and to leave more time for him to choose his own ways to participate in the filming.

Adjusting the filming according to Ollie’s non-verbal responses exemplifies the ethical consideration of seeking infants’ and toddlers’ ongoing consent (assent) and voluntary participation during the research, once parents have given proxy consent for their children’s participation (Hedges, 2022). Importantly, ongoing consent means children’s assent or dissent is not fixed but constantly changing (Hedges, 2022). Ollie’s ambivalent response to me at this time did not mean he would not participate in the

research. When I returned to Ollie later in the day, he smiled at me and continued his exploration of the environment. I took this affirmative, non-verbal cue to be his way of telling me he was comfortable with my presence and for me to film at this time.

Putting children and their emotions first, and believing they can give consent/assent, upholds ethical research with children. Children are capable participants in research. Researchers generate data with children rather than “extracting knowledge from them” (Flewitt & Ang, 2020, p. 82). However, children are different from adults, especially infants and toddlers who are still developing their verbal language and coherent understandings of their experiences. Such ideas are consistent with Salamon’s (2015) notion of going into naturalistic research with infants with an attitude of ethical symmetry. This idea acknowledges infants and toddlers as capable participants and respects their unique needs as people.

Concluding Thoughts

Reflecting on these experiences, including through collaborative dialogue with more established researchers, I have learned that qualitative research with infants and toddlers requires a thoughtful approach before, during, and after the familiarisation period (Hedges, 2022). Reflexivity is key to recognising and responding to the micro-ethics of situations with infants and toddlers that may appear as mundane and everyday moments to some but are, nonetheless, ethically significant (Graham et al., 2015; Spiel et al., 2020). I understand now that relational ethics-in-action brings both possibilities and complexities when filming in an infant-toddler setting. The trusting relationships between researchers, teachers, children, and their families can affect the progress and integrity of the research and the researcher. In particular, respectful and responsive relationships between researchers and very young children can empower both parties’ active co-generation of knowledge. However, researchers must constantly reflect on how their assumptions impact data generation and seek infants’ and toddlers’ ongoing assent by being attentive to their verbal and non-verbal cues in every research situation. It is also important for teachers and researchers to reflect on how their assumptions about the capabilities of infants and toddlers affect their teaching or research in the infant-toddler setting.

Finally, teachers and researchers need to be encouraged to engage in collaborative dialogue about ethics-in-action concerning all children and a reflexive approach to the ongoing storage and dissemination of their video data. For example, where and how do they store the videos? Who does and will have access to the video data? If teachers use their own phones to film, what will happen to those phone videos if they leave the job? If teachers or researchers include children’s videos in an online seminar or workshop, how can children’s videos be protected from being recorded by third parties? These questions remind us that videoing children’s experiences in ECE requires ethical conduct and a thoughtful awareness of the possibilities and complexities. Above all, it is essential for researchers to remember that participants are not just the subjects of research; rather, they are real people who are deserving of respect and care, no matter their age.

Acknowledgements

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Out of the staffroom into the centre: Early childhood teachers' use of mobile phones

BY TAMAR WEISZ-KOVES, JANE DIXON, AND JAANA LONG



(voices from the field)

This article focuses on the use of mobile phones by teachers in two early learning services. It includes the voices and experiences of two centre managers, Jane Dixon, from the ACG Parnell Early Learning School in Auckland, and Jaana Long, from Millie's House (Oxford St) in Wellington. Discussion highlights why and how their teaching teams intentionally use mobile phones as part of centre practice, and the associated benefits, challenges, and ethical considerations. Tamar Weisz-Koves, introduces and concludes the articles drawing on her experience as an early childhood teacher and teacher educator at the University of Auckland.

Introduction—Tamar Weisz-Koves

As a curriculum subject technology is concerned with ways of thinking and doing and the tools, products, and systems developed by humans to help us solve practical problems and make aspects of our lives easier and more efficient (Holdom, 2018; Mawson, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2017; Smorti, 1999). Over two decades ago Smorti (1999) posited that “There is an increasing awareness of the technological world that we live in, a world that people have created and changed [and will continue to create and change] through technology” (p. 1). Whether one sees the changes brought about by technological developments as positive, negative, or a mixture of both, there is no denying that the past couple of decades have brought about significant changes in the ways digital technologies have become embedded in daily life. For example, 20 years ago, when I first started working as a teacher educator, I recall asking student teachers in class to turn off their mobile phones and put them away to avoid students being distracted from learning. These days, digital devices such as laptops, iPads, and smartphones with their various apps have become essential tools for teaching and learning in initial teacher education (ITE) classrooms, with many ITE programmes now offering blended or online study options.

Correspondingly, the past two decades have also seen significant shifts in early childhood teachers' use of digital technologies as part of centre practice. For instance, computers, digital cameras, and iPads have enabled teachers to move beyond primarily handwriting documentation and relying on cameras that used film. Most early learning services now have websites and use social media and online platforms, such as *Educa*, *Storypark*, and *Seesaw* for a range of purposes, including children's portfolios and communicating with families.

Educationalists, such as Parnell and Bartlett (2012) and Pennells (2021), assert that digital technologies have the potential to be powerful tools for making valued learning visible, affirming children's identities, and strengthening home-school connections. However, the use of digital technologies in early childhood

education (ECE), particularly by children, continues to be the source of significant debate (Early Childhood Australia, 2018; Flee, 2016; Stephen & Plowman, 2013) as teachers consider the potential pros, cons, and ethical issues associated with decisions about whether to incorporate new technologies into ECE settings, and if so, how?

A trend I have noticed over the past 2-3 years while visiting student teachers on practicum is that of teachers using mobile phones as part of centre practice. No longer relegated to the staff room and teachers' breaks, the mobile phone is becoming a regular feature in some ECE contexts, including those with infants and toddlers. For example, during a recent practicum visit in the infant and toddler room at the Auckland-based ACG Parnell Early Learning School, teachers explained they were using a new app to document individual children's care and routines. They seemed keen for me to understand that they were using their mobile phones for work related to children i.e., not for personal reasons.

The idea for this article emerged after speaking with Jane Dixon, the Manager of the ACG Parnell Early Learning School, about the team's experience of using the *Playground* app. I asked her if she would be interested in sharing this experience and developed some prompts for discussion, which Jane has generously responded to. To broaden the range of perspectives, I put a call out on *The First Years* Facebook group to invite responses from other early childhood services. Jaana Long, from Millie's House (Oxford St) in Wellington, responded to this invitation.

Many thanks to Jane, Jaana, and their teams for the following responses which provide insights into why and how teaching teams in some ECE services are intentionally using mobile phones as part of their practice, and the associated benefits, challenges, and ethical considerations.

Jane Dixon

ACG Parnell Early Learning School (Auckland)

Our early learning school is located in central Auckland. We support the learning of children aged 3 months to 5 years and have three learning spaces for children aged 0-2, 2-3.5 and 3.5-5 years of age. We are licensed for 118 children and are a Reggio inspired learning environment.

We use mobile phones to keep parents informed about their child's day. We utilise an app called *Playground* for kaiako (early childhood teachers) and an app by Xplor, called *Home*, for whānau (families) to ensure that parents have semi-live updates about their child's key care moments. This includes when children go to sleep, when they are checked while sleeping, and their wake-up times. Whānau are also able to see when and how much children eat and drink, and when they have had a fresh nappy. Additionally, parents can input children's medication needs and see when these were administered.

Kaiako also use these apps to document observations connected to an individual child's learning priorities and trajectory as close to the event as possible. This encourages parents to contribute to their child's learning, creating links to learning at home and our early learning service.

Apps We Find Useful

We find the *Playground* app very helpful as we can see an overview of each child's day in terms of their key care moments. This enables us to see and analyse patterns and whānau find this helpful too. Our conversations with whānau at the end of the day are strengthened as they have some idea of how their child's day has been. Being aware of their child's patterns in real, or close to real time, helps parents feel at ease. Parents can come to us with targeted questions and revisit certain parts of their child's day which they may feel unsure about. Our parents like that all their child's teachers have access to information about the child's day using the *Playground* app, as it makes communicating easier. All documents are online, so there is no risk of teachers misplacing documents as they move through the room, which is also extremely helpful.

Responses From Families

Although it was a challenge to get everybody up and running with the *Playground* app, and there are still challenges, whānau like the idea of being able to see aspects of their child's day. When talking with parents about how they find the app, they have said that it removes some of the fear around leaving their child and they have a sense of peace when they get updates.

As kaiako, we understand that our children come first. We are aware of ensuring that children do not see teachers looking at their screens, so will often take turns to update our charts away from tamariki (children).

Challenges

Tamariki always come first. This means that updates may not happen in the moment but will happen not long after. When the app was first introduced to whānau, it took some time for whānau to understand that these may not be updated in real time but will be updated when teachers are not directly engaging with tamariki. For example, we may not update that a child had their bottle as soon as they finished their bottle because we might still be supporting or engaging with the child. However, we will do this once the child's needs are met.

Another challenge is ensuring that children do not see us always having a phone in hand. When doing an observation, we may quickly take a video or photo of a child but then discreetly tuck our phone away to ensure we are engaging with the child. We can then update this observation at a later time, away from tamariki.

Ethical Considerations

We are mindful about being in the moment with tamariki and careful about what information and images we capture, and how often, to ensure that we have uninterrupted genuine engagement with children. We are also mindful of not impeding the learning moment with technology and use our devices in a respectful and non-invasive way. We maintain that children are the priority, ensure that we have parents' permission, and that all members of our team are clear on how and what information is gathered. Information is deleted from teachers' phones once it has been used for its intended purpose.

Suggestions for Other Early Learning Services Thinking About Introducing Mobile Phones as Part of Centre Practice

Ensure there are clear guidelines and boundaries for kaiako that place tamariki at the centre of decision making. It is important to articulate what mobile phones are used for and how they are used. In doing so, kaiako are well equipped to use technology responsibly.

Additional Comments

Digital technology has become a big part of society, but we are mindful that there needs to be a balance and digital technology should not take the place of human interaction. Although we utilise digital technology in the centre to give parents as clear a picture of their child's day before they pick up their children, we are aware that this does not replace daily conversations with whānau that involve talking about their child's day and dispositional learning and making authentic connections between the centre and home. Digital technology should be used to enhance communication and not to take away from the beauty of having face-to-face conversations with all involved in a child's learning journey.

Jaana Long

Millie's House (Oxford St, Wellington)

We are a small centre, licensed for 34 children. We offer 4-hour sessions from 8.30am–2.30pm and 1–5pm as well as all day care for children aged 2–5 years old.

In our team, we each have a Samsung A10 purchased by the centre just over two years ago, which we refer to as an assessment tool. We use these mobile phones to take photos and videos of the children at play. This helps us to capture moments that reflect children's interests and learning. Sometimes, we record the children's voices to gain insights into what is going on for them. We then use our centre phones to access *Storypark* and load photos and videos almost immediately into children's portfolios as a "magic moment" or group story. Kaiako, with permission, also use our mobiles to video record each other's teaching for the purpose of self-reflection. This is a great tool for teachers.

Apps We Find Useful

- NZ Sign Language (for learning new words)
- *YouTube* and *Spotify* (for accessing music we play through the Bluetooth speakers)
- *Google* (for research)
- *Storypark* (for online portfolios)

We also have several Bluetooth speakers that we connect to the phones to play music during mat times. On occasion, we play videos of celebrations or of the children using a Google dongle attached to a TV (that is only used for this purpose).

Kaiako are grateful that they have these tools and do not have to share one iPad between five teachers due to cost. Each teacher having their own centre phone means they do not have to wait for a turn to take photos or videos and can capture more magic moments and learning for children. This also means we can be more productive in our non-contact time. Furthermore, having access to centre phones helps teachers to separate work from their personal life.

Responses From Families

Our families were advised when we got the phones and we let new families know so that they do not think kaiako are using their personal phones during centre time. They like the idea that photos can be taken and uploaded instantly and are keen to know how else we might use our mobile phones. We are happy to discuss this, as we are very clear about their usage.

Setting Guidelines

It was a significant cost to the centre to purchase the mobiles, so before introducing mobile phones, we discussed how they would be used and why it would be useful to have one each. We discussed at length how they were to be used and that they would stay on the centre property and be locked in a cupboard at night to ensure the privacy of children.

We also discussed what would happen if the mobiles were misused. In the beginning, we reviewed how we were using them. As the manager, if I felt teachers were overusing the phones and not focusing on the children, I would give them feedback and remind them of what we had discussed. Now that we have had them for so long, we are more comfortable, and they are only used for their intended purpose.

We have all signed an agreement on the usage of the mobiles as assessment tools to ensure we respect children's privacy and respect the parents' views too. Kaiako know not to have their own phones on them and that personal phones are for use in their own time. The mobiles are connected to the centre's unlimited Wi-Fi but because kaiako respect that they are such a useful tool, they do not use them for non-centre related purposes (e.g., checking personal emails). They also leave the centre phones at work unless they request to take them home for a special reason (e.g., if they are catching up on centre documentation). This reduces the possibility of misuse.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

The children's privacy is a high priority, and we know that many families do not want their children to have digital footprints. We respectfully ask families to not take photos at special occasions. If they would like photos, we offer them our centre mobiles, then upload the photos onto *Storypark* for them. This is an effort to ensure photos are not uploaded to social media sites.

Once, we had an issue where we were concerned about a staff member and their language and behaviour with the children. It was suggested we record what the person was saying without their knowledge. However, we had long discussions about this and decided that it was unethical. We would not like that happening to us, so we would not do it to any others either. Instead, we agreed that any issues observed need to be written down and discussed with the person involved.

Another issue we are aware of is not to access sites we have not seen before when sharing with children. We are very careful that children do not have access to any sites that are inappropriate.

Suggestions for Other Centres Thinking About Introducing Mobile Phones as Part of Centre Practice

Kaiako need to understand the importance of respecting children's privacy and be mindful of parents' concerns. It is important that teachers not be blasé about their use of the mobile phones and be aware of the consequences of misuse. Engaging in in-depth discussions about the usage of mobile phones develops a clear and shared understanding about how and what they are used for. Having clear rules, and reasons for these rules, is helpful.

Purchasing centre mobiles and having a rule that these phones stay in the centre makes it less likely they will be used inappropriately. Having centre phones stay at the centre also ensures that they are not accidentally left at home and teachers have access to them when needed.

Additionally, kaiako need to be clear about the apps they use and have agreed understanding about which ones are used and for what purpose. For example, we have had some children who want to hold the phones to view cartoons or *YouTube* videos, but we are clear that they are only for teachers to use and will find videos or music that we believe are appropriate for children to see or listen to.

Additional Comments

It is important to be very clear as to why you have mobile phones and what they are used for. Kaiako in our centre know that if they misuse or damage the phones, they will not just be replaced as they are expensive. This was something we discussed early on, so kaiako have been careful with their use from the beginning.

Conclusion

Kaiako, in the early childhood centres that contributed to this article, are using mobile phones for multiple purposes with the intention of benefiting children, whānau, and teachers. The portability of mobile phones offers many affordances as a convenient tool to use in the moment for communication, observation, assessment, documentation, and furthering children's learning.

It is evident that much care and thought is going into the ways mobile phones are used by teaching teams in both centres to ensure that children are at the heart of centre practice, that children's safety and privacy are maintained, and ethical considerations are addressed. Ways centres can circumnavigate some of the fears around teachers' use of mobile phones in centre practice include having clear guidelines for their use—that both teachers and families are aware of and are regularly reviewed—purchasing phones that are only for use in the centre, and ensuring that phones add to, rather than replace, face-to-face communication.

It is hoped that this article provokes awareness, reflection, and healthy debate around teachers' use of mobile phones in early childhood education. For a useful summary of research and guidance regarding the use of digital technologies in early childhood education, readers are encouraged to access the *Statement on Young Children and Digital Technologies* published by Early Childhood Australia (2018). Readers may also find Parnell and Bartlett's (2012) article, "iDocument: How smartphones and tablets are changing documentation in preschool and primary classrooms" of interest. Both readings are freely available online and you can find the links in the following reference list.

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Children's interests, inquiries and identities: Curriculum, pedagogy, learning and outcomes in the early years by Helen Hedges



BOOK REVIEW BY DR DANIEL LOVATT



Expect to be challenged and inspired when you read *Children's Interests, Inquiries and Identities*. Expect to be drawn in deeply, wanting to read and re-read the book and expect to gain new and insightful understandings of teaching and learning in early childhood education. In this book, Professor Helen Hedges brings together much of the empirical research she has been involved with in Early Childhood Education. She weaves her research evidence together with past and contemporary research and theorising from multiple perspectives to problematise and move past many practices and understandings that have been taken for granted and subject to folklore in ECE. She then offers possibilities as ways to challenge, deconstruct, reconstruct, and deepen understandings.

Helen has written a book that will appeal to teachers, students, parents, policymakers, and academics. As the title suggests, the book focuses on young children's interests, inquiries, and identities through four perspectives: curriculum, pedagogy, learning, and outcomes. The book is highly accessible to readers from all walks of life. Helen thoughtfully offers possibilities for a myriad of readers to best prioritise their reading through the book, suggesting different chapters for different readers. In all sections of the book, she draws on her past research, presenting rich and engaging vignettes to support and clarify her arguments.

Throughout her book, Helen demonstrates an exceptional ability to weave many threads together in ways that acknowledge and interrogate the complexity of the topics covered yet leaves the reader with clarity. As I read the book, I was often reminded of a weaving machine that takes many pieces of thread into a common point and produces a beautiful picture through its thoughtful and skilful combination.

The premise for *Children's Interests, Inquiries and Identities* appears simple: dig deeper into children's interests to understand what might underly surface-level activities. However, digging deeper into young children's interests, inquiries, and identities is not a simple task. Helen acknowledges the complexity of digging deeper, beginning by problematising the notion of children's interests-led curriculum. She takes up the challenge put forward by Carl Bereiter (2002) that young children have profound questions related to large issues and forces throughout the world, such as birth, death, good, and evil, that teachers seldom dig deep enough to recognise.

Helen encourages the reader to be analytical when considering children's interests, to reflect on the complexity of those interests, and to theorise and explain children's interests in deeper ways. She

offers multiple perspectives, such as funds of knowledge, funds of identities, and working theories as ways of enabling deeper understandings of interests, inquiries, and identities. Helen then draws on these possibilities to integrate teachers and children's interests, explaining how vital and valid teachers' interests are in early childhood curriculum. She explains her ongoing research on interests, inquiries, and identities with older people, linking interests and identities in later life to early childhood. Finally, she brings it all together, offering two models. One for recognising and understanding children's interests, and the other, a model for interests-based curriculum and pedagogy.

The first third of the book establishes an argument that interests, inquiries, and identities are under-researched, even subject to understandings that can be considered folklore. The first three chapters investigate and explore theoretical perspectives and understandings of interests, inquiries, and identities, and incorporate further perspectives, including those of policy-makers and curriculum developers.

In Chapter 1, Helen begins by problematising children's interests, arguing that their interests are under-researched, under-articulated, and taken for granted. She asks the reader to dig deeper, and to go beyond the surface-level activities and topics young children choose to be involved in. Helen argues that young children desire to make meaning of the world and develop multiple identities that give purpose and meaning to their lives.

In Chapter 2, Helen raises the issue of children's interests as being subject to folklore and folk wisdom. She asks the reader to go beyond current, and perhaps narrow, understandings, and to analytically address children's interests. Helen reviews past research of, and theoretical perspectives towards, interest, inquiries, and identities; promoting a sociocultural perspective which is prevalent through the remainder of the book. She presents powerful connections between children's interests and informal learning which afford readers with valid reasons to investigate and explore children's interests in new ways.

Chapter 3 includes an international perspective on early childhood policy, investment, and curriculum, focusing on the dilemmas that exist between policy and practice, particularly from neo-liberal standpoints. Helen positions the notion of human capability theory as an alternative to human capital theory as one way of promoting deep explorations and understandings of children's interests in early childhood curriculum. These first three chapters establish a basis for interests, inquiries, and identities as requiring strong evidential and empirical analysis and theorising, and as powerful aspects of learning.

The book then moves on to discuss Helen's own, and others' research, and ways of developing deeper theory-based and analysis-informed understandings of children's interests, inquiries, and identities through Chapters 4-7. This section begins with an examination of the methodologies underlying Helen's research. Through Chapters 5-7, Helen then draws on her rich and comprehensive research, together with past and contemporary research, to present funds of knowledge, funds of identity, inquiries and identities, and working theories as ways to interrogate and understand children's interests.

Chapter 4 details the methodologies and methods that have been the foundation of Helen's rich research projects into children's interests, inquiries, and identities. She explains the premise of ethnography which has been an important part of her work and delves into the complex world of ethics and research with young children. Helen then offers further possibilities for research, focusing on participatory and relational methodologies.

In Chapter 5, Helen presents the first possibility to develop deep and rich understandings of children's interests: a funds of knowledge approach. Helen explains the background and current understandings of funds of knowledge. She then presents her research which shows that funds of knowledge can be a significant way to recognise, engage with, and extend the learning that emerges through children's interests.

Chapter 6 continues the work from Chapter 5, by focusing on children's inquiries and identities. Helen presents Wells's (1999) real questions—the underlying inquiries that drive children's interests. She draws on Lindfors's (1999) work on human urges as social, intellectual, and personal, together with other research, to present seven fundamental inquiry questions that have been identified through her own research. Helen moves on to present funds of identities, arguing that this concept is a valid, relational based way of understanding children's interests and capability development.

Chapter 7 then introduces working theories, as an expression of inquiry and interest as a way to understand children's interests and inquiries. Helen argues that relational approaches in early childhood education, coupled with an open-mindedness to learning outcomes, and a focus on human capability theory are valid and significant ways to approach teaching and learning with young children. Supporting working theory development is one way that that brings these approaches, outcomes, and theories together.

The final section of the book begins with a potentially contentious topic: teachers' interests. In Chapter 8, Helen argues that teachers' interests are an ongoing and active aspect of teaching and learning whether recognised, or not, and provides an argument for their validity. In Chapter 9, Helen explores ongoing interests after early childhood, and the consequences this has for early childhood curriculum and pedagogy. Chapter 10 brings the entire book together, recapping the earlier arguments and explanations, and weaving them together through two models.

In Chapter 8 Helen asks us to re-analyse the place of teachers' interests in early childhood education. She points out that unrecognised teachers' interests are prevalent in guiding many decisions and responses that teachers make in their everyday teaching. She argues that teachers' interests should be recognised and valued when viewed from a sociocultural and relational pedagogical perspective. This perspective provides validity for teachers' interests to be overtly (re)positioned in early childhood curriculum and pedagogy, particularly in response to children's interests.

Chapter 9 focuses on the impact of children's interests on their later lives. Helen draws on Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) and her own research on children's ongoing lives as adults, focusing on the effect earlier interests had on later lives. She presents findings that sustained interests in early childhood can promote ongoing

achievement and motivation, though not always in the original areas of interest.

Finally, Chapter 10 draws the many threads throughout the book together, returning to Carl Bereiter's (2002) challenge that young children have profound questions, and that teachers seldom dig deep enough to recognise those profound questions. Helen provides an overview of her explanations and arguments in each chapter and presents two innovative models which address Bereiter's challenge. First, she presents a model showing how children's deep interests can be recognised and understood. In this way, Helen presents a way for teachers, academics, and policy-makers to understand how to go about identifying interests in daily teaching and learning. She then presents her second model, which brings together curriculum, pedagogy, interests, and knowledge in a way that promotes holistic outcomes, in particular, the development of working theories and learning dispositions.

Importantly, this book—*Children's Interests, Inquiries and Identities*—not only problematises and de-constructs the complex issues and challenges presented by seemingly simple concepts. It brings fresh understandings; explaining and synthesising various theoretical perspectives, and drawing on Helen's own, and others' research to analyse and re-construct those complex issues and challenges.

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Fellowship launched in memory of Tony Holmes:

A devoted teacher and educationist



A fellowship has been established in honour of the late Tony Holmes who was a co-founder of Victoria University's Institute for Early Childhood Studies. The fellowship is for a practitioner with a project which will benefit ECE and will be based at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington's Faculty of Education for a period of up to three months.

Starting in 2024, we hope that the fellowship will give recipients time for research and reflection, leading to recommendations for pedagogical or policy changes that will benefit early childhood education and care in New Zealand. The overall goal is to promote ongoing study and research on the practice, organisation, and philosophy of early childhood education.

For more information, please contact the
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List of contributors

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Mary Benson McMullen has been a Professor of Early Childhood Education at Indiana University (IU) since 1993. She was an infant-toddler and preschool teacher, then programme director before joining IU. Mary's research involves quality early care and education for infants and toddlers; healthy growth, development, learning, and well-being of children birth- to age 5; and pedagogies of care across cultures and contexts. Her books include: *On Being and Well-Being in Infant/Toddler Care and Education*; *Life Stories from Baby Rooms* (2022) and co-author with Brody of *Infants & Toddlers at Play*; *Choosing the Right Stuff for Learning & Development* (2022).

Dylan Brody

Dylan Brody (they/he), MEd, is a graduate research assistant and doctoral student in the Department of Educational Theory and Practice at the University of Georgia. Learning from infants and toddlers for 14 years has afforded Dylan the opportunity to cultivate an embodied theory of wonder which nurtures the scope of their work, outreach, and artistic pursuits. Their primary focus of scholarship is rooted in Critical Studies, with particular emphasis on early childhood, dimensions of justice in play, abolition, learning as alchemy, anti-oppressive pedagogy, and classroom as a healing portal. They are co-author with McMullen of *Infants & Toddlers at Play* (2022).

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Maria is co-Associate Dean Pacific and a senior lecturer at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland. She enjoys teaching and researching on infant-toddler pedagogies, educational leadership, early years curriculum, culture, and diversity in education. She is a fully certificated teacher, an experienced teacher mentor, a member of The First Years Journal editors collective and long-time supporter of this journal.

Jane Dixon

Jane Dixon is an experienced early learning services manager. She is a qualified and registered teacher who has a Postgraduate Diploma in human resources and certificates in Tikanga Māori. Jane is passionate about the Reggio approach to learning with an emphasis on ensuring that when children leave the early learning school, they are inspired to be lifelong learners with an emphasis on thinking "outside the box". To do this, Jane believes that we must support children to explore their creativity in a rich learning environment that encourages them to explore and make sense of the world.

Dr Kiri Gould

Kiri Gould is a lecturer, teacher-educator, and researcher at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland. She is Programme Director of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies. Her commitment to supporting

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Rebecca L. Hopkins leads the Postgraduate Diploma and Master's in Teaching and Learning (Early Childhood Teaching) programmes in the School of Education at Auckland University of Technology. Rebecca's teaching and research centres around an ethic of engagement and creativity, which she sees as being negotiated in the relational spaces between people, and people and their environments. Her Doctoral research explored and critiqued images of childhood and the normalised use of photographs in early childhood education. Current research projects focus on dissonance as pedagogy and potential, and the relational ethics of being human in a more-than-human world.

Alice Chen Jia

Alice Chen Jia is a PhD candidate at the University of Auckland. Both her master's and doctoral study focus on teachers' leadership in the context of early childhood education in New Zealand. Alice is a fully registered ECE teacher and educator in New Zealand and a certified interpreter in China.

Jaana Long

Originally from Ireland, Jaana Long started her early childhood teaching career in Australia before moving to New Zealand. She has managed centres and home-based services in the Wellington Region for over 20 years. Jaana says that she is continuously in awe of children and their learning and has been at her current centre for more than 11 years because of her belief in small group care. She works with an amazing group of kaiako who are all passionate about ECE and believe that it takes a village to raise a child.

Dr Daniel Lovatt

Daniel Lovatt is a qualified early childhood teacher and the curriculum leader at Aro Arataki Children's Centre. He previously worked as an electrician and electrical engineer. He recently completed his PhD, through which he explored young children's development of working theories related to STEM.

Ruth Mason

In addition to being a RIE® Associate, Ruth Mason is a parent educator certified by the Early Childhood Development Center of New York Medical College and is studying to be a Pikler pedagogue. Ruth is a journalist who has written extensively about parents and children, including articles on RIE® and the Pikler approach. She wrote the weekly column, Parenting, in The Jerusalem Post for seven years, is the producer/director of the documentary *These are my Names* and the founder of the Ethiopian Children's

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Associate Professor Jacoba Matapo

Jacoba Matapo is the first Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific at AUT. She is an Associate Professor, specialising in Pacific early childhood education and Pacific education research. She is of Samoan and Dutch heritage and was born and raised in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Her academic contributions centre on indigenous Pacific communities and collective engagement, which inform her research, teaching, and leadership.

Salā Pafitimai Dr Fa'asaulala Tagoilelagi-Leota

Salā Pafitimai Dr Fa'asaulala Tagoilelagi-Leota has a PhD cultural transition from AUT (2017). The focus of her research explores factors that contribute to Samoan children's cultural and language identity and wellbeing. Her research specialises in ECE transition from the aoga amata context to Samoan primary bilingual classrooms in Aotearoa New Zealand. She has significant experience in organisational leadership and management at executive and governance levels within tertiary institutions.

Dr Tafili Utumapu-McBride

Dr Tafili Utumapu-McBride is as an experienced academic in ECE initial teacher education and has expertise in mainstream and Pasifika ECE curriculum and pedagogy. She is fluent in gagana Samoa. Tafili has a PhD in Education from the University of Auckland (1998). Her doctoral research examined the impact of Samoan women's roles in 21 Samoan Language Nests in Auckland and was one of the first in Pacific ECE. Her research focused on documenting how Samoan communities had evolved and how they maintained their cultural identity.

Tamar Weisz-Koves

Tamar Weisz-Koves is an experienced ECE teacher, mentor, and teacher educator. Tamar has contracted at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland, in a range of roles, including Director of the Graduate Diploma in Teaching (ECE) programme. Areas of professional interest include practicum, teacher mentoring, teacher leadership, and STEM in the early years. Tamar is a member of The First Years editors collective and the lead editor for this issue.

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