

Images of Children on Social Media: influencers and influencing our image of children and families

Early childhood educators hold a specific image of children which is respectful and acknowledges children as significant and capable individuals. Our image of the child is influenced by the multidimensional nature of their identities, competencies, and contexts. Diversity and difference is honoured and childhood is privileged as a crucial life stage. The view that children are agentic subjects (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2016) with rich potential (Robertson, 2010), who ought to be engaged actively in all matters which influence their lives (Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009) is a key focus of a strong early childhood philosophy.

On the Internet and social media platforms there are an abundance of images of children as parents and families are eager to share the lives they lead. While parents reserve their right to post a mostly unrestricted choice of content, the issue of privacy, identity and the rights of children (Livingstone & Third 2017) on digital media remains to be more carefully examined. The phenomena of 'micro- celebrity and influencer parents' (Leaver 2017) on a variety social media platforms has seen the emergence of a deliberately curated narrative of family life and childhood. As popular parent influencers attract large numbers of followers and fans the pressure to present a slice of family life and child participation to keep the viewers engaged and provide an opportunity to promote products will shape the content and composition of blogs, videos and images.

When considering the wide spread influence a popular online presence can have, Leaver (2017) states 'micro-celebrity parents can be quite influential in promoting and normalizing certain shifts in parenting practices' (p7). As followers receive daily and weekly updates of family life they develop sense of familiarity and connectedness with the micro-celebrities they follow. This presentation begins to explore the question of whether images and reporting of family life on social media has an impact on the wider community view of children as competent, capable individuals with agency over their own lives. Online images and stories are examined and an exploration of the emerging and represented 'image of the child' is discussed.

DEEWR. (2009). *Belonging, being, and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Australia: Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

Leaver, T. (2017). Intimate Surveillance: Normalizing Parental Monitoring and Mediation of Infants Online. *Social Media + Society*, April – June 1–10

Livingstone, S. & Third, A. (2017) Children and young people's rights in the digital age: An emerging agenda. *New Media & Society*. 19(5) 657–670

Rinaldi, C. (2013). Re-Imagining Childhood. The inspiration of Reggio Emilia education principles in South Australia. Adelaide Thinker in Residence 2012-2013.

<https://www.decd.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/reimagining-childhood.pdf>

Robertson, J. (2010) . Reconsidering our images of children: What shapes our educational thinking?. In A. Fleet, C. Patterson & J. Robertson (Eds.), *Insights: Behind early childhood pedagogical documentation* (pp. 37-54). Mt Victoria, NSW: Pademelon Press

Robinson, K.H. & Jones-Diaz, C. (2016). *Diversity and difference in childhood: Issues for theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Berkshire, England: Open University Press.