

Foundation Phase: Talking Point

Children's Photography – Capture the moment

This issue we're talking about photography, and how by introducing a digital camera into your setting you will immediately unlock the potential that photography has for developing children's understanding of themselves and the world around them - putting the child at the centre of their own learning.

Pete Moorhouse gives us a fascinating insight into how a child views the world through a lens and explains how this powerful medium can unlock a child's learning by becoming the vehicle they use to express themselves. He also gives us some practical advice on getting started.

Using Pete's hints and tips, we invited the children who attend two of our member settings – Little Angels in Newport and Monmouth Day Nursery, to take part in a photography workshop, with follow up photography experiences led by practitioners in the setting. The aim of the workshop and follow-up experiences was to capture the children's curiosities and encourage them to explore, experiment and observe their nursery's environment using their camera. The resulting images give us a fascinating insight into how a child views the world through a lens.

Children's unique view of their world

Photography is a vastly underused children's resource in early years given its rich potential. As practitioners we regularly use cameras and tablets to document, but this is rarely extended to the children – you may think there is a higher risk of damage being caused to the camera? But given the right instruction the possibilities of using photography with young children are endless.

Photography is a language all of its own and is accessible to all children irrespective of gender, culture and background and can be an engaging medium for children with a wide range of special educational needs and disabilities.

Photography provides a different way for children to express themselves and making their ideas visible. For some children photography really seems to be a key that unlocks their learning and becomes a strong language of expression. Children use their imagination, naturally seeing out unusual perspectives and are not confined by conventional ideas of what makes a 'good' photograph.

Photography builds on children's intrinsic motivation and exploratory drive. By following their curiosity and taking their own pictures they are deciding what is important and constructing their own meaning of their experiences. The resulting images are often unexpected and striking. Children view the world in unique ways and the camera allows them to capture these perspectives.

Children's voice: A picture and a thousand words.....

Initially I imagined photography would provide children with another visual art form to work with but after introducing digital cameras to children several years ago it quickly became apparent just how much more potential there was to photography for opening up conversations.

Photography provides an exceptional tool for encouraging children's voices. Children feel a sense of ownership over their images and readily communicate the ideas behind them. They are empowered as they know the information and the thinking behind the images that we don't.

Children like having their images as the focal point and these become the starting point for conversation as images are reviewed together. They make meaningful reflections about their images and these often become a way of starting new dialogues and new inquiries. In Reggio Emilia they have been using cameras for many years and they talk of the 'language and dialogue' of photography, which goes to emphasise this rich potential for developing communication.



Unique insight

Photography provides practitioners with a unique insight into the way a child sees the world around them, making their interests visible, and opening up opportunities for following and developing their lines of enquiry. For this to be effective we have to ensure that we make time and space to listen carefully as the images are reviewed together.

Versatile

Photography is extremely versatile – it can be an interest in itself or used to support other enquiries, recording outings and so on. The images can be reviewed instantly on the camera, or downloaded and viewed on a laptop or pc, or a tv or whiteboard, projected on a wall or printed. Images that are printed can then be used in many ways – for mark-making and drawing on, creating a collage, making a storybook and so on. Images can also be reworked digitally with a variety of apps. The possibilities are endless.

Documentation

Photography is a powerful tool for children to become documenters of their own work – documenting both the process and product. Photographs taken by themselves have a deeper significance and are easier to re-connect with. This can contribute to children reflecting and evaluating their learning, developing their metacognitive understanding, and thinking about next steps.

The documented images provide a memory link to previous experience – and these are even more relevant and memorable when taken by the children themselves. This can be particularly useful when documenting work that happens over a longer time frame such as the seasons, the weather or watching seeds grow. It can also be a useful tool for children to record a temporary construction that has to be dismantled often making them feel happier about having to clear it away.

Consultation

Photographs can provide an interesting way of consulting with children, gathering their ideas and having them feed ideas into evaluation. This could be consulting with children about what changes they would like to see in their environment such as in the playground – if we ask direct questions the conversation may be stifled, but by suggesting children take images of things they like and don't like and then reviewing the images together, it can really stimulate a dialogue and exchange of ideas. Similarly we have children use photographs to evaluate their time at nursery at the end of the year – by taking pictures of learning that had been significant, what they liked to play with and so on. This can provide extraordinary and sometimes unexpected insights. The Mosaic approach highlights the value of using photography as a medium for consultation.

Photography and the curriculum

The Foundation Phase is built on a pedagogy that embraces active play and learning, and the experiences offered to children are an essential ingredient in the development of the Draft Curriculum for Wales 2022. Photography, taking, reviewing and using images, embraces these principles and supports the seven **Areas of Learning** and the **Four Purposes** of the Draft Curriculum for Wales 2022. On page 12 there are some examples of how photography can support children's learning and development in the photography experiences offered in the member settings.



Areas of Learning

Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity

Being trusted to use the settings photographic equipment enabled the children to acquire the necessary skills to take and talk about their own photographs:

- children felt valued and empowered
- it encouraged their self-esteem and personal moral values
- it developed their sense of self and sense of belonging (see the case study on G in Little Angels Preschool)
- it enabled children to express their views and feelings

Language, Literacy and Communication Skills

Photography provided opportunities for children to:

- develop vocabulary & descriptive language e.g. button, lens, eye, screen, wide, tall, mini
- start conversations (with adults and other children)
- create and record stories using the photos taken - in Little Angels the practitioners supported children to create an A4 sheet of their photographs from a trip to the school's garden. Practitioners listened to the children's stories about the experience and helped them to record these.

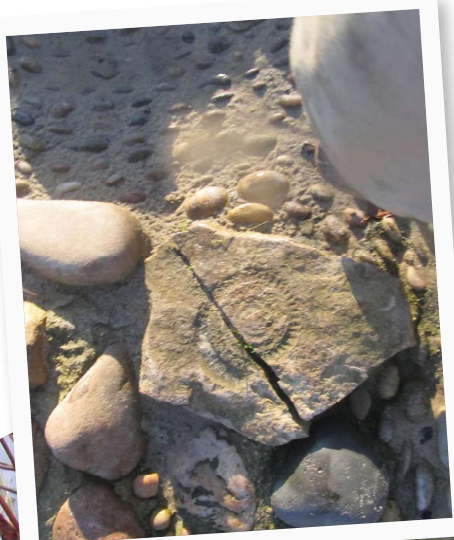
In the case study about M in Monmouth Day Nursery photography is a learning experience that can support children that are reticent about using language, or have language delay, to express themselves.

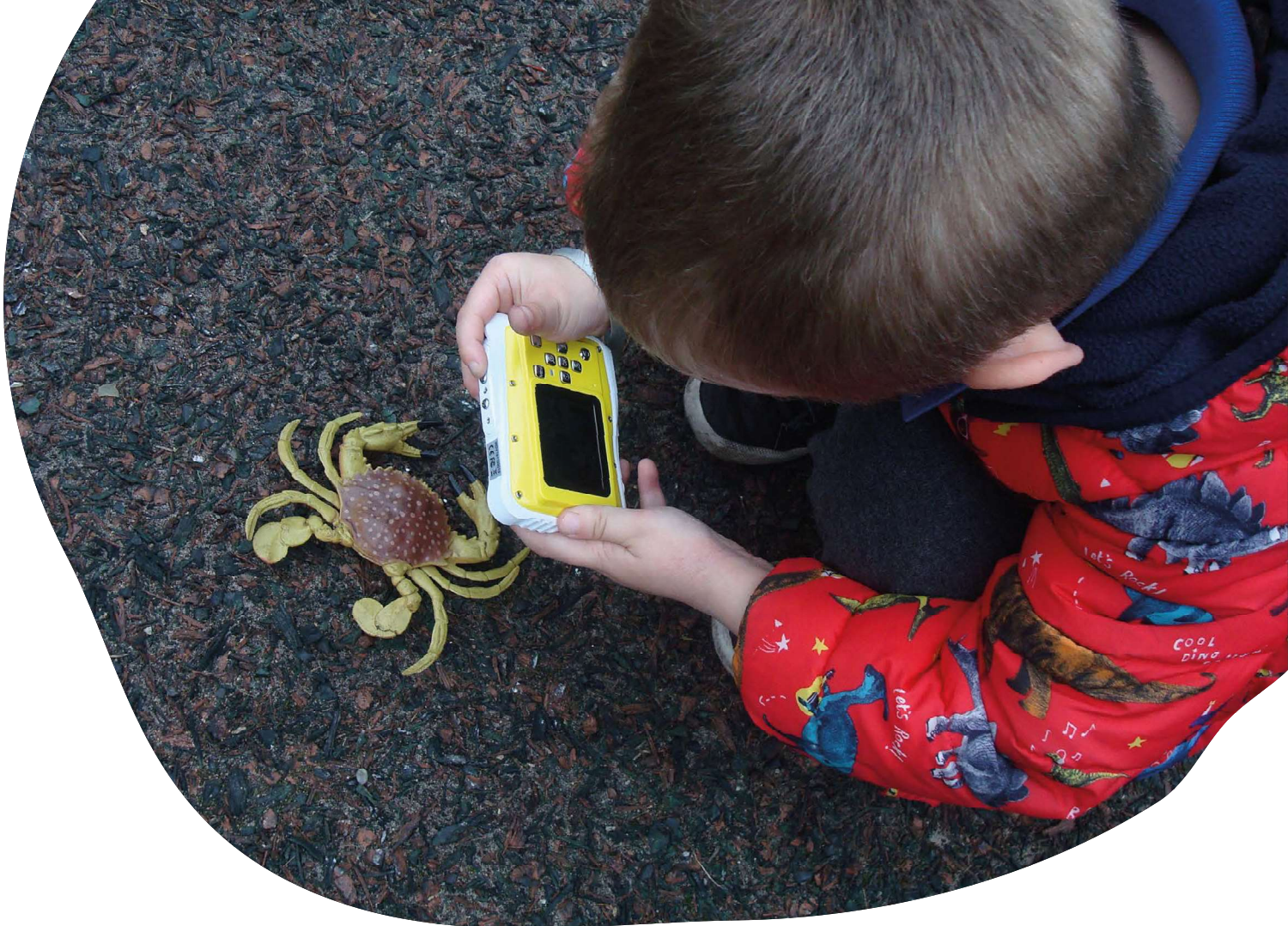
Mathematical Development

Children developed their skills, knowledge and understanding of mathematics through practical experiences exploring

- Taking photos of images, shapes, numbers
- Comparing size and measurements
- Perspective and positioning

Children also developed an understanding of time in a way that was meaningful to them e.g. recalling events that they had photographed, seeing the changes in the weather and watching shadows change.





Welsh Language Development

Through photography children built a deeper understanding of the Welsh language both orally and in a written format. In Monmouth Day Nursery the display board featured the Welsh language vocabulary that the practitioners and children used during their photography sessions e.g. edrycha (look), gwena (smile), Dyma... (here is...) Dw i'n hoffi... (I like...)

Knowledge and Understanding of the World

Photography increased children's curiosity about the world around them – it supported them in understanding more about past events, people and places, living things and the work people do in their families and in their nursery community e.g. in the workshop a child talked with practitioners about their dad's camera.

Physical Development

Handling and using photographic equipment supported children to:

- Develop fine motor skills and dexterity
- Develop hand-eye coordination
- Increase their control, poise and posture, so that they could keep still as they took their images
- Handle tools with increasing control e.g. taking care of the camera and not covering the lens with their finger

The camera provided an opportunity for problem-solving as children had to work with the desirable difficulties that the camera posed to them physically. In both settings practitioners commented that they had the opportunity to watch and document children supporting themselves and each other in this problem-solving with minimal adult support.

Creative Development

Photography provided children with a medium to express their creative ideas and to reflect on the process of creating visual art. This involved working with ICT and exploring its possibilities on both the cameras and on tablets.



The Four Purposes



Ambitious, capable learners, who use digital technologies creatively to communicate and analyse information, and who are ready to learn throughout their lives

Photography provided an opportunity for children to create their own visual art works and in the process develop conversations about the information that they were recording. Children talked about their plans for the images that were going to take and had the opportunity to recall the process in conversations with their peers and their practitioners.

Enterprising, creative contributors who, think creatively to reframe and solve problems, and are ready to play a full part in life and work.

One of the challenges that the children found in their photography experiences was that they put their finger over the lens. The children in their review of their images discovered that this was happening and developed different ways of holding the camera so that they did not obscure the lens.

Ethical informed citizens, who are knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world now and in the past, and are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

For the children in the member settings photography provided a way to look closely at their learning and play environment. It gave the children the opportunity to have discussions about their nursery and their family.

Healthy, confident individuals who, form positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect, and are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Using the camera provided the opportunity for children to ask other children and adults for their permission before they took a photograph. Children did this through oral communications but also through non-verbal means, such as thumbs up and down or a smile or shaking the head to say no.

Pete's guide to equipment

Over the years we have experimented with a variety of different cameras, tablets and other devices.

Cameras

When it comes to cameras, there are so many options available and there are pros and cons to each.

When considering your purchase, I recommend you avoid any that are made specifically for children. They are well protected with rubber mouldings but tend to be cheaply made with poor quality processors and produce poor quality images. They also tend to include distracting additional effects and games which become an unnecessary distraction. Instead, look for a small high-quality digital camera – they take high quality images and tend to be easy to use.

Second hand

I would strongly advise getting second-hand equipment especially as there are so many cheaply available these days as we constantly replace old equipment to keep up to date. Cameras will eventually break in the hands of young children. Using cheaper second-hand equipment can allow us to feel less apprehensive about damage allowing the children more freedom with the camera without us nervously hovering over them. We need to be comfortable with children handling cameras for it to be successful.

Neck strap

It is important that children wear a neck strap to prevent the camera being dropped. I would recommend using one with a wide fabric strap for comfort.



Pete's recommendations:



Canon PowerShot

The cameras in this range are robustly made, produce high-quality images, are easy to grip, have a relatively large screen on the back for reviewing images and take AA batteries.

You can find these on eBay for as little as **£30**.



Fuji FinePix XP120

A robust option, both waterproof and shock-proof and available in a range of bright colours

From **£100** new



Nikon Cool Pix W100

A robust option, both waterproof and shock-proof and available in a range of bright colours

From **£149** new

For more information on photographic resources visit:

irresistible-learning.co.uk/resource/childrens-photography/

Have a designated children's camera. Position the camera somewhere in the setting so that the children can see it at all times, but not necessarily be able to access it without adult help. Make it clear that the children can access it anytime they want but they must ask an adult first. This emphasises the need to take care of this special equipment and for us to know who is using it and track whose images are whose.

Handy tip: - before each child uses the camera take their photo first to help identify whose images are whose!

Getting started – The Workshop

The workshop consisted of a provocation around a digital camera inspired by Pete Moorhouse's work with photography with children. The practitioner leading the workshop had a puppet who promoted discussion about the digital camera that she brought to the session. Having children share what they already know was a good starting point for discussions. The puppet asked the children about the camera and how to work the camera. There were lots of opportunities to handle the camera, turning it on and off, looking at the eye of the camera (the lens), finding the button to take pictures, finding where the pictures that had been taken were on the digital screen. In the workshop the puppet also showed the children some images that she had taken on a rainy day in the park. The puppet talked about why she had chosen to take that picture and discovered what the children saw in the picture. These images could also include looking at some magazines and photographs or visiting a photographic exhibition. There was also an opportunity for children to observe their environment through cardboard view finders. This observation session could also explore other lens-based media to further develop understanding of choosing images. This could include investigating lenses, magnifying glasses, a USB digital microscope or projecting images captured with a web camera.

After the workshop practitioners in the member settings provided more guidance by giving the children instructions on how to use the camera so they could get the best out of the photography experience. This was done on a one-to-one or small group basis. The practitioners gave guidance on:

- The need to handle the camera with care and protect it from damage
- Using the arm strap and making sure that it was always worn
- Not running with the camera.
- How to switch the camera on and off
- Which button takes the image
- How to focus (camera - half press/ tablet - until circle or square disappears)
- The importance of holding the camera still and keeping the lens clear
- The importance of keeping fingers from obscuring the lens
- How to zoom in/out
- How to switch between review mode and shooting mode.
- How to delete unwanted images
- Some discussion around etiquette – respecting people who do not want their picture taken



After the initial instruction the children took practice shots to gain confidence in the operation and framing of the picture. The practitioners suggested to the children that it was a good idea to take a portrait of themselves first. This helped identify whose images were whose on the memory card.

Little Angels Nursery



In Little Angels Preschool the practitioner set up a discrete learning opportunity for a small group of children by taking the camera out into an area of the school garden that was unfamiliar to the children. G began the session exploring the way that the camera worked with the practitioner. He was confident in taking photographs and using the camera and was able to take clear photographs independently. The practitioner suggested that G took his portrait before he began taking his photographs to identify who's they were on the memory card. G was fascinated in his portrait and began the session by taking lots of 'selfies.' He talked about the different expressions he was making and experimented with the way he could take images closer to his face and further away from his face. He spent a long time engrossed in this process before he began to look around the garden. He carefully selected two objects to photograph. The practitioner was interested in G's story about his photographs in their review session. G expressed his interest in his face and the way it moved. He was less interested in discussing his interest in the objects he had taken images of. The practitioner recorded G's interest in his face and was interested in whether this fascination would continue when G used the camera at other times.

In Monmouth Day Nursery the practitioners in the preschool room made a space for the camera on a display board. They explained to the children that they could use the camera independently by making a request to a practitioner to use it. M was fascinated with using the camera and began quietly pointing to the camera when she wanted to use it. The practitioner supported her use of the camera and helped her to problem-solve how not to cover the lens with her finger. M was interested in taking photographs of people. At first, she used non-verbal methods of asking other children if she could photograph them but over time, she began to use more words and became involved in conversations with others. This was noticed by the practitioner as M had been reticent about using verbal communication. It was observed that in the sessions where the practitioner or other children reviewed M's photographs with her, that M became more vocal. M's interest in her images encouraged her to share her interests with others and this led to her socialising with others in the setting. The camera offered opportunities for M to share her view of the world.

Monmouth Day Nursery



Exploration:

Most children will naturally follow their curiosity and experiment, developing their technique and skill through trial and error. Where children need encouragement suggest:

- taking shots from different perspectives – e.g. above and below, unusual angles, close-up and further away or from different sides
- different subjects - portraits, objects, landscapes, details, buildings and so on.

Importantly, give children time to experiment and find their voice. We can encourage children to take images that are important to them by showing genuine interest in their resulting images.



Extended projects:

When reviewing images themes often begin to emerge and these can then be developed and extended - there are so many possibilities.

The children could take the camera home over the weekend. Children enjoy sharing their images back in the setting, talking about and describing the people, places, events and objects they may have documented and why - their perceptions also fascinate parents. This project encourages a link between home and setting. There are endless possibilities of subjects the children can explore. We've given you a few examples below to get you started...

- My journey to school
- Where I live
- Exploring colour, texture and patterns
- Expressing likes/ dislikes
- Festivals and Cultural events
- Making maps
- Making a picture story book
- Photographing the weather
- Looking for shapes in clouds
- Growth

Other lines of enquiry may also emerge from their interest in photography – they may decide to make cameras from junk modelling supplies, they may use their skills with tools to disassemble a (broken!) camera, discovering the many parts inside, they may go on to create drawings/ painting inspired by their images or draw directly on print-outs of their images.

Reviewing images and reworking images

Photography is versatile in the many ways in which images can be reviewed. We often see a huddle of children gathered around a camera looking at the images that have just been taken. They can be viewed on a larger scale on a laptop, PC or white board. Images can be reworked digitally or printed. Printed images can be made into collages, drawn on, cut, and so on. Images can be shared with parents through wall documentation, learning diaries, and slide shows. I particularly like adding their images to PowerPoint and adding some of their dialogue to the slides. Selected slides containing children's commentary can then be printed and added to learning diaries.

Downloading and storage

It is good practice to get into the habit of downloading the images off the camera after each session. The number of images being stored can become quickly overwhelming and difficult to organise. They are best downloaded after each session into a separate folder of each child's work.

Exhibition:

Children take pride in their images and also in presenting them. This could be on a monitor or a wall display or it could be taken one step further with the children exhibiting their favourite works in a public space such as a café, library or health centre. This type of event is very popular with children and their families. Some images could be framed or printed on large canvasses. Children could choose the image they would like to display and their thoughts added as to why they selected this image. People are often taken aback by just how interesting and striking their images are.

Safeguarding children and permissions

It is important to review the children's images on the camera before downloading them to a computer. When using the camera the children are independent and we do not necessarily know what they are taking images of. On rare occasions children may take untoward images of themselves or others. It is essential to review the images immediately and delete any compromising images before they are uploaded to a computer (once uploaded they are often automatically backed up to another server and it becomes harder to completely erase data). In terms of permissions for the use of children's images the same criteria apply as with photographs taken by practitioners. It is vital you obtain parental permission before using the images on the school website, social media or in publications. The proposed use of images should be fully explained and written permissions obtained.

About Pete

Pete is an artist educator and an early years creative consultant. Pete has over 25 years' experience of working as an Artist Educator within schools. He is currently Artist Educator at St Werburgh's Park Nursery School in Bristol. Pete works with children and staff to enrich the programs and encourage creative thinking through various provocations and longer-term projects. Pete has worked as artist-in-residence and delivered a variety of creative workshops in a great number of schools throughout the UK and abroad. His work is inspired by his visits and in-depth study of the Reggio Emilia approach, Froebelian principles and his research in Japan, New Zealand and USA.

studio@petemoorhouse.co.uk



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