

**we
can
take
pictures**



acknowledgements

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introduction

Working as a freelance photographer, Franki Raffles had long felt a deep dissatisfaction with her own profession, concerned that its enormous potential was less often used to benefit people than exploit them. However, after a close personal involvement with a mentally handicapped child, Franki conceived of one way in which the camera could be used positively and to the advantage of others. She taught the child how to take pictures, and was impressed at the joy that brought. She suspected that there may have been further benefits, too and that photography could be utilized successfully as a teaching aid. At this time, Franki was in touch with June Martin who was equally interested in the idea. Together they approached Ruth Wallace, head teacher at Pinewood Special School in West Lothian who enthusiastically invited them to organise a one-off session at the school. A full year later they were still working in the school with financial backing from the Scottish Committee for Arts and Disability, Kodak International and the Mental Health Foundation. This handbook is a pictorial account of that unique project.

What became evident during the sessions is equally manifest in these pictures: not only did the children derive immense pleasure out of taking their own photographs, they also showed a marked improvement in eye-to-hand co-ordination and in visual sense, as well as increased concentration and memory spans. Their enthusiasm for their own pictures encouraged the use of descriptive language and group conversation. By the end of the project, each child had his or her own personal book with their own pictures mounted inside to take home to keep.

But this report has another purpose beyond documenting the progress of one particular group: it is designed as a guide to help and advise others working with children and adults with learning difficulties. A similar photography project can be easily organised in just about any setting, and by people who themselves may only have a basic working knowledge of the camera. Equipment for such a project need no longer be prohibitively expensive or impossibly technical: alongside the recent growth in the amateur market there has been a corresponding drop in price, making inexpensive easy to operate cameras readily available in the shops. The handbook records how Franki introduced the cameras to the children, how she planned and undertook a single session, a series of six sessions, and the year long project. She was keen to record these steps, because she believed that the same results could be obtained almost anywhere where the camera is used. Franki puts the success of the project down to the power of photography itself: "it provided the children with a channel of communication, a way of looking at the world, and a way of challenging aspects of it". These positive attributes of her profession which Franki discovered at Pinewood Special School are more than evident in this inspiring collection of photographs.

Chris Dolan

the idea



Shona with an instant picture camera

A mystique surrounds the idea of photography. Some people are regarded as being gifted and creative, while others deny that they can use a camera at all. Working, as I do, as a professional, it's all too easy to believe that a successful photographer needs that certain 'something'. True, not all of us have fast enough reflexes to take pictures for the national newspapers, or have the kind of visual sense needed for 'art' photography, but that doesn't mean that photography should be the sole preserve of the professional—nor should it be relegated to the family album. Outside these areas there is enormous scope to utilize the technology of photography for everyone.

My work with severely mentally handicapped children was based on the idea that, with a little help, anyone can use a camera—and get a lot of fun from it. Handing a camera to a

young child and allowing him or her to take photographs with the minimum of supervision may seem foolhardy, but in fact there is no real reason why children of any age should not be given the opportunity to use photography as a means of self-expression. This handbook describes how one group discovered the pleasure of taking pictures as a way of looking at the world and at their place in it. The text, and in particular, the pictures, provide a testimony of this enjoyment and of the project's widespread applications to other groups.

In November, 1982 I held a day's session in Pinewood Special School in West Lothian. On that day, every child in the school had the opportunity to take a photograph for her/himself with an instant picture camera. The results were taken to the Scottish Committee for Arts and Disability who agreed to fund a series of six sessions. At the end of that time I applied to Kodak UK Limited under their Photographic Bursaries Scheme to cover the cost of running a year long project at the school. The Bursary was awarded, and at the same time the Mental Health Foundation awarded another grant to develop the research aspects of the work.

positive benefits

Throughout this time the scope of the project had widened considerably: it had become clear that photography can be a useful vehicle for teaching skills to severely mentally handicapped children.

co-ordination

Apart from the sheer pleasure the children derived from taking pictures, there were other far-reaching benefits. For instance, the children's hand/eye co-ordination was greatly improved through operating a camera. The process of looking through the viewfinder, holding the camera steady and pressing the shutter down caused initial problems, but very soon every child managed it. Part of the reason for this success with co-ordination lies in the children's keenness to produce their own photographs. This same enthusiasm had allowed me to change from using an expensive instant-picture camera to a 35mm camera.

memory

The children, rather than losing interest while their pictures were developed, eagerly looked forward to seeing their photographs the following week. The photographs the children were taking—each other for example—involved very short distances, which meant using a single lens reflex (SLR) 35mm camera. At first there was no real hope that any of the children would manage to focus accurately.

perception

Visual perception is an area where mentally handicapped children can experience difficulties. Using the 35mm SLR encouraged them not only to look carefully at their environment, but to isolate an object from its surroundings. It was continually surprising how the children managed to achieve things well above our expectations of them. In only four weeks some of them showed an amazing level of patience and delicacy of touch, producing perfectly focused photographs.

getting help with the compact camera



Malcolm sees his first photograph



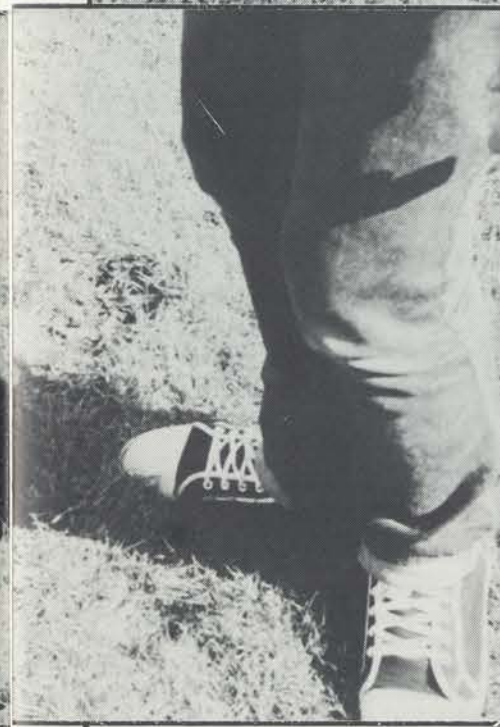
language

The children were keen to discuss their own photographs, and different ways of taking pictures, thus stimulating their use of descriptive language. For children with limited verbal skills this was a major achievement.

Before the start of each session the children were asked to describe the work of the previous week, and then describe the photographs they had taken—so they were describing photographs they had not yet seen.

In general they could remember in great detail both the subject matter and the individual photograph. Seldom did any of the children experience difficulty in identifying their own photographs—a full week after they were taken. The wider scope of the project, then, embraces concentration, co-ordination, enthusiasm, visual perception, memory span and descriptive language. However, none of these by-products is any more important than the basic fact that the children gained an enormous amount of pleasure out of taking pictures.

... friends' feet



... the grass



things the children wanted to photograph ... the local church



the projects



Douglas and Jane with the instant picture camera



(1) the single session

At that initial session in West Lothian, when every child was given the chance to use the camera, we organised the children into groups of 12 with three adults. The best way to introduce the camera is to take a photograph of the whole group. In this case the instant-picture camera produced the photograph immediately and the children took it in turns to identify themselves and each other. The camera itself was then held up and the different parts (flash, shutter button and viewfinder) pointed out to the children. After this had been done each child had the chance to take a photograph her/himself. Because the instant print camera is fairly heavy and bulky, we had to help some of the younger (5 year old) children to hold it. After taking the photograph, the child would sit and watch the image appear, as if by magic. They all found this process very exciting. One thing that required careful explanation for some children was why they were not in the photograph they had just taken. Once it was explained that they were behind the camera, they accepted it.



Douglas, showing his snap around



Most of the children decided to take photographs of a classmate. Although it often looked as if a child was holding the camera in a position that would result in a missing head, this was rarely the case. In fact it was surprising to see how many of them had centred the subject in the frame perfectly.

The session was a great success. The children had an enormous amount of fun, and at the end of the day each child had their very own photograph to take home.

(2) a series of six sessions

Our next stage in the project was to hold six weekly sessions. We divided the children, as before, into groups of twelve. The large groups meant that three adults had to be on hand, but with smaller groups two adults should suffice.

We spent the first two sessions working with the instant picture camera which I am sure is a very valuable means of introducing mentally handicapped children to photography. However, the cost of using these is prohibitive, so a major aim of the six

sessions was to move on to using the single lens reflex (SLR) 35mm compact camera. I had envisaged problems with this as the delay between taking a photograph and seeing the result increased from two minutes to a full week. Consequently, we had planned out the progression in great detail beforehand.

week one

As with the first single session all the children managed to take good, centred photographs. This time, however, they were allowed to take two pictures and problems with choice arose. A few were unable to make up their minds about what they

wished to photograph. With some children their choice with the second photo was a repeat of the first.

One of the benefits of having more than one person with the group is that each child can be afforded more time. This helps with decision making, while taking the picture and discussing it with the child whose first reaction is to rush all round the school showing it to all the staff.

The question of choice concerned us. We wanted to encourage the children to think about what they wanted to photograph, so we asked each child to decide on a picture for the following week.



photography—a way of interpreting the world

week two

Many of the children came back with their ideas ready. In the first week the photographs had been almost exclusively of friends, but now a few had chosen rooms in the school or activities. In general most of the children had a clear idea of what they wanted to photograph, some to the extent that they even knew how much of the subject they wanted to include in the picture. Other children did still rely on suggestions, but over the six weeks we saw an all-round improvement on this score.

The other purpose of this second session was to introduce the children to the 35mm camera. Not only do these provide a much cheaper form of photography, but in terms of future opportunities for the children these cameras are more accessible, easier to handle and have more potential as the children's expertise grows.

We chose to use the Olympus Trip because it is sturdy but lightweight, has few gadgets, a clear viewfinder and a shutter that's easy to operate.

Our main concern, of course, was that the children wouldn't be able to grasp the time lapse between taking the photograph one week and then not seeing the result till the following week. We decided that the best way to proceed was to let each child take a photograph with the instant print camera and then immediately repeat the process with the 35mm. The idea is that the 35mm photograph would be a replica of the instant print. I explained, in simple terms, how I



would take the film away and develop it, returning their prints the following week. Then, at the end of the session, the instant prints were mounted on cardboard and pinned on the wall. In this way we hoped to provide a visual memory for the children of the photographs to be matched.





week three

The visual memory proved to be unnecessary. None of the children showed any difficulty in remembering and all of them identified their prints successfully. The quality of these first prints, however, was poor—probably because of the contrast in size and weight of cameras. After using a fairly big and heavy camera, the instant print, the children then immediately used the smaller and lighter 35mm.

In week three we set a theme for the children and encouraged them to take photographs within the theme. It makes sense to provide the children with a framework in which to make choices. The idea of making a choice still exists but it is limited which makes it far easier for the children.

So, our first theme was The Gym. All the gymnasium apparatus was set up and the children were then told that they could take photographs of anything which related to the gym lesson.

Whilst a child was using the camera an adult would be standing watching and occasionally reminding the child to hold the camera steady. Most of the children were keen to take photographs of their friends using particular pieces of gym equipment.



week four

We started again by asking the children to identify their own photographs. This time two out of the twenty-four could not identify their own photographs despite remembering the subject matter. However, these were the only ones who had difficulty in making the link between remembering the subject and visualising it. Nevertheless, they were pleased with the prints and accepted them as their own when handed them.

For our theme this week we chose Music. An additional bonus of using themes such as music or gym is that it makes it far easier to look after those children who are waiting to use the camera. With a group of twelve this is no small consideration.

One noticeable feature of this session was the increased confidence with which the children handled the camera.



Sandra, pleased with results

week five

By now the quality of the black and white prints was much higher in all but a few cases, and there was none that was unacceptable. In fact throughout all the sessions one of the encouraging aspects was the relatively few photographs which were unusable.

As the weather was fine we chose as our theme 'outdoors', and took each group outside. In terms of what the children chose to photograph this was the most interesting session. Each child was handed the camera in turn and left to photograph freely. No help was given unless it was directly requested. One or two children seemed to walk outside, stop, and then want to photograph what was immediately in front of them. Other children asked what they could photograph but no real help was given and all that was said was that they should look around them and see what was interesting.

This was an interesting session and very rewarding. The pictures taken by the children were of a high standard and the subject matter fascinating. For instance, one child spent a long time looking for a bird to photograph and eventually found a group of birds in the trees. Another child wanted to take a photograph of grass. (see photo page 5).

week six

The last session, and no photographs were taken, instead we spent the time giving each child a small book of all the photographs they had taken in the preceding weeks. They were obviously delighted with the books. However, because some children had taken more photographs than others, we decided we should still keep all the books the same size, which meant that those children were short of a few pictures. We didn't expect the children to remember every photograph they had taken. We were surprised when they did notice, and were able to say which ones were missing. Although they weren't upset by this, we were amazed by the memory they had of photography. In some instances the children were remembering photographs that had been taken nine weeks previously as the school holidays came in the middle of the sessions.



photographing music

(3) a year long project

At the very start we divided our twenty children up into groups of five according to their ability, and appointed two adults to work with each group.

using an instant picture camera

Of the four groups, the children with the lowest ability used the instant picture camera throughout. We felt they would benefit far more from this than from attempting to move them on to the 35mm camera which we felt would mean very little to them.

We spent the first few weeks working on colours. None of the children in the groups knew more than one or two colours, so we encouraged them to photograph things of specified colours in the hope that we could increase their awareness. We had some success in this, but decided to move on after a couple of weeks to the subject of skills. For instance, the children took photographs of every stage of plugging in an electric light and switching it on. This included pictures of how to hold a plug properly, putting it in the socket, etc. The photographs were then made into a wall chart and put up in the classroom.

The children also made other charts: washing the dishes, making a pot of tea and so on. The instant picture camera is ideal for this kind of work. The prints are coloured which is



eventually we found a group of birds in the trees to photograph

necessary for identifying hot and cold taps, and also the results are immediate so that at the same time as taking the photographs the children can be involved in working out the order that the prints should be displayed in.

using an SLR camera

The other three groups moved progressively from theme to theme. At the beginning we asked the children to think about water, what is done with it, where it is used, how it is used, where it is seen.

The children thought up lots of examples, and these were talked about for some time. After the discussion I showed the children some pictures of water which I had brought into school: people drinking, a river, watering flowers, a bath. The children were then told they could take a photograph of anything they could think of to do with water—as long as they could find it within the school. The purpose behind this is to try and develop the children's ability to make choices within a framework.

new positions

Soon we introduced a new dimension to the same theme: position of the camera in relation to the subject. The children were asked to think not only about what they wanted to photograph but also *where* they wanted to take the photograph from. To illustrate this we took a number of photographs from a variety of positions: straight on, from the left or right, a little below or a little above. As we were still using the instant print camera at this stage the children could see the differences immediately. From then on the question: "where do you want to take a photograph from?" became a constant feature of the classes.

Next, we introduced the children to the 35mm camera, and after just two sessions they were competent enough to be given a great deal of freedom with it.

developing

At this stage we explained the process of developing a picture. I brought in a developing tank, a strip of negatives, an enlarger and some finished prints. We showed them what a negative looked like through an enlarger, and they were all very impressed by the idea that a print could be made to any size.

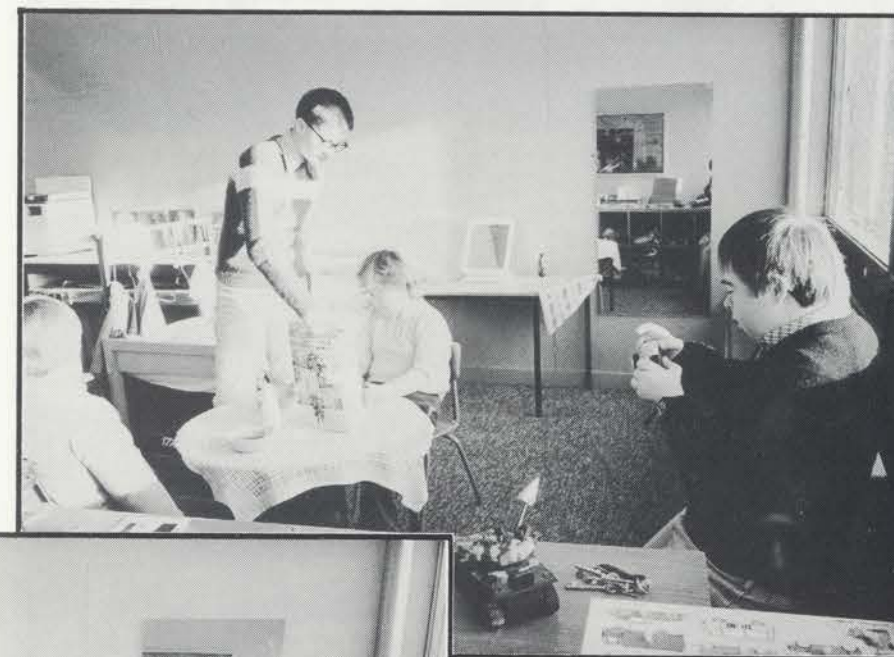


a day in the life of

The next project we spread over six weeks. Called 'A day in the life of the group' we asked the children to think about what they did during the day from getting up in the morning until going back to bed. Now although the school is a day school, it has in it everything that would be found in the home: beds, cookers, and so on. The children took it in turns to act out various stages of the day whilst one child took a photograph. For example, the children would lay a table for breakfast, one child would then serve the breakfast, three others would pretend to eat it, and the fifth would take a photograph.

The children enjoyed this project enormously and it has useful side benefits too. For instance, it helps children learn about time sequences, it involves them in practical activities and encourages them to look at themselves and at what they do.

At the end of the project, big display boards were made up for each group, with a selection of the photographs they had taken. The pictures were of a good standard and the images were all centred. That display was exhibited in the school, and during the Christmas concert so that mums and dads could see it.





a completed display board

Stephen focusing on the model



storybooks

We were keen to try and use photographs as a vehicle for learning, so we decided to write a story for the children which would incorporate certain concepts which they had difficulty with.

We used lego to build a set which the children could use to illustrate the story. Then, we told the children a section of the story each week, and they positioned the lego pieces correctly, and took turns to take photographs of the set.

Our story concerned three women: one very tall, one very small and the third of normal height. They lived on a farm with animals including a sheep dog and a pet cat, and they had a tractor on the farm.

We used the story to highlight the idea of position. For instance, our dog and cat get lost outside. The tall woman looks *UP* in the trees for them, the small woman looks *DOWN* among the flowers, and the medium sized woman looks *BESIDE* the dustbin. Then they see the dog *IN FRONT* of the cupboard in the kitchen.

In the first session the children were given the outlines of the story with

certain things kept back to stimulate their interest. They did not find out what happened at each stage of the story until it came time to take the photographs.

So all they knew at first was that the story concerned three farmers, a cat and a dog. They were told the cat and dog were missing and that the women had to find them.

precision focusing

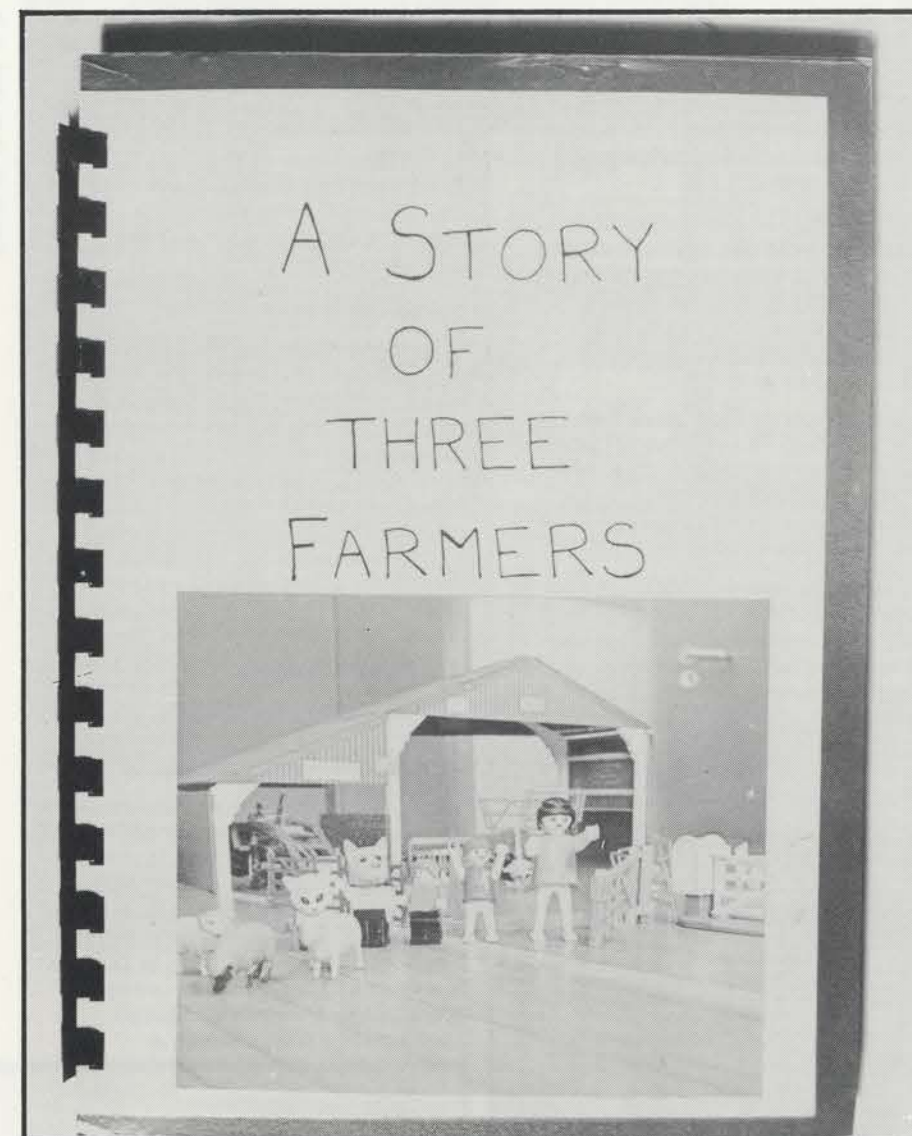
Now we came across our biggest obstacle yet: the lego set was too small for the minimum focusing distance of the 35mm Olympus Trip we had been using. It would have been too time-consuming to make a bigger set out of cardboard, so we reluctantly decided to see if the children could understand the basic idea of focusing a single lens reflex camera. I say reluctantly because the Canon A1 I had, unlike the Olympus Trip which has a simple selection of focus distances, requires a degree of patience, accuracy and fine motor control that I expected to be beyond the abilities of the children.

Seven of them did have trouble: some because they could not identify the small circle and bisecting line seen through the viewfinder, and others because they couldn't achieve the degree of control necessary. There was some improvement over the next few weeks with this latter group. Some of the children produced photographs that showed a

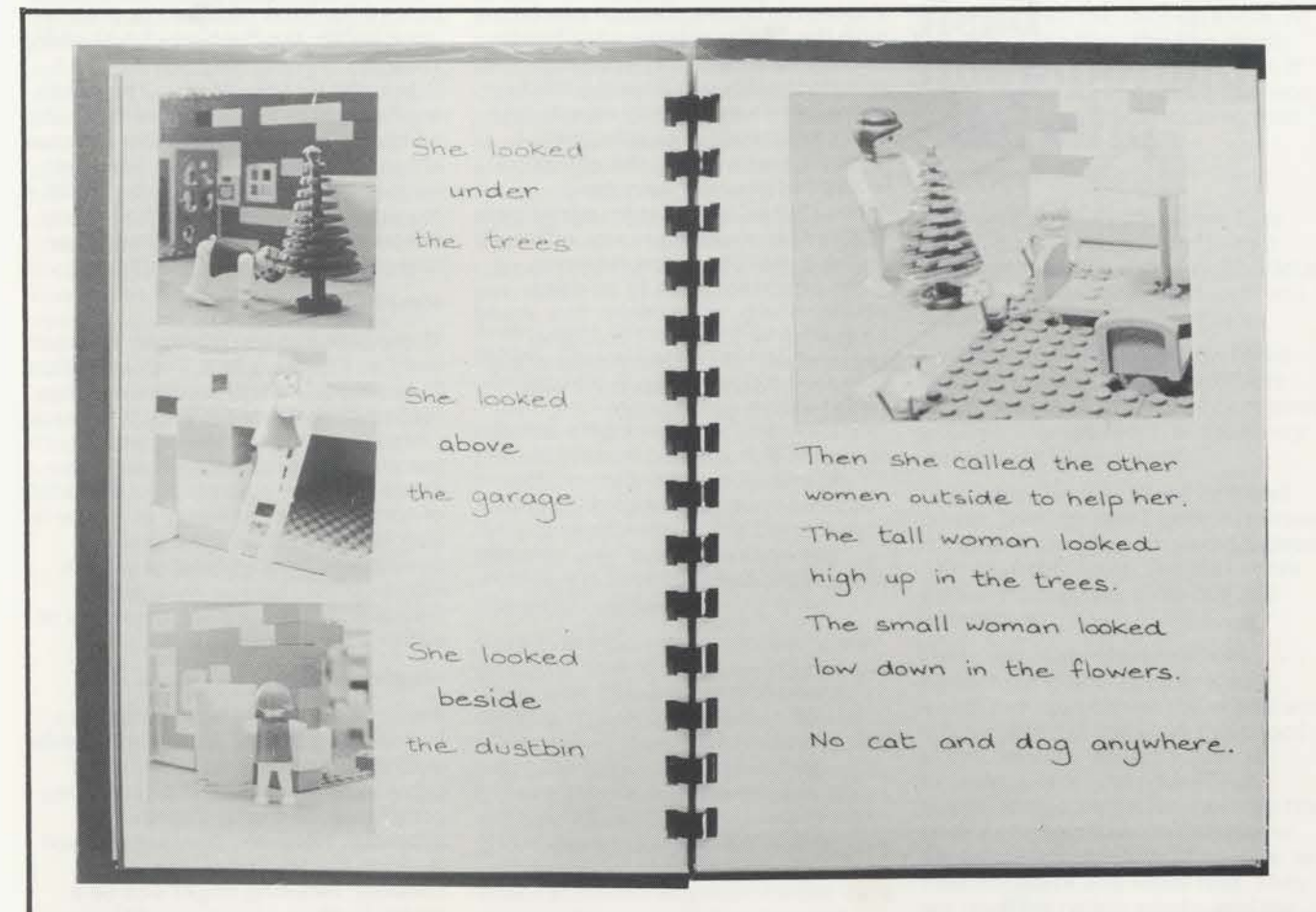
remarkable degree of control over focusing. It was amazing to watch the patience shown by the children when focusing the camera: they turned that focusing ring slowly back and forward for minutes. One child in particular, generally thought to have poor co-ordination skills, produced photographs that were indistinguishable from my own.

building the model





the finished book



the final books

They all enjoyed the story project enormously, from hearing the story, to creating the sets by moving the figures around, to taking the photographs. At the end we made the story up into books and presented each child with a copy. We made the books as indestructible as possible, using stiff card, plastic-coating each page and finally spiral binding them. It was a great deal of work to produce fifteen copies, but it was worth it as each child was delighted with their very own copy.



basic photographic principles

colour

All the work in this booklet can be carried out with no more knowledge than that provided by any camera instruction manual. However, a basic understanding of the way that cameras operate can help prevent a few problems. Although, in the work described, all the photographs taken with the 35mm camera were black and white, this is not necessary. The reason for this was because all the processing was done by myself, and this considerably reduces costs. I am sure that some of the children I worked with would have been interested in, and able to, participate in this side of photography, although this did not take place. However, if the processing was to be done commercially, then colour film would be equally suitable. It could also become part of the learning process for the children to take their own films in to be processed.

camera types

Three different kinds of camera were used by the children.

instant picture camera

There are many different models of this kind of camera on the market. The most suitable being one with a built-in flash. As most of the work is done inside, the flash was invaluable. There are usually between 8 and 12 exposures on special film. The prints are finished in about one minute. The prints are expensive, but the cameras are very simple to operate. The one used in this booklet, KODAMATIC EF, required no focusing, and had a very simple mechanism for lightening or darkening the print as necessary.

simple 35mm camera

These cameras are relatively cheap. I used an Olympus Trip. They are often fully automatic with symbol settings for focusing. They are easy to use and cheap to operate; the film size is standard, so processing is not too expensive. The advantage of this kind of camera over the instamatic type is that these cameras have greater potential in terms of the negatives. The negatives can be enlarged if necessary. The films are cassettes of either 20 or 36 exposures.

single lens reflex camera

These cameras can be expensive to buy although there are cheap models available. They are suitable for all types of photography in any lighting conditions, and offer enormous potential. However, they are focused through the lens and, for some children, focusing might well be a problem. The camera uses 35mm negative size, and the one I used, a Canon A1, had the facility to be totally automatic which meant that the children only had to deal with focusing. The cameras accept interchangeable lenses, but for the purposes of the work described, only a standard 50mm lens was used. Besides the ones I used, there are many different makes and models of camera which offer the same facilities.

aperture/shutter speed

For any given brightness there is a variety of ways the camera can be set to give the correct exposure. Basically, a lot of light for a short time, or a little light for a long time. The amount of light is determined by the aperture, and the length of time by the shutter speed. Although all the cameras used in the project were automatic, it is necessary to understand the way the two aspects combine and the effects of the combination. This is because the aperture affects both the shutter speed and the focusing. The larger the aperture, the less depth of field, which means less of the photograph will be in focus. This means that in low light conditions when the lens is wide open, in order to make an image on the film, focusing is more difficult. Only that area of the subject on which you are focusing will be clear, and the background will be blurred. This is important to bear in mind when using a camera.

lighting conditions

Often when taking photographs indoors on a grey day, you can ignore the fact that the window of a room lets in a great deal of light. If the subject matter of the photograph is standing in front of the window, the effect will resemble that of a silhouette. There are ways of compensating for the light through the window, but when working with children who do not understand the principles of photography, it is easier to steer them away from taking a photograph towards a window. It has the same effect as taking a photograph into the direction from which the sun is shining. This is the case even if the weather is dull and overcast.

Sometimes, camera meters can be fooled. This occurs if taking a photograph of a light subject against a dark background, or a dark subject against a light background. With the instant picture camera, it is simple to correct, merely being a matter of altering the darken/lighten control. On a camera such as the Olympus Trip, the only way to combat this situation is to temporarily change the film speed setting.

If the photograph to be taken is, for instance, of a dark object against a white wall, the camera will take a reading that will be affected by the whiteness of the background and will leave the dark object under-exposed. If you alter the film speed setting to the next speed down, say from 400 to 200, this has the effect of making the camera give a longer exposure and hence a correct exposure for the dark object. This also works in the reverse situation with a dark wall and a small light object, here the film speed would be increased. On the SLR camera, there is a compensation dial for this purpose.

using the camera

Set the film speed. The speed rating of the film is printed on the film box usually as ASA and/or DIN setting. On an instant picture camera this is not necessary. Load the film into the camera, 35mm film comes in cassettes where the leader is threaded onto the take-up spool. At the end of the film, the film must be wound back into the cassette. If taking a photograph indoors, brace yourself, or support the camera on something solid.

film types

Slow film, such as Ilford Pan F, or Kodak Panatomic X, need longer exposures, but record very fine detail. They are not suitable for hand held indoor work, unless with flash.

Medium speed film, such as Ilford FP4, or Kodak Plus X are still very sharp, with fine grain. They are good general purpose films, but not very suitable for indoor work.

Fast films, such as Ilford HP5 and Kodak Tri-X are good general purpose films, and are ideal for using indoors with available light. They are more grainy than slower films but still acceptable.

There are other films, such as Kodachrome and Ektachrome, which produce colour slides and are not suitable for the work described in this booklet, as it is relatively expensive still to produce high quality slides. Negative/positive film, such as Kodacolor, Vericolor or Boots come in a range of speeds, as with the black and white film. They are used for colour prints, and the fast versions are suitable for indoor use.

some suggestions for projects

Any of the projects described in detail can be adapted to suit the particular needs or interests of a group. There were many ideas which we would have liked to work on with the children, but did not have time for.

life books

This could be valuable for any child, or adult. It could involve the child providing photographs from home, as well as taking photographs of their home, school, interests, friends, etc. These photographs could then be made into a small book for the child.

story books

In the booklet, I describe a story book which was worked on by the children. The adaptations of this are infinite. The story can be written to include any concepts, or events which are considered useful or interesting.

a day in the life

This idea can be used in many ways. Although, we took a normal school day, this is not the only day that could be chosen, and a day is not the only length of time which could be used. Holidays, or outings provide an ideal occasion for the children to take photographs as well as a more ordinary day.

colours, shapes

Photography can be used to teach children many different things. We spent some time on colour and shapes, incorporating these in a variety of ways. Sometimes, the children would be asked to choose something which was predominantly one colour. On another occasion, they dressed up in different colours and photographed each other.



photography provides a channel of communication

We Can Take Pictures

An inspiring collection of photographs documenting a unique project which introduced mentally handicapped children to photography. Taking pictures proved to be a powerful teaching vehicle, and a source of much happiness for all the children concerned.

The accompanying report suggests the idea could be adapted to suit the needs of a wide range of people with learning difficulties.

CSV Advisory Service

helps teachers, Youth Workers and others to develop community-based learning. Some of the services provided are: publishing kits, games, and handbooks, and the termly magazine 'School and Community'; organizing meetings, workshops and training sessions and setting up pilot projects.

Mental Health Foundation

The Mental Health Foundation

Britain's leading grant-making charity in the field of mental health, finances pioneering research and self-help and community care schemes.



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