

PLAY IDEAS BANK

Practical Ideas for Creative Play -
A comprehensive collection for Playworkers & Playschemes everywhere

No.28

PHOTOGRAPHY



Most play projects use photography one way or another. Often this is just to keep a record of events. This leaflet suggests that children can use photography creatively in their play and shows how the playworker can get them involved. First we will look at some of the ways you can use cameras in playwork without any additional equipment, and then go a stage further and look at setting up a play-centre darkroom. There isn't room to include detailed instructions on photographic processing, but we hope to cover this in a future leaflet.

This leaflet has been written and drawn by Harry Shier.

Cameras

The first requirement is that a camera or cameras must be in the hands of the children themselves. Some playworkers lend their own cameras to children, but if you do this, do check your insurance. If possible you should get access to cameras by some other means.

- * Suitable cameras are now quite cheap, so you may be able to consider buying one or two for your project.
- * Find out if other local play projects would like to use cameras in playwork. Maybe you could share with them and spread the cost.
- * See if you can borrow or hire cameras from your local Play Resource Centre or community arts/photography project.
- * Make your own: Yes, this is a serious suggestion. To find out how, see Ideas Bank Leaflet No. 18, "Pinhole Photography".

WHAT CAMERA

Any kind of camera can be used in playwork, but here are some things to consider:

* Choose cameras that use 35mm film. This is the commonest type and gives you more choice of film and better pictures. Also most non-commercial darkrooms and enlargers are set up for this kind of film. There are two main types of 35mm camera:

- The SLR (single lens reflex) looks something like this. They have the best lenses and allow the expert to have complete creative control over the picture.



An SLR is ideal if you want to learn about photography and explore the creative possibilities of picture-making. This would be useful for older groups.

- The 35mm Compact Camera looks more like this. These are smaller and more convenient. The cheapest ones are about £20, but if you pay a bit more you can get cameras that will do practically everything



automatically. This more or less guarantees you'll get a reasonable picture and makes it the ideal camera for younger children.

WHAT FILM?

If you want to do your own darkroom work, then you will have to use black and white film. Do-it-yourself colour processing is for real enthusiasts only.

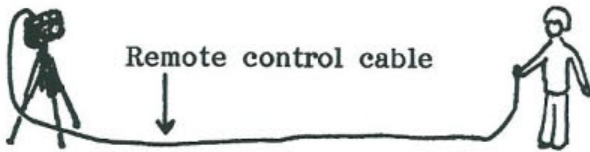
Otherwise, colour photography is now cheaper than black and white. The cheapest method is to use one of the big mail-order firms that offers a "free film" with your prints. Of course the film is not really free, but it is still cheaper than any you can buy in a shop. Some major processors now provide very large prints (5"x7" or bigger) at very little extra cost, which is ideal for playscheme displays. The drawback is you have to wait a week or two for your prints, which can be a long time if children are eagerly waiting to get on with a project of their own. Most towns and cities now have high street shops that offer an overnight or same-day service. This costs more but may be useful for important projects.

Projects

Children, once given a camera, will be happy to snap each other and the world around them as long as you keep paying for the film! However, if you are going to provide film and pay for processing, it seems reasonable, even in a free play environment, to discuss with the children how they want to use the camera, and what sort of projects they would like to work on. Children should be able to come up with their own ideas, but here are some suggestions to think about:

SELF PORTRAITS

This needs extra equipment; a tripod and a remote shutter release (try to borrow these).



With the camera set up like this you can sit or stand in front of it and photograph yourself. This is a powerful tool for exploring self-images, as it allows the child to choose exactly how they want to be in the picture. Children can also choose their own backgrounds and props and maybe include words or slogans in the picture.

RECORDING AN EVENT

Playworkers usually do this themselves, but it could be a project for a group of children instead. Choose something like a trip out, a camp, a parade, festival or sports event. After taking the pictures the group could go on to turn them into a permanent record with written captions and other material, either in an album or as an exhibition (or, if you use slide film, it could become a slide show, with live or taped commentary).

PANORAMAS



Take several pictures from the same spot so that each one slightly overlaps the one before and join them together (mounted on a piece of card) for a panoramic view.

PHOTO-MONTAGE

This is cutting up photographs and putting several together to create a striking new image. See Leaflet No. 25, "Collage Plus".

LOCAL THEMES

Photograph aspects of the local community, in particular things that are changing or disappearing. Children may want to highlight problems they experience such as lack of play space or recreational facilities.

TRICKS AND SPECIAL EFFECTS

There are lots of clever tricks you can use to get amazing or unusual photographs, but we haven't room to explain them here. So you'll have to get one of the books listed overleaf to find out more.

PHOTO-STORIES

These are familiar from teenage magazines where they often replace the comic strip. A story is told in a series of photographs, to which captions and dialogue can be added.

* The realism of the photographs makes this a good technique for "real-life" stories which can use real locations.

* It is also great fun to create fantasy stories, using costumes, masks, face-paints, models and painted back-drops. A clay dinosaur or cardboard space-ship, photographed close up from a low angle, can look quite real. A small cut-out of a witch on a broomstick, stuck to a window then photographed through it against the evening sky, can be very spooky.

1. Make up a story.
2. Decide who will be each character.
3. Find suitable locations for each scene.
4. Prepare any costumes, props, scenery etc.
5. Go through the story step by step. For each step, pose the characters in suitable positions (with realistic expressions) and take a photograph. One scene could have several photographs if a lot is happening - maybe from different angles, or include a close-up.
6. When the prints are developed, lay them out in order and plan the captions and dialogue you want to add. You can just write this in under each picture, or you can put dialogue in word balloons, cut out of plain paper and glued in place on the photograph. This can look quite smart if done neatly.
7. The finished story can be presented in the form of an album, or as a wall-frieze.

You could even have it printed as a "proper" comic. Printing photographs well is complicated and expensive, but you may be able to produce a reasonable version on an ordinary photocopier.

A more ambitious project is to use slide film and make the story into a tape-slide show.

The Darkroom

WHY MAKE A DARKROOM?

Learning to develop and print your own photographs is an excellent project for playworkers and children together:

- * It develops numeracy skills and also understanding of physics, chemistry, visual communication and design.
- * It is the cheapest way to produce large black and white prints for displays and publications.
- * It gives you complete control over how your finished photograph will look.
- * Doing the whole process themselves gives children a great sense of achievement.
- * The sense of wonder and excitement when a child sees her first photograph develop in front of her eyes is one of the most magical experiences in playwork.

If you want to try your own photographic processing and printing, or if you want to try Photograms (see over) or Pinhole Photography (see Leaflet No. 18) you need a darkroom. A local youth or community project may have a darkroom you can use; ask at your local Play Resource Centre. However, using another project's darkroom will limit the children's access, as you have to arrange a special trip out every time you want to let the children use it, so a better alternative is to make your own.

MAKING A DARKROOM

Any room can be made into a darkroom, but small rooms without windows are easiest. In a Playground or Playcentre remember that when a darkroom is in use, other people can't easily come in and out. If you use an office, for example, it could be a nuisance if the phone keeps ringing.

- * You must have mains electricity.
- * You need to seal up every source of light in the room. If there is a window, cover it with opaque cardboard or black plastic sheeting and seal up with tape all the way round. Use draught excluder to seal up gaps round the door.
- * To test the results switch off the light and wait five minutes. If it still seems completely dark the room is ready for use.
- * If there is no ventilation, don't let children stay in too long and open the door to change the air from time to time.

* You do not need running water in a darkroom. Prints can be put in a washing-up bowl or bucket of water and taken out to the sink for washing later.

* Ideally you need two tables or benches, one on each side of the room, but if there isn't space, a single large table will do.

* You have to work in red light as white light would spoil your prints. It's best to buy a photographic "safe-light", as ordinary red bulbs, though cheaper, often let some white light out as well.

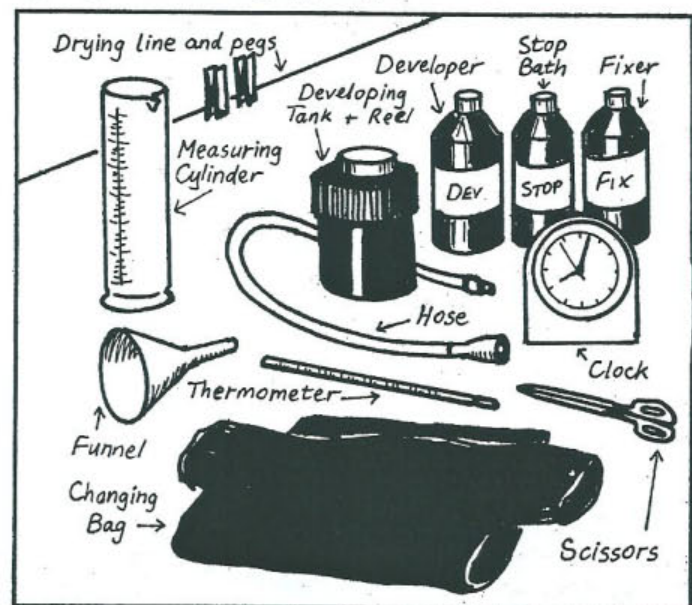
DARKROOM EQUIPMENT

The pictures below show what you'll need. If you have a suitable room and would like to set up your own darkroom you should now seek the advice of someone with experience of darkrooms to help you get the right stuff. It will cost several hundred pounds to equip a darkroom from scratch, but often the equipment can be bought second-hand (try "For Sale" ads in *Amateur Photographer* and your local paper). You can sometimes pick up a complete darkroom set-up very cheaply. Photographic chemicals are fairly cheap - a little goes a long way - but paper is expensive and you will find you can't afford to waste it. However, as long as you and the children learn to work carefully and methodically and look after your paper properly, you will find it is well worth the expense.

There are two stages to developing a photograph:

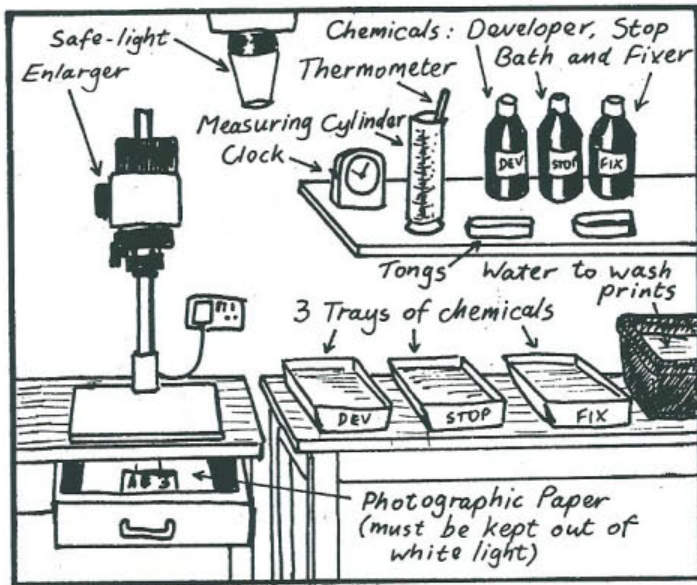
1. DEVELOPING FILMS

First you have to develop the film to produce a set of negatives. This does not need a darkroom as you can use a special light-proof "changing bag" instead.



2. MAKING PRINTS

The second stage, making your prints, does need a darkroom and an enlarger.



If you want to do darkroom work with children you should either go on an introductory photography course, or find someone who knows how to do it to teach you step by step. If neither of these is possible, one of the books below, or a grown up photography hand-book will help you get started.

Safety

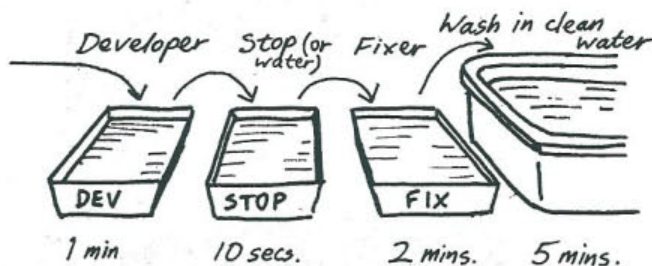
* Many grown up photographers work in photographic chemicals with their bare hands with no ill effects. However, the chemicals can irritate sensitive skin so when working with children, play it safe and make sure tongs are always used. If any participants have sensitive or damaged skin make them wear rubber gloves.

* Always dry hands before touching switches or any electrical equipment.

Photograms

Photograms are an exciting creative art-form and also a good introduction to how the darkroom works. You need a darkroom as shown above, but an ordinary table lamp will do instead of an enlarger.

1. Switch off white light. Work in safe-light.
2. Place a piece of photographic paper, shiny side up, under the light or enlarger.
3. Place an object, or objects on the paper.
4. Switch on the light for 2 seconds (this may vary depending on how bright it is).
5. Develop the picture as with an ordinary photographic print:



Exposure to light will have made the paper turn black. The areas shaded by the objects on the paper will show as white shapes on your photogram.

This simple technique has lots of creative possibilities:

- * Make patterns and pictures from all sorts of found objects.
- * Natural objects - leaves, flowers, twigs - are particularly effective.
- * Transparent or partially transparent materials give lovely effects: Woven fabrics, petals, liquids in containers.
- * Cardboard cut-outs used as stencils.

Books

- * Greenhill, R., Murray, M. & Spence, J.: Photography (Macdonald Guidelines, 1977) - Highly recommended
- * Pickering, John: Photography for Children (Batsford, 1976) (actually for teachers).
- Good books for children are:
- * Peach, S. & Butterfield, M.: Photography (The Usborne Guide to..) (Usborne, 1987)
- * Carey, David: The Camera (Ladybird, 1970)
- * Smith, Peter: The First Photography Book (Guinness, 1987)

For more Play Ideas Bank leaflets go to:

www.grcltd.org