

FOCUS ON PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY



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The Lens Between Us

Photography as a Mediator of Relationships

by Kirsten Haugen

With the rise of smartphones, the majority of humans* now possess an omni-present, near-endless, and virtually free capacity to snap photos. At the same time, the majority of today's children and teens have only experienced photo-taking as ubiquitous and instantaneous. More than ever, our ability and drive to 'capture the moment' mediates our relationships with one another, especially with children. Let's wield this power with intention and reflection.

'Capturing' the Moment

Who among us would forego the joy and value of documenting moments that mark our journeys through life, whether they are large and formal or a serendipitous moment in time? Who would discount the impact of would-be victims and bystanders who can document troubling situations and bring them to light, casting off doubts of their veracity? Once we 'take' or 'capture' a photo, it is worth asking who owns that image—and the moment and memories it contains? Both casually and legally, ownership typically goes to the photographer, who intentionally or not chooses what stays in the frame and what gets cropped out.**

From Snapping to Composing

Serious and professional photographers offer a model for making a qualitative shift from reflexively snapping to thoughtfully composing photographs. This in turn shifts the relationship between those on opposite sides of the lens. Dedicated photographers ground their eyes and minds in deep relationship with whom and what they photograph. Much like a child-led curriculum, approaching a camera as a dedicated photographer would leads to immersive experiences that deepen our observations and connections with the world around us. How can early educators adopt this

sense of relationship and intention in the photographs we take of children?

Taking Photos: When and How

Intentionally or not, the photos we take reflect what we value. Consciously or not, the things we say and do when taking photos of children send messages. One way is to be mindful of the potential hidden messages and outcomes of **when** and **how** we take photos of children and **what** we do with the results. Consider these familiar, well-meaning exchanges and how they may be received by children:

- **"Smile!"** — "Look happy for me; that is more important than me understanding what you are thinking, doing or feeling right now."
- **"Your parents will love this!"** — "In this moment, I think you are cute/worthy/attractive/funny/great for marketing."
- **"Wait, I missed that! Do that again!"** — "Perform for me. I am more interested in how this looks than in sharing this moment with you."

Without even speaking, what message do you send a child when you stop what you are doing with them to take a photo?

Ask yourself, can I take this photo without disrupting or disrespecting the moment? How does photographing this moment alter the moment itself? Is it worth it?

Done thoughtfully, the act of photographing can actually create the connecting moment. When I was a child, my grandparents took their eight grandchildren to a studio. The photographer wrapped up the posed photos, then called out, "Show me how much you love your grandparents!" The resulting photo, with everyone crawling over each other to hug our grandparents, is a family favorite. When it comes down when and how to photograph, Annie Leibovitz says, "Everyone has a point of view. Some people call it style, but what we're really talking about is the guts of a photograph."



Kirsten Haugen, M.A., collaborates with children, adults and organizations throughout the world, to understand and improve opportunities for children to grow and learn. She is passionate about clarifying our understanding and application of universal design for learning, learning with nature, behavior and self-regulation, and thoughtful use of technology in education. She works with Nature Explore, World Forum Foundation and other partners, and lives in Eugene, Oregon.

When you trust your point of view, that is when you start taking pictures.”

Sharing Photos: With Whom and Why

The joy and ease of taking photos carries over to sharing them, making it all too easy to do so without consideration for what may happen with a photo or how sharing impacts the children in it. Consider these questions:

- Who is the true audience for this photo?
- Will those who see it have adequate context to understand the child and the moment? What context might I need to provide?
- How does what I do with this photo respect and include the child’s perspective, understanding and desires?
- Will sharing this violate the child’s dignity, rights or safety in any way?
- Might I gain insights about whether or how to share particular photos by talking about them with the children involved?

The articles and reflections that follow share many ways our growing capacity for photography by both children and adults offers rich benefits to our families, communities and educational experiences. The potential is tremendous when we reflect deeply and repeatedly on the different dimensions of photography’s power. Thoughtfully done and shared, our relationships and moments with children are enriched.

*Cell phones and social media are ubiquitous. According to a 2019 study by the Pew Research Center, in advanced economies, 76 percent of adults own smart phones and 67 percent use social media, while in emerging economies 45 percent own smart phones and 49 percent use social media. Only 6 percent of adults in advanced economies and 17 percent in emerging economies own no mobile phone at all. In emerg-



The author and her siblings and cousins show a photographer how much they love their grandparents.

ing economies, it is the youngest adults who are most likely to own smart phones and use social media.

**Photographing others, including children, in public spaces is typically legal unless there is a “reasonable expectation of privacy,” such as in a public bathroom, or a prohibition is expressly posted. In public spaces especially, people may not even know their image has been ‘captured,’ nor where it will end up.

Resources

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The Eye of the Beholder

Photography as a Curriculum Tool in Nature

by Jill M. Anderson

If you give a child a camera and go outside...

I know, I know. It seems trite. Every situation in early childhood can be written as an "If You Take a Mouse to School" story. In this case, though, the results are so unique and enlightening, you might wish you had introduced nature photography years before to the young children in your lives.

Many of us have personally experienced or seen the multitude of selfies that children take when given access to a cell phone camera. They are highly entertaining and offer an interesting view of how children use their ability to capture and document their facial expressions. An increasing number of early childhood learning environments provide cameras for children to document their work, their friends, and their days in early childhood education. Photography is a tool and a strategy to implement that supports each child's ability to learn about and connect with the world, themselves, and others.

Incorporating digital cameras or camera phones in the outdoor learning environment offers many of the same opportunities. In addition, children discover the aesthetic beauty the outdoors provides, their ability to capture and document wonder in nature, and the use of a powerful tool for communication. Photography in nature supports children's deeper learning about the world around them, their own interests,

and their competence in communicating with tools and resources.

We, as early childhood educators, benefit by observing children's play with cameras and how they communicate their discoveries with peers and with us. We gain a valuable peek into individual children's thoughts, motivations, abilities, and feelings. We see what they choose to focus on, how they articulate their choices, and how that changes over time. The camera is just a tool. But what it provides the children and us is a true snapshot of each individual.

It is easy to throw my arms open and say, "Everyone should use nature photography with young children!" I am so passionate about it because I have witnessed the eye-opening joy that is introducing children to photography outdoors. It is a powerful sight to see a child slow down, stoop over a worm, not scoop it up, but take a picture of it. This brief few seconds is a significant moment of learning. I observed her regulate the impulsive desire to hold a worm. Instead she chose to observe and document its journey. She was inspired to watch this living thing continue its life without her interference.

She wondered where it was going. Did it have a family it was returning to? Which way was it going to go? How long would it be before it decided to go back underground? A three-minute encounter with a worm provided her with opportunities to self-regulate, wonder, question, and articulate these musings to me. With camera in hand, this little girl was showing me how deeply she cared for these worms and that her desire to know more and document this worm's journey transcended her desire to scoop worms up and carry them around.



Jill Anderson, M.S. Ed, ECSE, of Heart & Smile Creative Consulting LLC, is a nature-based educator and photographer based in the Kansas City metro area. She creates nature connections and shares her love of learning in nature with children and their families through playgroups, nature walks, and photography. Watching children of all ages and abilities come alive in outdoor environments is her "why," along with capturing images of the natural beauty all around us.

The intentional teacher in me is also inclined to provide a modified KWL chart here to make sense of photography as a curriculum tool.

What do we already KNOW?

We know that children in our care and in our classes are surrounded by cameras and technology with screens in their everyday life. We know they are very interested in technology, but they may not be explicitly taught how to use it appropriately or with purpose. We know that children are highly motivated when they are given the opportunity to follow their own interests. We know that children thrive in an outdoor learning environment. We know that children are incredibly curious about living and non-living things in the natural world. We know that the most powerful documentation of learning occurs when children are included, and better yet, when it is child-led.

What do we WANT to know?

We want to know more about every child—their personal perspective, their aesthetic, their story. We want to know more about each child's learning style. We want to know more about what motivates each child and brings joy to their face. We want to know what is unique and enticing in our own outdoor learning environments.

What will we LEARN?

The children will learn that photographs capture a brief moment in time that may look very different each day they return to the same spot. The children will learn about others' perspectives as they view and discuss peers' and adults' photos. The children will learn more about themselves, as they choose what to photograph and explain their choices and preferences. The children will learn to be confident in their own opinions as they share their art and documentation. The children will learn how to reflect on discoveries about themselves and their discoveries in nature. The children will learn to be confident in their own opinions and their ability to use a camera.

As educators, we will learn to step back and observe. We will learn which child loves to get close to insects and amphibians for macro photography. We will learn which child is motivated by capturing motion as the wind blows the leaves in the trees. We will learn which children are adept at communicating about their photographs; we will learn which children require more support in articulating their thoughts. We will

Photo courtesy of Heart and Smile Creative Consulting



Outdoor observation painting using mud paint.

learn that what we find fascinating about our environment may not be what captures the attention of the children. We will learn how capable children are of choosing their own learning.

This quasi-KWL chart touches only briefly on the wide range of the knowledge and learning that occurs when inviting children to use cameras as they explore and adventure outdoors. This is most assuredly a practice, though. Depending upon your children's exposure to the use of digital cameras and camera phones, it may take some time for children to move through different stages of learning to use cameras.

What does photography with young children look like?

Introduce the use of cameras as you would introduce other new provocations, toys, tools, and experiences. It is always good to start with a discussion about how to care for the cameras or digital devices in your classroom. Make this discussion short and to the point, as the children will be excited to get to experiment and play. You may choose to make it interactive. Take some photos of the children and narrate what you are doing:

"May I take your picture?" (Model how to respect others' privacy.)

"I am holding the camera by the sides with both hands, so my fingers are away from the lens." (Model how to hold the camera safely.)

"I think I am too far away from that flower. I am going to walk closer so it will be bigger in my photo." (Model how to plan a photograph.)

"Thank you for asking for a turn. I am going to take the strap off my neck and hand the camera to you carefully." (Model how to take turns and transfer between photographers.)

The key to supporting these budding nature photographers is to give them ample time to explore the camera and what it can and cannot do. You will see many fuzzy photos, photos of bodies with heads cropped off, and photos of unidentifiable nature treasures. I equate this to learning how to build a structure that is stable and does not tumble until we want it to crash. Trial and error is the name of the game in early learning and in photography, too!

When you look at the resulting photographs together, encourage each photographer to talk about his or her results. Give prompts and ask questions to encourage self-reflection:

- "Tell us about this group of photographs."
- "How did you get such a close-up photo of that leaf?"
- "You say you like this one. What do you like about it?"
- "How is this photograph of the flowers different from the photos of the beetle?"
- "It is hard to know what it is. You're right. Why can't we figure it out?"
- "What do you want to photograph next?"

As the children become more comfortable with the camera and how their actions result in different photo outcomes, continue to encourage them to pursue subjects and styles that elicit joy from them. I have included a few activities to inspire you and your children as you all become obsessed with the wonder that is nature photography.



Photography-infused Activity Ideas

Nature walks

Document finds and observations on nature walks with cameras to provide rich additions to written and drawn journals. The photographs also provide a clear picture for children who are motivated to do research about a nature find after the walk.

Still life study

Choose a unique spot in your outdoor environment that is somewhat set apart from everything. A single tree, a flowering bush, or a group of stumps work well. Model taking photos from different angles and distances to encourage children to discover how perspective changes the resulting photograph.

Documenting change

Photograph a tree or other living landmark nearby over time. Children may choose to stand in the same spot during different weather and in different seasons to document exact changes over time. They may also choose different angles and framing depending upon the day, deepening their understanding of a "study."

Macro worlds

Get low to the ground—lie down even! Sit and observe a small area of ground, a plant, or a single flower for a time. Watch for the tiny living world that exists right under our feet and noses. These photographs take time to master (moving slowly, holding still), but provide a fascinating opportunity to discover something new just by looking more closely around us.



Photo courtesy of Heart and Smile Creative Consulting

Photography supports close observation and documentation.

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PHOTOGRAPHER REFLECTIONS

Long Exposure

Learning Photography from My Mom

by Tim Wang

I was introduced to photography through my mom. To prevent me from getting into video games, she gave me a simple point-and-shoot camera and took me out to shoot during the weekends. During seventh grade, we would go to the harbor or suburbs to take pictures. It was an opportunity for parent-child time. At first, she just encouraged me to take photos of anything. I don't remember her criticizing what I had taken (even though it was straight-up garbage, looking back). This encouragement and exposure to photography eventually grew on me. I started to develop preferences for the genre. I guess that's when I realized that my mom's play had worked.

I started with bird photography. I loved capturing the movements of the birds and just observing them in general, though I didn't know what kind of bird I was shooting back then. My mom and I would sit in a car by the side of a rice field and just watch the herons come and fly away all afternoon. It was something that we could appreciate and talk about in common. We would also go to zoos, where kids would stop by different cages for a couple minutes and run on to the next, but we would just observe and shoot one animal for a while. Small movements and changes of the animals that were once boring to me were no more.

When I was in fourth grade, we took a family trip to Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks. I was so annoyed at my parents for dragging me around to see puddles of water and rocks. I lacked the appreciation of my surroundings and of nature. I don't know whether I would have later developed such appreciations for nature and the landscapes around me, if I had not been introduced to photography. But I do know that because of photography, I see things very differently than most people. Photography cultivates a person's patience, appreciation and curiosity. Everything is about timing and the moment that you click the shutter.

In a time where technologies have the power to both unite and isolate individuals, photography serves as a better alternative for children to explore and appreciate the events and things around them. Rather than using technology that encourages you to stay indoors and engage with virtual playmates, photography encourages exploration, expression and communication. Adults can share something in common with children and guide them or learn with them through the process. Exploration is always more interesting and fun with companions.



Photo of Jiu Fen Old Street, Taiwan by Tim Wang.



Tim Wang is a budding professional photographer. He grew up in Taiwan and is a recent graduate of the University of Canada, British Columbia. At 17, he was a finalist in the 2015 National Geographic international photography contest.

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Photography and Children's Right to Participation

by Vashima Goyal

Voices of Children: A Documentary

Vashima Goyal's passion for photography as a form of expression for children has simultaneously enriched and been enriched by her work with fellow members of the World Forum Foundation Working Group on Children's Rights, including the creation and production of The Voices of Children documentary, conceived and created together with Avante Educação e Mobilização Social (Brazil), COMOVA (Brazil), Boulder Journey School (USA), and Child@Street 11 (Singapore). This film can be viewed online, streamed or downloaded, and includes a discussion guide. We encourage you to view the film on your own or with a group of friends or colleagues.

The Documentary: worldforumfoundation.org/voc

The Working Group: worldforumfoundation.org/childrensrights



Big World, Deep Insights

Children gain from gazing at the big world through the tiny lens of any camera. Photography as a tool to construct meaning entices the child's head, heart and hands to capture the moment, being fully present. The natural curiosity to discover details of the big world leads a child to use a camera's zoom with zeal. Digitally reviewing the fleeting moments thus captured in the camera offers children a key to recall, relook, reject and refresh details otherwise lost. A camera within a child's control can offer moments of intense concentration, enthusiasm and joy. Such a state of mind enriches the learning experience multifold, and can stretch the flow thereafter,



Vashima Goyal is passionate about co-constructing collaborative learning journeys based on transformative ideas to enhance educational experiences, research and documentation. Goyal founded EduRetreat.org in 2008, a Singapore-based initiative, to enable educators to have dialogic exchanges through travel-and-learn conferences.

leading to new possibilities to play with other mediums for deeper internalization of initial observations. For example the young protagonists are enthusiastic to help transfer the images from the camera's memory card to review the images on a bigger screen. This extended possibility supports animated discussion, humour, looking anew at the process and the emotions that go along with initial observations, reflections, feedback and suggestions.

In my experience, scaffolding the process to review images for documentation, display, scanning or printing, with a group of children, reveals deep insight into their fair, logical and aesthetic minds, open to exchange of ideas and multiple view points. It amazes me how quickly children are ready to let go and move to the next moment (in this case the next image!) once agreement is accepted. Satisfaction of a job well done nurtures the spirit of celebration, recognition and bonding.

Expanding the Encounters

It is one sort of experience to be captured by camera as an object by enthusiastic parents, peers, educators, even strangers. Getting behind the lens, taking charge of the power of possibilities and perspectives, impacts the experience at a far deeper level—inviting the child to observe, connect and value being fully in the moment. The technical aspects of photography are secondary, to begin with. After all, children born in digital times rarely underestimate their capacity to point and shoot.

What makes the transformative difference is the autonomy of choice and freedom to click, without fear, at what lures the mind's eye. This autonomy to make sense of the world is an essential gateway to engage children for deeper reflective conversations and communication. It would not be an exaggeration to see it as an early experience in mindfulness and attentiveness. Children have natural affinity to beauty. Once a five-year-old shared a pearl of wisdom that stayed with me. She said, "Children love all beautiful things!"

It prompted me to start a ritual of sharing one or two beautiful pictures of nature or animals with children, giving ourselves unhurried time to let the photographs speak to us.

A few questions to provoke reflective conversation can naturally lead the children to inner explorations.

- "Let's pause together and look at the image for ten seconds"
- "If you like let's close our eyes and see if we can still hold the image in our mind's eye"
- "What do you notice in the picture that speaks to your heart?"

Voice and Visibility

Unparalleled in history, our wired world makes the mobile camera a dominant medium for children's lives and communication. It's critical that we ask, what should the camera help to make visible? For example, in the context of school, photographs of children's learning make their presence, competencies

Reflections on Participation as conceived in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Participation promotes the empowerment and capacity of children to be involved in the decisions and actions that affect them. This includes civil rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, of conscience and religions, association and peaceful assembly as well as access to information and children's right to express their views in matters affecting them.

Articles on Participation include:

- Freedom from discrimination (Article 2)
- The right to be heard (Article 12)
- Freedom of expression (Article 13)
- Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14)
- Freedom of association and peaceful assembly (Article 15)
- Access to information (Article 17)

Source: www.childrightscampaign.org/what-is-the-crc/the-themes-of-the-crc/



"Children learn to gaze at the big world through the lens of a camera."

and explorations visible, while honoring children's rights to be seen and heard.

More recently, as humanity as a whole, we have experienced disquieting dilemmas during the global pandemic. The idea of "one glove fits all" as a winning strategy universally applied has proven untenable. When we ground ourselves with a responsible, ethical and authentic purpose, photography offers a multitude of benefits, honoring children's right to participate and unlocking the audacious possibility to investigate their world with keen awareness. With the old world order in transition, enhancing our individual and collective capacities to appreciate, connect and respect our planet with its intertwined, interdependent relationships is a goal well worth aiming for. In order to appreciate, marvel and internalize the beauty and strength of diversity, early experiences build stronger foundations for hearts in harmony that sync and sing for Mother Earth.

Time and Space

Ann Lewin-Benham draws our attention to the powers of photography for exploring the dimension of time and space with children. She states, "When you take a photo, you 'freeze' time and 'frame' space. Children will understand these powers of photography if you tell them, 'Look! You froze time!' And later, 'Look! You framed a space!' Later, you can ask, 'Shall we make freeze frames today?' And still later, when you admire a child's photo: 'Oooh! A space framed in a frozen second!'"

What is essential is to question anew. To raise consciousness. Frivolous, disrespectful and insensitive use of photography with children must be questioned. To discover creative pathways to more profound outcomes of photography as a tool requires a more evolved mindset. Values are imbibed through everyday practice. Enthusiasm is infectious through joyful interactions. The children's experience with the camera when limited to clicking occasional images under tight control of adults, or obsessive selfies, is likely to fall short of value. Without deep engagement, can we instill the value of imagination, empathy and care?

Let's maximise photography as an engaging reflective tool for embracing and exploring life in all its intricate, fascinating facets. Let's turn the camera into a tool for framing the shift in our perceptions that comes through keen observation and reflec-



Photo courtesy of The Voices of Children Documentary Project (worldforumfoundation.org/voc)

Felin and Felix 6-year-old twins are capturing images for their book. They are both authors and illustrators for the book.

tion. Our loving and living exchanges with children about what we see through the lens amplify the playful possibilities of embracing complexity while retaining tenderness in joint discoveries. The urge to share what has been "frozen" and "framed" has a universal appeal, as it conveys the joy of discovery, beauty and truth of the moment captured.

Early Interconnected Experience

Are these not the same effervescent emotions and exchanges necessary to nurture and evoke children's harmony and compassion with "otherness?" Time and again we must ask thoughtful questions. Freedom to use photography, the children's right to participate, and the love and peace in the



Photo courtesy of The Voices of Children Documentary Project (worldforumfoundation.org/voc)

Students build awareness, wonder and reflection through photography.

process are more complicated than we think. One tectonic shift in adopting the powers of photography as a tool to see the world would be to include the notion of children's right to participate in early relational connections for emotional resilience and wellbeing.

Early learning experiences in the visual language of photography through active participation open new possibilities to build an aware and awake gaze in young minds. Learning opportunities to notice the macro and the micro feed directly into children's wonderment. This early and concrete realisation is a timely step towards deep learning.

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Photography as a Tool for Documenting Learning

by Angela Fowler

Documentation as Visible Listening

Digital cameras are perhaps some of the most valuable tools in a preschool classroom. They can, of course, be used with very young children as a natural introduction to technology. However, cameras are perhaps most powerful as a tool for documentation. Cameras, if only for a moment, provide us a lens into the mind of the child and allow us to make their learning visible to others. The camera allows us to see a child's actions more clearly and engage in more meaningful dialogue. No educators understand this better than the educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy.

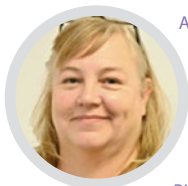
In Reggio Emilia, photography has become an integral part of the curriculum. In some ways, their approach to working with young children could not exist without it. It is the way in which they make learning visible, not only to colleagues, parents and the community, but also with children, that makes this approach one of the most inspiring in the world. Photography and the documentation that results from it are essential to the pedagogical research done by teachers alongside children and drives their teaching-learning relationship (Rinaldi, 2005).

As Carlina Rinaldi, president of the Reggio Children Foundation, stated (2005), "Documentation can be seen as visible listening, as the construction of traces—through notes, slides, videos, and so on—that not only testify to the children's learning paths and processes, but also make them possible because they are visible."

Though photography is not the only form of documentation done in Reggio Emilia, it certainly is one of the most powerful. It aids children in seeing themselves as learners and helps them make connections that otherwise might have been missed. It helps teachers reflect on what they see happening and thus supports deeper, more meaningful learning experiences. It also helps teachers move beyond their perceptions of learning and reflects the child's perspective on learning as well. This practice can prove more accurate in terms of making learning visible. As teachers and children see together, revisit together, and reimagine experiences together, they create stronger knowledge building processes. This skill, known as metacognition, is integral to children's development of critical learning processes (Lewis, 2019).

From Photo Taker to Documenter

Photography for documentation has become second nature to teachers in Reggio Emilia, but they, like all of us, were not instant experts. Using photography to make learning visible is a complex process. At first, when beginning to use photography or even video as a tool for meaningful observation or documentation, many of us are tempted to capture every moment and every experience. Of course, this may make sense, because children are learning every minute and in every experience. However, we learn very quickly not every moment is translatable, important to revisit, nor valuable for documentation. What teacher has the time to go through hundreds of photographs a day anyway?



Angela Fowler is the executive director of Cultivating the Early Years, an organization dedicated to supporting progressive education for young children. She has taught and directed courses and programs at Columbia College and the Erikson Institute. She writes on topics including authentic assessment, children's rights, technology, and progressive education for the early years. She is co-chair of the Children's Rights committee and supports technology for the early years work for the World Forum Foundation. She has worked in the field of

education for more than 25 years and has participated in and coordinated 14 study tours to Reggio Emilia, Italy. Fowler continues to consult and work with progressive educational programs internationally, and is especially focused on how progressive policies and approaches can support social justice and equality.

If we take the time to develop our understanding of documentation, we discover photography's true power for valuing children's work and for making learning visible. It will take practice to get to a point of "mindfully" taking photos of meaningful learning experiences. Yet, by sticking with it, following the advice below, and reflecting on your own process and results, you will be rewarded with documentation that shows the depth and learning capacity of every child. And fortunately, other educators have much to share to lead you on this path.

Getting Started: Patience, Trial, and Error

When you first start photographing the children in your classroom, you might find yourself with many photos that seem pointless. This really is part of the process. As you learn more about documentation, you will begin to discern which images are especially meaningful. For example, you may have taken a bunch of photos on a field trip to a farm. When you return from your trip, you realize you have a lot of photos that do not reflect how meaningful the trip really was for the children. It will take practice, but eventually you will be able to recognize when those really meaningful moments happen and when to actually take the photo. This is an important skill to develop, because you don't want to be stuck behind a camera all day. You want to engage with

children, to scaffold their learning, and be free to catch those teachable moments.

Reflective Practice and Dialogue

Making learning visible or even producing documentation is more than taking photos and putting them up on a wall. You must choose meaningful and thoughtful images that reflect the learning in your classroom. To do that, take time to download, view and reflect on the images you are taking. What do you see? If a photo does not really convey any meaning, erase it. Yes, really, erase it! Then take your time looking at the photos you have left. What are they telling you about the learning that took place? Do they convey meaning? Do you remember taking this photo? What were you thinking about when you took the photo? Does it tell a story about your trip to the farm? Does it tell the story about what the children were learning? How does it tell this story?

Once you have chosen some images that you feel illustrate the real impact of your trip, share them with your colleagues. Ask colleagues to tell you what they see in the photos. Do they see what you saw? What are their thoughts? Do they provoke more questions? If so, great! Powerful images should always evoke more questions. Having a dialogue with colleagues about documentation is a process that does

Collaborating in small groups, 7-year-olds express their complex ideas around rights through intricate drawings, following intense dialogue with the documentary team.

Photo courtesy of The Voices of Children Documentary Project (worldforumfoundation.org/voc)



not always come easy to teachers. It opens us up to questions. It can make us feel vulnerable. But, it is a crucial part of the process, because it helps us think about why we chose certain images and not others. It helps us to see the learning and potential meaning in an image that we may have missed. Once you have some practice with your colleagues, you may find it easier to have these kinds of dialogues with children, which is the next step to master.

Children at the Center

Children have a voice and we need to make sure we are not usurping it. Too often, we miss what is going on in the child's mind because we simply don't ask. This can also happen when we are using photographs or video as a tool for assessment or evaluation. We need to show that children are developing certain skills, so we use a picture of them engaged in an activity to demonstrate our accountability. Unfortunately, if we cut the child out of the reflective process, we miss much of the learning and knowledge that is developed by the child. Instead, involve children in the process of observation and reflection. Once you have those chosen few meaningful images of your trip to the farm, take the time to ask children, "What do you see?" "What were you doing?" "What do you think about this photo?" "What questions do you have?" More often than not, you are going to build a richer picture than if you simply decided that your observations or photos could speak for them.

Finally, Making Learning Visible

Resist the urge to rush the process of documentation in order to get images up on the wall. Though documentation begins by taking a photo, it is our dialogue with colleagues and especially with children that reflects the real learning. Though your final documentation may make learning visible to others, it is within the dialogues, the questions, and the revisiting that the real learning happens. If you skip these steps or undertake them half-heartedly, you have missed the whole point. Documentation that lacks meaningful dialogue and fails to reflect the child's words may yield a pretty bulletin board but little more.

This is no different than how we work with children every day. We know learning is about the process, not the product. It's about the experience of exploring with materials, not just the resulting clay sculpture. It is all too easy to forget this and jump to the final product. While many of us want our final documentation to be beautiful, it must always reflect real learning and include the child's voice.

Photo courtesy of The Voices of Children Documentary Project (worldforumfoundation.org/voc)



The camera offers a powerful tool for observation and reflection by adults and children alike.

Once you have collected all of the rich dialogue from the children and understand their learning process, then and only then are you ready to create a piece of permanent documentation. Of course, you should spend time making that documentation beautiful, but not to illustrate your hard work. Rather, make it beautiful to reflect the importance of the child's learning and demonstrate the value of *their* work. Never forget that documentation should focus on the child and is not about the teacher.

Photography is often used as a tool for observation and to capture occasions, events, or experiences. However, meaningful observations or documentation go far beyond simply taking photos, to engagement with our own reflection, dialogues with others, and the powerful input of children. Documentation is about making a child's learning visible. It is not about making our teacher perceptions of learning visible. Even very young children are capable of sharing their thoughts, observations, and experiences, so let's make sure it is their voices we hear most loudly.

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PHOTOGRAPHER REFLECTIONS

On Photography, Close Observation and Curiosity

by Kris Tsujikawa

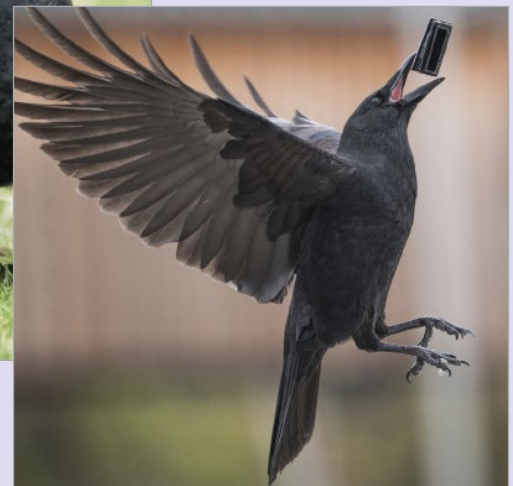
Wildlife photography allows me to learn about animal behavior and to document it. Using different lenses, I am able to capture and magnify things that would be difficult to see with a naked eye: a bird with a tiny insect caught in its beak, a crow playing with a shiny object across the field, a distant eagle hidden in a tree while ravens energetically mob it.

Photography provides visual cues as well as a permanent record of the animals I observe. I took photos of a young crow that had a small silver band attached to its leg. I submitted photos of this extraordinary bird, including the complete band number, to the United States Geological Survey. The USGS was able to tell me the estimated year of birth, the sex, the date she was banded and who banded her. I learned my crow, a female, was at least 17 years old and one of the oldest reported banded crows. She was banded by corvid expert John Marzluff in West Seattle.

Through photography, I can share my love for crows and all living beings. Once I capture images, I examine the photos more closely on my computer. It stirs my curiosity and inspires me to learn more. I hope my photos will help people appreciate birds and other creatures. I have made many friends with scientists, artists, activists, birders and other lovely people from all over the world.



Photos by Kris Tsujikawa



Kris Tsujikawa is an avid photographer, dedicated parent and PAWS board member (paws.org). She loves to share her passion for photography and crows on Twitter @kris0723.