

***Photography in the Classroom***  
***a workbook***

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# Photography in the classroom



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# Preface

The Illinois Arts Council worked with the three members of the photography team—Nancy Langsan, Ralph Levinson and Alan Teller (who also served as the team's coordinator)—to develop the visual arts component for the Council's 1974-75 HEW/ESAA Title VII Special Arts Project. The team's special combination of talents and personalities made for a unique program, one which we found exciting, successful and meaningful enough to again use as the visual arts component for our 1975-76 Title VII grant.

This workbook so thoroughly contains the team's sense of accomplishment and delight, as well as their frustrations and resolutions, that it is unnecessary to say more here, but this: we hope your reading of this workbook triggers your curiosity and sense of discovery. With care and attention, you can use this tool to realistically begin plans for your own photography program.

*Jane Turczyn, Director  
HEW/ESAA Title VII Special Arts Project 1974-75*

# Introduction

The photography component of the HEW Title VII Artists-in-the-Schools program was designed primarily to get kids in touch with their feelings and their selves using the medium of photography as a tool for self-awareness, communication, and creativity. Exercises were structured to facilitate "intercultural" and "interethnic" understanding by having students become more aware of themselves and more able to share this appreciation with others.

We taught with the belief that all students are unique human beings, capable of real perception (as opposed to mere "seeing") and real creativity. Photography, particularly relevant and enjoyable to TV-raised children, is a medium which virtually all students can practice with little difficulty, and one where the tangible end product produces a real feeling of accomplishment.

Our program was not designed to use photography as a vocation, hobby, or replacement for reading and writing skills, but rather as a tool for other ends. The program is experientially rather than technically oriented, and leads the student to concerns that run deeper than how to hold a camera or how to develop film. Our belief was that cameras don't take pictures, people do. How they do it tells us a great deal about them. Our exercises stressed how eyes alone are not the sole prerequisite for photography—all the senses, ideas, and past experiences of an individual are used in creativity.

Drawing, writing, role playing, body movement, music, fantasy, were seen as legitimate aspects of our photography program, as we encouraged the students to explore themselves and their environment through personal assignments and group discussions and exercises.

The learning skills fostered through the learning of a craft and its application for personal statements are essential for mastering traditional subjects. The motivation acquired through this program may well transfer to other areas. (Photography appears to be independent of reading, writing, or verbal skills; we have had technically sound, sensitive, and eloquent statements come from non-verbal students or "slow-learners," as well as from those deemed "average" or "gifted.") As the mastery of the photographic process will ideally increase a student's confidence to tackle other skills, the success of this program multiplies as it is integrated with existing programs and curriculum.

Photography is a great deal of fun and provides an exciting window into another person's world. We would like to see the personal sharing photography enables increased, and offer this workbook as a chronicle of our experience and a guide for new programs.

# Chronicle

At each of the three schools we worked in, we wanted to establish a permanent facility, hold classes, hold teacher workshops, train a teacher to continue the program after we left, and have a final show of student work. With varying degrees of success, we met these goals.

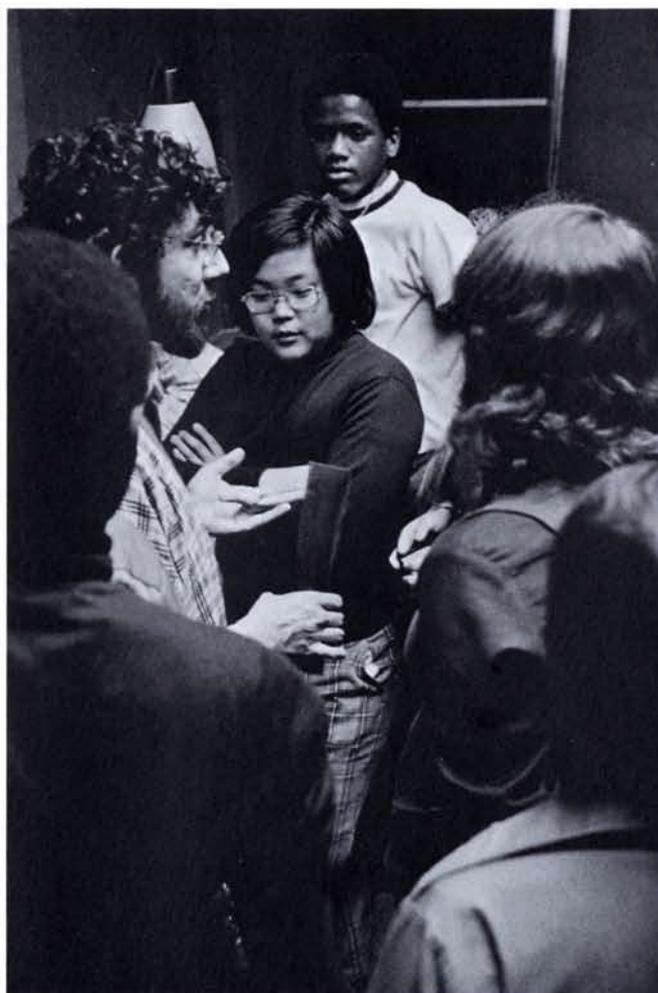
In all schools we taught 2 days a week, three 1½ hour classes per day, with 15-20 students per class. The first half of each class was devoted to experiential exercises, the second to technical photography. Our "team" consisted of two photographers and an art therapist. We were assisted by a differing number of aides and teachers in each school.

Our first school was the Fieldcrest Elementary School, District 144, Markham, Illinois. Being the first in the project, it suffered from our newness to the task. The "photo lab" at this school was an unused bathroom at the rear of the classroom. Our enlargers were set up in the stalls, over the toilets. While this worked and illustrates what is possible, it was, needless to say, far from ideal. We realized from this that a strong commitment from the school and a spelled-out space arrangement are necessary to avoid needless wasting of time and confusion. This facility also had the disadvantage of being less than permanent, and given the reality of school space limitation, the more solid a hold you can have on a physical area, the better. We did not realize the necessity of long term teacher or aide participation until too late, and consequently only had an aide working with us for the last few weeks. Relationships with other teachers or curricula were also minimal,

and we became increasingly aware of the need for improving this. Teacher training was also not as effective as it could have been. Despite these growing-pain limitations, we had a 90-print show at the end of our eight weeks, and succeeded in accomplishing much of what we had set out to do: a facility had been built, students and teachers were taught technical skills, the use of photography had been introduced as a tool.

The second site, the Coolidge Junior High School, District 151, in Phoenix, Illinois, received the benefits of what we learned at Fieldcrest. To develop the permanent darkroom, we had sinks installed, counters built, all the necessary construction done before the residency began. Teacher workshops were more publicized, better attended, and extremely effective. (A full time teacher was freed to be with us for the entire time we were in the school. He is now teaching the photo program as an elected activity.) We made some progress in our awareness of existing programs and curricula. Classroom exercises had the advantage of being field tested.

At the third school, the Algonquin Elementary School, District 163, in Park Forest, Illinois, the program continued to progress. A full room was carved out of an existing classroom, and a total, air-conditioned darkroom was constructed. The district media coordinator, school librarian, and curriculum teacher all attended our classes regularly and assisted in both experiential and technical work. As in the two other schools, the end-of-project show was a highlight, with great parent, child and photo teacher enthusiasm. A slide/tape documentation presentation of the project was made for the district by the media coordinator, who participated in classes.



The sum of our experiences demonstrated clearly the need for the program's close coordination with already existing school programs and curriculum. Our time limitations of 8 weeks per school made this coordination far from complete but, nevertheless, practical connections were made. (For example, some teachers who had photography students in their classes occasionally provided photographic options to regular assignments.)

It also became apparent that aside from scheduled teacher workshops, informal, friendly contact is a must between the photo team and the regular faculty. This sort of communication is invaluable in dealing with difficult and hard to reach students, providing vital links between the photo experience and the learning process in other classrooms, and nurturing the interest in the program's possibilities so that meaningful continuation can be a realistic goal.

# Organizing the program

## **Preliminary groundwork**

Once the Arts Council had selected participating school districts according to Title VII guidelines, the superintendent appointed an in-school coordinator for the photography program to survey the individual schools and principals for school selection. Physical layout, scheduling and staff attitudes were taken into consideration. The principal of the chosen school then appointed a resource teacher to be trained by us. In District #163 the media director, Ardath Meeden, was assigned to actively participate in one class per day. During our three residencies we found the attitude of the principal to be the most important and often overriding human factor.

## **Resource teachers**

Our most satisfactory association was with Dave Dudiak, a 5th grade teacher, who was assigned to work with us in all our classes during the eight weeks at Coolidge School. Dave thus experienced the continuity of our program, became familiar with our process and became proficient in the technical skills. He is now continuing the program as a daily curriculum elective.

In one elementary school we worked with a teacher's aide, whose assistance was limited by the fact that she couldn't stay after school (no money to pay her) and was occasionally yanked out of class to work somewhere else. The homeroom teachers in the other elementary school provided occasional assistance. An interested father of one of the students came to class a few times, as did the district's audio-visual consultant. Any person who came to class was an immediate participant and helper.

## **Scheduling**

The use of both experimental and technical activities during each class session requires a substantial block of time. However difficult it may be to arrange, sessions of at least 1½ hours are necessary. We had to work around the firmly established lunch period in creating the schedule, so in all three schools we had two classes before lunch and one after. In two of the three we found the period just after lunch to be the most "up."

## **Meeting with teachers**

In our preliminary meetings with the teachers, we found that a high degree of interest was accompanied, especially in the junior high, by a strong sense of caution. Teachers were delighted to have the program in the school, but when it came to having to relinquish some of their students for a couple of hours each week, some became very uptight about the loss of learning time in their own classrooms. Naturally, their concern became ours: we worked out an alternating schedule whereby a student would miss a particular class only once a week, rather than the two times per week that would have resulted had we had all classes meet at the same time both days. Other concerns revolved around the incorporation of their subject matter into our process. We discussed how documentary photography necessitates the writing of outlines and the study of sociology, how percentages and fractions are used in enlarging, and how we break down and study the new vocabulary words we offer. We tried to further develop their confidence in our willingness to incorporate their suggestions, their needs into our program.

### **Selecting students**

We requested that the students be a cross-section of the general school population: by race and nationality, sex, academic achievement, social development, financial status. Fortunately, we had the funds to subsidize film and cameras for students with no money, and for students whose parents refused to cooperate financially. Teachers did not ask for volunteers, but assigned students. In two of the schools we had students from various homerooms and grades together in one class, so students who had never before worked together had a new experience. We had three "intact" classes in the third school. We requested that class size be kept to 15 students, but in actuality worked with classes ranging from 15 to 21. We found 15 to be a good working size for elementary and junior high.

### **Notifying parents**

When the final selection of students was made, we sent a mimeographed letter home with each student explaining the program, the procedure through which their child was selected, the estimated cost to the student, etc., and left a space for the parent's signature. We made a small alternate list, as some parents refused permission at the start and one or two others withdrew their children later on.

Surprisingly, we did not encounter any objections due to financial reasons—this in neighborhoods ranging from middle class to poor, black and white. The only consistent objection, again, was the fear that the child would be missing other important school work. Although we do acknowledge the loss of study time in the more traditional areas, we feel that the unique opportunity for personal

growth and increased motivation our program offers is invaluable. We encouraged the students to take responsibility for their more complex work load.

### **Scavenging cameras**

We arranged our finances (see Budget Appendix) to allow the purchase of many older cameras from thrift stores and flea markets. We also publicized that we were looking for cameras, and asked that people scavenge their attics and basements. Cameras were given free to those students who could not afford them and were rented for a small fee (\$1.00 to \$3.00) to those who could afford but didn't already have one. At the end of the course these students were told the cameras were theirs for the keeping. We feel the rental idea created a sense of responsibility, since most of the students came up with the money from their own savings. We supplied film free to those students who couldn't afford to pay anything. In one school the film was subsidized by the district, so the students paid only 50% of cost. We bought film in large quantities from less expensive sources in the city, where it was also easier to find the Verichrome Pan film we used. We kept the supply at school and sold it as it was needed. An unsubsidized roll of film cost 60¢-80¢. Any and all savings were passed along to the students.

### **Recommended cameras**

We would recommend almost any functioning camera, preferably fitted with flash, for which it is possible to buy Verichrome Pan film (see Technical Appendix). If a camera is erratic, forget it, as it will cause great frustration for the student and will be a time waster.

Most Instamatics are excellent, although we did experience inconsistency with the Soligor brand. Pocket Instamatics which take the miniature size 110 film make excellent negatives. However, there is a problem in processing the film, as Kodak does not make a plastic developing apron for it. (Theoretically, Kodak does make a tank for it, however, it is impossible to find or even order. It has to be either tray developed in total darkness, or wound on a fine metal reel made by Kinderman, which is difficult for some to use, and more expensive.) In one school we blocked out light in the john, set a tray over the toilet, and had the students develop their 110 film there.

The old Kodak Brownies and Hawkeyes, box cameras, folding cameras, Arguses and Yashicas are excellent. A small majority of the students used similar 126 Instamatics, making it necessary to label the cameras. We did not use 35mm cameras as they are expensive and film for them can only be purchased in 20 and 36 exposure rolls, as opposed to the 8 and 12 exposures possible with the majority of the cameras mentioned. Progress is enhanced by using shorter rolls: students can have a greater number of chances to see and correct mistakes (bulk loading of short 35mm rolls is an option if 35mm cameras are available).

#### **Testing cameras**

The three main aspects that need to be checked carefully are the body, the lens, and the shutter. Ask yourself the following questions before you plunk down even \$1.00 at the Salvation Army: is the body solid, with no missing pieces for light to seep through? If it is a foldout camera with bellows,

are they intact? Does the film advance knob interlock with the takeup spool (does the spool turn as you turn the knob)? If there is a re-wind knob, does that work? Angle the lens to the light; is it free of bad scratches and ground-in dirt? Open the back of the camera, look through the lens and press the shutter release button; is the shutter there? Does it have a firm, steady sound? Does it work every time? If there are any other adjustments, such as f-stops and shutter speeds, do they work?

In some roll film cameras it is necessary to cock (set the spring for) the shutter, by first either moving the cock-lever or turning the film winding knob. For testing Instamatic models, open the back, move the small metal catch to the right, cock the shutter by turning the film winding knob, and press the shutter release.

#### **What about Polaroid?**

Polaroid is excellent for certain activities when immediate feedback is desired (Exercise #1, page 17). Continual reliance on this camera, however, robs the student of involvement in the very important sequential processes which are at the core of our program. The most suitable Polaroid model we used was the 440, which will produce good black and white pictures in even low light situations. It runs from \$30 to \$50 used.

#### **Facilities**

The most feasible working situation would include two rooms: one a permanent darkroom facility for making proof sheets and enlargements; the other an activity/developing room with a closed-off film-drying area. A good activity room would be private, spacious enough to allow for group and individual work, have good natural and artificial

lighting, window shades, running water for film washing and mixing the monobath, and a closet or closed-off area for hanging developed film. Wooden clothespins, each labeled with a student's name, can be clipped on wires in an unused coat closet for an excellent drying system. Garment bags with clothespins clipped on hangers will do.

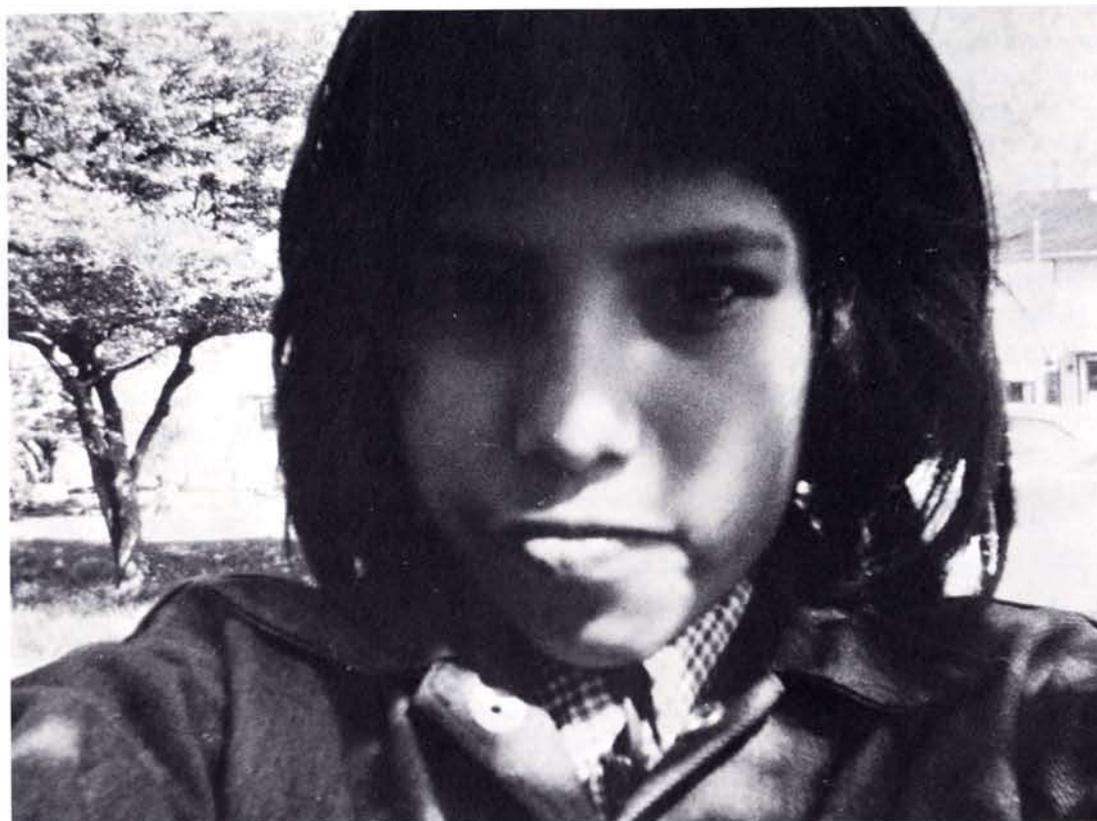
The size of the darkroom facility is dependent upon the number of students you want to accommodate at one time. This room need not have running water, although it is desirable if you should ever want to switch from stabilization processing to the traditional tray method. (Details on the stabilizer, as well as other technical processes and terms, are in the Technical Appendix.) Windows will have to be sealed to fully block light—masonite nailed into the frames is adequate, ventilation provided—fan or air conditioner, as well as a sufficient number of electrical outlets installed—one for each enlarger, contact printer and stabilizer. Permanent darkroom equipment includes: enlargers, timers, safelights, contact printer, and stabilizer. A light baffle system should be devised to permit students to come and go freely from the darkroom into the outside white-light area. This can easily be done by hanging two sets of floor-to-ceiling black darkroom cloth curtains. Easy access to a white-light area during the enlarging process is necessary for checking contact sheets, test strips, and enlargements.

For the elementary school that chose not to build a permanent facility, we made, off of the activity room, a four-person darkroom out of 8'x8' two-stall bathroom. We removed the swinging stall doors, keeping the partitions in place, and placed a desk over each toilet. We added one other desk and a folding

table for more counter space. However well these cramped quarters functioned, it's important to remember that *this space could not have been utilized this well if we had not been working with the stabilization process*. As it was, we had to move the contact printer into the classroom and devise a setup for making proof sheets off in a darkened corner. Contact paper is different from enlarging paper in that it can be handled in low white-light situations. Students made their exposures in the contact printer, slipped the paper into a folder and carried it into the darkroom for processing. Enlarging paper, whether it is stabilization or the conventional type, is always handled under red or amber safelights.

#### **Outside resources**

We budgeted money for field trips—both to take photographs and view photographs—and for visiting artists. Although eight weeks is a very limiting amount of time, we felt a need to have the students begin to interact with the photographic works of others, and the potential for source materials outside their own immediate environment. Photography books, slides, newspapers and films provide excellent opportunities for students to learn how to view, analyze, and discuss these images. Be sure to carefully look over our bibliographies for ideas of the kinds of supplementary materials available.



*Nicky Tamayo*

# Relationship to other photo education programs

There are currently two organized and overlapping movements which emphasize photography's educational significance, and which are actively engaged in its promotion: the Visual Literacy movement, and *Popular Photography's* "Photography as the 4th R" program. While our approach shares many of the same aspirations these programs have, there are significant and basic differences. We all agree on the positive effect on self-concept, the enhancement of students' learning and developmental processes, the importance of creativity in general, and a belief in the power of photography. The differences lie in how we each go about teaching this, what we feel students are truly capable of, and what the end product of education should really be. Some differences are subtle, some obvious.

The Visual Literacy movement tends to see photographic communication as a lineal phenomenon—that there is a picture language with grammar and structure akin to those of words. In its simplest form, this means a *picture* of Dick, Jane, and Spot, instead of those familiar words. It is subject-oriented (i.e., *what* you photograph, instead of your way of doing it), without a real awareness that photography is an extremely subjective medium—not the objective one we are often told it is. The beauty of photography is that it is not specific: each person interprets the meaning of images his own way, based on who he or she is as an individual human being. There is a basis for discussion, not a new hieroglyphics.

While *Popular Photography's* approach is less didactic, it too, in its rush for public acceptance (and the inevitable market this will bring), smudges over individual differences. The words sound right, but the resulting images are not anywhere nearly as exciting as they could be.

Both Visual Literacy and *Popular Photography* offer a vast oversimplification of the potential of pictures, one which is certainly more marketable and easier to teach, but one which misses the subtlety, beauty, and excitement of meaningful images coming from within the students, and the celebration of their uniqueness. Our approach stresses that students perceive and respond with all of their senses, dreams, past experiences. It is not enough to teach photography's technical end for all of this to come out. We are speaking of another process which begins where the technical leaves off.

There is a fine line between education, indoctrination, and chaos. We are trying to tread it, leaving the students' uniqueness intact and free to fully develop.

# Summary

In the same way a program can be born from wishes and dreams, it is made strong only if allowed to grow from constant questioning and careful doubts. Why were we knocking ourselves out; to what end for the students as well as ourselves?

We often thought that what we wanted for the students was different from what they seemed to want for themselves. While we yearned to convey the subtleties of feelings, communication, response and sharing, they seemed to delight more in the concrete experience of the doing and making. We worked toward both rewards by trying to create exercises that combined the concrete with the subtleties of new individual and group awareness.

The eight week/sixteen period course was barely long enough to touch on the meanings and potentials of the students' work. Our time with the students ended as they became familiar with a process of seeing and then translating experience into form. We couldn't remain long enough to grow with them from their initial familiarities to the individual confidence necessary to sustain prolonged interest and involvement.

In dealing with our doubts and frustrations, we struggled hard to see clearly what was, in fact, happening around us; we found that both ends were beginning to find ways to meet, even though much more work was asking to be done.

A situation at Fieldcrest School illustrates some of this. David was a fifth grade student. Two of his sisters, Kathy, a 3rd grader, and Susan, a 6th grader, were in our other classes, so there was a lot of photography activity at home. During the last two weeks of the program, when we put our emphasis on

the discussion and sharing of the students' photographs, we display all the mounted prints and ask each student to select one to which they really respond, and to talk about it to the rest of the class. One day when we had gone about half way around the circle, sharing our immediate and intimate responses, David became quite agitated and started complaining about the activity. A girl had just been talking about the print she had selected—an out-of-focus photograph of a lawn fountain—when David got up and began denying the girl's reaction. He gave a little speech about irrelevancy and threatened to walk out of the classroom. Instead, however, he walked over to the water fountain in the room and took a drink of water. The entire class broke into hysterics—third graders on up through sixth graders. It was crystal clear to all of them that the photograph of the fountain and, in fact, what the girl had been saying about the fountain had indeed penetrated David's mind. A connection, albeit subconscious, could not be denied. (David never fully understood our laughter, although everyone else in the class was quite aware of what had happened and was enjoying it for all its worth. A photo-affirming irony!)

There are numerous sociological, cultural, aesthetic, educational and human arguments that, to us, support our program; that give it specific reasons-for-being because of where we are in time and history. Yet diversions into those discussions, however meaningful, are not the purpose of this workbook. What we've written in the way of narrative and listed in the appendices should be enough of what you need as you prepare to participate in the energy, the looking, doing and seeing, that we find so exciting and important.



*Tonya Galbreath*