

Mick Waters introduces Jane Hewitt and

Learning through a lens

It's all about photography

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For Tony, 'my rock', with thanks for your endless patience, love and support.

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Photograph © Susannah Ireland

Introduction by Mick Waters

Not many years ago photography was less immediate than it is now. Where people used to take a photograph, wait until the film was used, send away the film for processing and wait for its return to see whether they were satisfied with their effort, they now point and click. They might not even point a camera; a phone or a tablet is waved and the image recorded. Satisfaction or otherwise is addressed immediately and the photo stored or despatched to anyone who might be thought to wish to enjoy it, or it might even be made available on the web to anyone who might come across it. It is virtually impossible to fail at photography; indeed failures are a source of mirth and can be deleted as quickly as they were taken. Some iconic events are viewed through the lens by seemingly everyone in attendance and the image seems as important as the experience.

If only children were encouraged to enjoy writing with such abandon! Have a go, experiment, laugh at mistakes, show people examples you are proud of or your latest effort, comment on each other's ... enjoy it! This enjoyment would be a good starting point for in-depth teaching of the power of writing and the ways in which we can get better and better at it. This book uses enjoyment as a starting point and explores in-depth learning by helping the teacher to understand potential and possibility in their teaching.

Jane Hewitt has produced a brilliant book for teachers to show them how they can exploit an interest that pupils will take to naturally. It is a pleasure to introduce her and her work.

As you read this book, you will find ways to build on the strengths in your own teaching. There are ideas, straightforward explanations, extended examples, starting points and

helpful suggestions. It is one of those books that you can work through from front to back or you can open it at a particular place to help you through the next part of the teaching repertoire.

The book addresses the subjects of the curriculum. Subject disciplines, and their programmes of study, all contain content which falls into three types of learning. Every subject tries to teach pupils 'how to ...' do things; setting out the skills which help pupils to become secure in the subject. Next comes teaching 'about' the subject; exploring and learning the knowledge associated with it. Third comes learning 'through' the subject; learning elsewhere is opened up through proficiency and knowledge.

Jane explores these three areas so well in her book. She offers the teacher the chance to find out how photography works. There is detailed explanation of how the camera works, how to use it well and how to move from being a happy snapper to someone who can compose and structure a photograph that will have real impact.

There are plenty of opportunities for learning about photography. The section on technique covers the 'camera basics' and when this is added to the essence of composition the book moves into the realm of art. The uses of photography as a form of expression, persuasion or investigation will guide you and your pupils into so many subject discipline realms.

Jane brings across the power of photography and offers a rich source of talking points, in depth discussion and debate that can be started in assembly, form time or lessons.

Photography may not be a curriculum subject in the traditional sense but the chance to 'learn through' photography so that it becomes the vehicle for other learning is cleverly presented in the book. Jane manages to offer suggestions and ideas that can be used directly or adapted to bring learning alive for teachers, either by studying with photographs as a resource or by using photography as the touchstone, the hook or the magnet to grab the pupils' attention and take them to new depths in subjects such as science, history or geography. The fascinating practical work on pinhole cameras and camera obscuras, for example, will take pupils into scientific concepts and social niceties of a by-gone historical age. The consideration of apps, iPhoneography, and their usage, which flow through the book, will exploit the computer science and technology requirements of a curriculum.

The book offers ways in which difficult concepts in citizenship or PHSE can be addressed through the use of photographs and the engagement of pupils in photography to highlight or exemplify awkward issues. Suddenly the challenge of the embarrassing conversation is eased by the chance to deal with images rather than words. Similarly, concepts that schools often find difficult, such as teaching pupils about protest or

campaigning, become more immediate through well-chosen photographs ... and Jane offers plenty of those.

By reading the book, you will get to know Jane. She has vast experience as a teacher and knows how to connect with pupils. One connection is through photography. Her professional approach will help you to build upon your own and the ideas, techniques and suggestions will help you to explore learning in new ways, whatever the subject discipline.

Do enjoy this book with the pupils that you teach.

Smile please!



Why photography?

Imagine being told that you could introduce a device into your teaching that was easily accessible and would enable you to be creative. This device comes in a variety of forms and with a range of price tags to suit all school budgets. It will motivate pupils but will also create laughter as well as deep learning and thoughtful reflection. You won't need any real training to use it – you can learn, with your pupils, as you go along. It will allow for mathematical and scientific ideas to be mixed in with art and literacy. And it will stimulate discussion – it may cause controversy, too, but it will certainly get a reaction.

Have I convinced you? Great. But, in fact, you already own at least one of these amazing devices – a camera, smartphone or tablet – so all you need to do is unlock their potential and see how these amazing tools can be used. I hope this book will open your eyes to the ways in which you can use both new technologies and your own skill set to get creative with photography.

Are there skills that you wished you had? I always wanted to be able to draw or play a musical instrument. Sadly, I can do neither. I have tried, really I have, but I was asked to leave the school 'orchestra' at the age of 11 and given the role of stage hand (it still stings even after forty or so years). My drawings look as if a small child has done them and no amount of telling myself, or anyone else, that they are 'abstract' makes them look any better.

Nevertheless, I believe that some skills can be taught and vastly improved by practice. Matthew Syed, in his book, *Bounce* (aptly subtitled *The Myth of Talent and the Power of Practice*) creates a really convincing argument for the power of practice.¹ However, one might argue, as in my case, that if you don't have a modicum of talent in the first place, how can you improve upon it?

*Its not what you look at that matters ...
it's what you see.*

Henry Thoreau

¹ M. Syed, *Bounce: The Myth of Talent and the Power of Practice* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010).

Learning through a lens

Despite not being able to draw, I have always seen myself as a creative person and I would get really frustrated when I had ideas that I wanted to turn into concrete images. Working with children, I know how powerful it is when you can show them examples and when they can visualise their ideas.

My 'eureka' moment came when I was asked by our gifted and talented coordinator to look into buying a digital camera. Following hours of browsing, we spent £350 on a 3-megapixel camera. That in itself shows how quickly technology is moving on. I now have a phone with a 5-megapixel camera and several (OK, loads of) apps that I can use for editing photos.

At the time, my Year 10 form were happy to get involved, so we spent some time just being silly with the camera – striking poses, pulling faces and taking snapshots during form time. The results were amazing and, more importantly, captured what we were doing – you could see the enjoyment, the interaction, the whole classroom experience ... The rest, as the saying goes, is history.

If I look back now, the photos are undeniably not my best. Henri Cartier-Bresson talks about 'your first 10,000 images being your worst' and I suppose this goes back to the idea of practice that Syed describes. However, the beauty of photography is that anyone of any age or ability can enjoy and be successful at it.

I was working as an official photographer at a wedding recently when I was approached by an elderly gentleman who pushed his compact camera into my hand and asked me to 'get those lines back'. Following a rather confusing conversation, I realised that he meant the grid on his viewfinder that helps you compose using the



rule of thirds (there is more on this in Chapter 1). If you'd asked him what the rule of thirds was he wouldn't have had a clue, but he did know that those lines helped him and he wanted them back! Instinctively, he was using the tools the camera provided. Having restored his lines, he went away enthusiastically snapping guests, flowers and passing waitresses – a smile on his face and happily interacting with other people, all due to the camera in his hand.

I have no formal qualifications in photography and I am completely self-taught. So, what then makes me think I can write a book on photography? First, this book isn't just about photography – it's about how we use photography to help children to learn. The title 'Learning through a Lens' is what this book is all about. Yes, there are hints and tips along the way, but this is in no way a photography manual.

Second, I have earned my stripes on the teaching front, with thirty years in secondary schools teaching a whole range of subjects and working as an advanced skills teacher for several years. This has given me the chance to work with and learn from some amazing practitioners. I was fortunate, in 2007, to travel to Uganda with some intrepid colleagues and spent two weeks working in schools there. The photographs that I took on this trip showed me just how powerful images can be in learning – some of them appear in this book.

My third justification for writing this book is that what I lack in formal qualifications, I make up for in passion for my subject, a keenness to learn, a willingness to experiment and the solid belief that *anyone* can use photography in their learning – and enjoy themselves at the same time. One of the beauties of photography

Your first 10,000 photos are your worst.

Henri Cartier-Bresson

Learning through a lens

is that it is subjective. I might like an image, you might hate it – there are no hard and fast rules. I took what I thought was an ‘arty’ photograph of a bride and groom’s feet. The bride, as all brides do, had spent a fortune on her shoes. The groom had been given some socks with camper vans on them. They loved this photo and put it in their album. My mum looked at it and said ‘Oh love, you aren’t very good are you – you’ve chopped their heads off!’

Showing children controversial photographs – in the sense that they will elicit a strong negative or positive reaction – can be an effective opener. I often displayed an image on the board when pupils arrived in my classroom, so they became accustomed to coming in and looking for the image. I tried to find photographs that would entertain, shock, have a wow factor – anything that would hook them in. The pupils might well come in and say, ‘That’s rubbish, that is,’ but they would at least be forming an opinion. It’s like the old joke: how many photographers does it take to make a photograph? The answer is fifty – one to take the photograph and forty-nine to say, ‘I could have done that.’

For one starter activity, I displayed *Rhein II*, the image that was sold by the auction house Christie’s for US\$4.3 million, setting the record for the all-time most expensive photo. This landscape photograph was taken by the German artist Andreas Gursky and is, to my mind, very ‘ordinary’. It simply shows strips of grass and water. Yes, I know, it’s subjective! (You will have to Google it as I’m not paying for the rights to use an image that I personally don’t value.)

I obviously didn’t tell the pupils that it was the most expensive photograph ever sold, initially, but I did ask them how much they thought it was worth. This being Barnsley, the first response I got was a very blunt, ‘I wouldn’t give you ten bob for it, miss.’ What ensued was a very heated discussion about the merits of this photograph and the worth or value of photographs in general. It ended up with them all vowing to become photographers as there was obviously ‘nowt to this photography lark’ and they all fancied making some quick cash! What it showed me was that pupils are often refreshingly honest about





Why photography?

their likes and dislikes when it comes to photography, so any discussion is more about nurturing their own sense of style and creativity than it is about art appreciation.

I believe that photography eradicates boundaries in the sense that it is a great leveler – anyone can take a photograph. Our response to an image is up to us, but the fact remains that the individual who took the photograph is happy with it and so the response of others is immaterial.

Consider the Bill Brandt quote: 'Photography has no rules, it is not a sport. It is the result which counts, no matter how it is achieved.' How amazing is that? There are no rules and you can't get it wrong. You can be as creative as you want and it will still be *your* photograph. You can argue that there are rules – rules of composition such the rule of thirds – but these aren't rules as such; they are just guidelines – rules in name only, which are there to be broken and experimented with.

Be daring, be different, be impractical, be anything that will assert integrity of purpose and imaginative vision against the play-it-safers, the creatures of the commonplace, the slaves of the ordinary.

Cecil Beaton

A smartphone, iPad or camera will enable you and your pupils to utilise all of the suggestions in this book. Photography and photographic devices are creative tools that can be used every day. They are, however, *tools* to use and not an end in themselves. The aim is not to turn you or your pupils into award-winning photographers or for this book to function as a guide to f-stops and apertures. There is some basic information about cameras in Part I, which will form a handy guide as well as pointing you in the direction of more in-depth technical information, but the key focus of this book (no pun intended!) is *learning*. Learning through experimenting, discussing, refining, analysing – learning through a lens!

Learning through a lens

The book is divided into two main sections:

- Part I: Background and basics. This includes looking at the important functions and settings of cameras, experimenting with photography, the legal position around using images in the classroom and the ethical debates around images, as well as creative ideas which are set outside of the classroom.
- Part II: Projects and applications. In this 'education friendly' section, I present projects focused around street art, miniature figures, visual literacy and challenges, and extended learning opportunities – all designed to be used in a classroom setting and to link with several areas of the curriculum. This section also includes some 'quick wins' – ideas that you could use on development days or in cross-curricular projects.

Throughout the book I have used different coloured boxes to help you navigate the content:

Overview

You will find these at the beginning of each chapter – they will outline the content covered.

Aspects covered

These also appear at the beginning of each chapter – they highlight which curriculum areas and skills are covered.

Help and advice

These provide links back to technical information or advice on how to use your camera or other device.

Tasks

These are ideas for activities linked to a specific chapter but can also be done as stand-alone tasks.

Using photography in learning is so much more than a list of what you could take photographs of. You don't need a book to suggest that you might want to take photographs of your school sports day or end-of-term production. Yes, the basic function of a camera is to take documentary images, but it can be so much more than that. If a camera is used without thought or insight, it becomes another casualty of the technological age. Similarly, an iPad won't make you a great teacher, but a great teacher can do amazing things with an iPad.

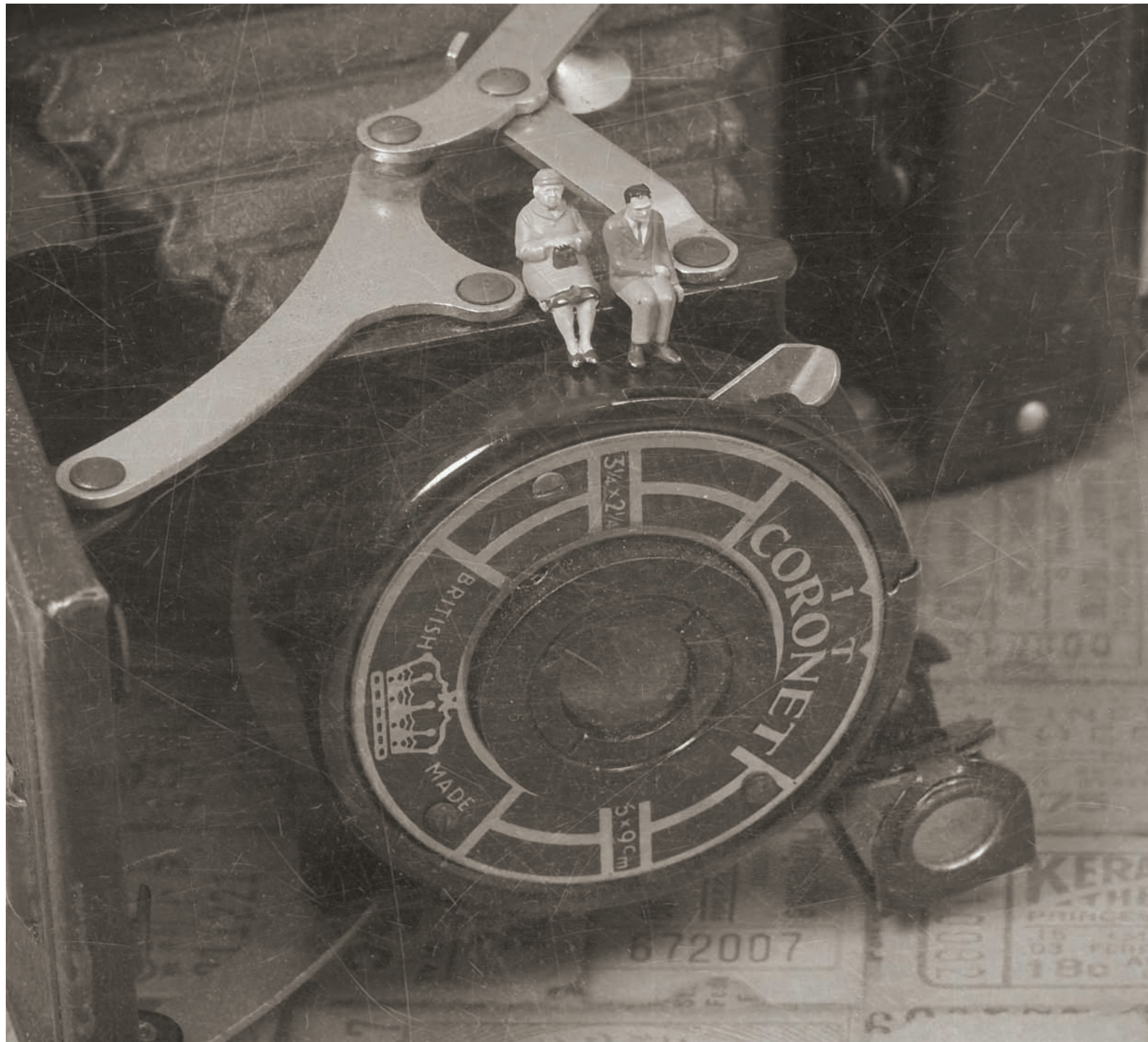
The camera itself is just a tool. Just compare the comment, ‘That’s a great photograph – you must have an amazing camera,’ with a comparable one made at a dinner party: ‘Thank you, that was a great meal – you must have an amazing oven.’ Obvious really – it’s the photographer who makes the photograph, not the camera.

A lot of photographers think that if they buy a better camera they’ll be able to take better photographs. A better camera won’t do a thing for you if you don’t have anything in your head or in your heart.

Arnold Newman

If you speak to enthusiastic amateur photographers, some will willingly confess that they have ‘all the gear but no idea’, whilst others have ‘no gear’ to speak of but have real flair and an imaginative eye. You can find articles on the Internet about professional photographers who have challenged themselves to shoot a whole wedding using just a phone (rather than me!), but you will also read in Chapter 5 about highly talented photographers who have used their phone to record events in war-torn areas of the world. This begs the questions: is raw talent and having an ‘eye’ more important than equipment? Is a workman only as good as his tools or can the craftsman create regardless of basic equipment?

The activities in this book don’t need expensive equipment – but they do need passion, a sense of fun, a willingness to experiment, to learn on the job, and the ability to see more than just what’s around you but to observe your surroundings deeply and with intelligence. I hope that you will be infected with the enthusiasm and passion that photography can bring to life!





*The camera doesn't make a bit of difference.
All of them can record what you are seeing.
But you have to SEE.*

Ernst Haas



Transform the way you and your learners look at, think about and capture the world around you.

'It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see', as Thoreau once said. That's one way of summing up this unusual, provocative and inspiring new book by professional photographer and experienced teacher Jane Hewitt. She shows teachers of all disciplines how photography is the perfect classroom tool to bring out the best in all children. Through it – and with Jane's experience and straightforward advice to guide them – teachers can develop children's confidence, self-esteem, creativity, thinking, leadership and team working and, at the same time, overcome social, cultural and personal obstacles to motivation and learning. In the author's words, 'Photography provides a vehicle for self-discovery, inspiration and wonder. It gets beneath the surface and beyond the obvious.' This book shows you how.

I was engrossed! It was a pleasure to read *Learning Through A Lens* and I am already planning how I can use the ideas in my classroom. They are *so* usable.

Rebecca Paddock, leader of curriculum and innovative learning, Hoyland Common Primary School

Through projects and activities in this book, learning becomes relevant and stimulating and can be driven by the learners.

Paul Bannister, head teacher, Highbank Primary School

It's brilliant, simple, practical and packed full of inspiration - a must for every school and class teacher.

Kate Davies, head teacher, Worsbrough Common Primary School and Rising Stars Children's Centre

Intended for teachers but I wouldn't restrict it to such a limited audience. Anyone who has enjoyed seeing life in pictures will find something of interest in these pages.

Julia Skinner, founder of 100 Word Challenge



Jane Hewitt taught, mainly at secondary level, for 30 years. She still loves learning, discovering new ideas and photography and is rarely found without a camera around her neck.

www.photoboxgallery.com/learningthroughalens

Overflowing not only with exquisite images to stimulate teaching and learning, but also wonderful ideas for lessons, pulling together the curriculum into a kaleidoscopic learning lens of its own.

Dr Debra Kidd, AST for pedagogy, Saddleworth School

At last we all have access to a wonderfully constructed book that is not only a teacher's guide but a technical manual too.

Dave Whitaker, executive principal, Springwell Community Special School and Barnsley PRU

