

Inspiration:

Engaging young people with photography (with cameras)

Aoife Giles

Introduction

Photography is an incredibly rewarding and useful medium through which to explore self-expression with young people. It is relatively quick to learn and you can begin to make pleasing images quickly. Photography's ubiquity also makes it an accessible and non-threatening way into art for participants.

By exploring photography and creating their own images, young people contribute to the development of social and political sensibilities within the community in which the images are made. The high visual literacy that many young people already possess can be easily transferred to examining and/or creating photographs around a particular interest, theme or social issue.



Introducing Photography – With Cameras

Photography workshops can be used with any age group from about 10 years upwards, and to explore different themes or issues. The type of equipment to which you have access and its age-appropriateness are key factors in deciding on your target participants and your approach. A professional set up with separate lenses is probably better with older groups, but point and click cameras can be used with everybody even much younger participants.

This workshop could be used as part of a series of workshops (as a follow-up to the exploring photography without cameras one I have described separately in this series, for example) and the workshop structure can also be adjusted to suit the interests of differently configured groups of young people.

You will need to explain particular features of cameras, demonstrate composition and draw attention to health and safety concerns (that participants don't run with cameras up to their eyes, for example), but photography workshops are best approached through exploration rather than instruction – with young people's visual literacy and experience of photography acknowledged and built upon through active learning exercises and exploring imagery through questions.

Duration: about 1.5 hours

Participants

The workshop works well with 10 to 12 young people or fewer. It's good to have an even number of participants so they can share cameras between them and each young person can have someone to pose for them.

Equipment and materials

- Simple line drawings of everyday objects (car, house, etc.) for warm-up
- Sheets of plain paper for warm-up

- 1 camera with fully charged battery to share between each two participants. (A simple point and click style digital camera is perfect.)
- Memory card for each camera
- Computer/laptop to which you can download photos
- Memory card reader or card slot on laptop; suitable cables for cameras.
- Projector (This is not essential but it can add a sense of excitement for young people to see their photos blown up to a large scale.)
- Flip chart
- Post-it notes in different colours
- Markers
- Printed handouts

Getting Started (5-10 minutes)

After introducing yourself and the aims of the workshop in broad outline, it's a good idea to establish a group contract before starting, establishing how the participants and facilitator will show respect for each other and the equipment, how they will listen to each other's perspective, where they will go when out shooting photos, how they need to leave the space and equipment at the end, etc.

Initial, warm-up element (15-20 minutes)

You can use any warm up that you know works well with a group this size, particularly a group of young people. Exercises that address communication and trust and communication are very useful here, since issues of consent, the context in which images are taken and the circumstances in which they are then used often arise during this workshop.



Anything too high energy and “mad” can be unhelpful because it can be difficult to wind down the energy afterwards for first part of the workshop, which will be spent sitting and explaining how to use the cameras. I have found that the following warm-ups work well:

- Have everyone stand in a circle, get someone to start clapping and then pass around a clap: following the circle, throw and catch a clap around the circle, eventually getting everyone to clap at the same time through observation.
- Add to this by adding an action to the name. In the same circle, the facilitator says his or her name and it is repeated back by the group; then the person next to them says her or his name and the group repeats it back, and so on moving around the circle.
- Then it changes so that, instead of people saying their own name first, the facilitator calls the name of someone else in the group and everyone repeats that name. The person whose name was called now calls out to another person in the group; everyone repeats that name, and so on.
- You can then move on to ‘Drawing Twins’. Start by splitting people into pairs. Give one person a line drawing and the other a plain piece of paper and a marker. They should not be able to see each other’s pages until the end. Have the person with the picture describe how the other person should draw the picture without saying what it is. (For example, the first person might say: draw a circle with a line going through it; now draw another circle beside that one and put a square and a circle inside that.) After 2 or 3 minutes, hand out more drawings and get the pair to swap their roles in the task.

When both have finished describing a couple of pictures and drawing a couple, get them to look at the finished drawings, compare them to what was expected and consider what they learned.

This exercise illustrates how difficult it can be to give clear instructions, and to interpret instructions, while also helping people tune into images and how they are made up.

Exploring knowledge of photography (10-15 minutes)

Ask all the participants to sit in a circle near the flipchart and start a quick, general discussion around photography. Remind people of the contract they agreed at the start, and to listen to each other, ensuring that each young person feels happy and safe to express his or her opinions.

Some questions to open and guide a quick-fire discussion (about 10 minutes, and remember that you’re not looking for any ‘right answers’) could be:

- Who already takes pictures?
- How and where do you take pictures?
- What do you like to take pictures of?
- What do you do with the pictures you take?
- Where do we generally see photographs? Does the location change how you see them?
- Is there a difference between printed pictures and ones that stay on the phone/computer?
- Is there someone in your family/group of friends who takes pictures all the time?



- Are pictures that you get taken in school or at events like weddings different to “everyday” pictures? Why or why not?
- What does it feel like to have someone you don’t know take your picture? How is it different from someone you know taking them?

Write the answers in big, legible writing on the flipchart. Note if certain themes or interests begin to emerge. Highlight common ideas or experiences. Try and draw connections between experiences common to different people, or shared ideas around taking or having their pictures taken. Use the interests of the group and if there is a theme that you are using photography to explore, as a guide for areas to develop the questions-

Now, set up spaces on the wall or on the flip-chart where people can stick up notes. Hand out Post-it notes of different colours to everyone in the group:

- Ask them to note their expectations and worries for the workshop (or about photography) on one colour Post-it.
- Ask them to note on a different colour Post-it the subject of their favourite photograph. Give them some examples of what this might be, such as a pet, a family member, themselves, a place they went on holidays, their football team, etc.

Then ask each participant to walk up to the flipchart or wall space, stick up their Post-its and describe their expectations and favourite photos as they stick them up. (Process Note: The collection of these Post-its is a good thing to document with a camera after the workshop.)

Working with Cameras (Total 75 minutes)

Introduction on how to use the camera (5-10 minutes)

You don’t need to be a camera technician to run this workshop, but you do need to know the basics of how the cameras work in order to introduce them to the participants – who may already know a fair bit themselves.

Familiarise yourself with the camera manual, be clear on key features;

- On/off switch
- Shutter Release, how to focus before actually capturing a photo
- How to review photos
- How to charge and change the battery
- How to remove and download the card
- How to set it to the highest images quality setting
- How the zoom works
- How to turn the flash on/off
- Where to look for the low battery symbol
- What noises and beeps it makes so that you can use these to guide the participants

As part of your preparations before arrival at the workshop space and during your set-up, make sure the cameras are ready for use, with a full battery and an empty memory card. The latter is very important because you do not want participants to find images that they should not be looking at. If you are going to guide discussions with them about consent and trust when dealing with images, they should be able to trust that you will keep their photographs safe –



and not sharing images that belong to other people will help establish that.

Having empty memory cards as people start will make it easier for you to download the images from the workshop. Having the correct date/time setting on each camera also helps enormously with downloading and saving the images in ways that will make sense: this makes their retrieval, any post-workshop work on the photographs, and documentation of the workshop process/outputs so much easier.

Top Tips:

- Make sure that all cameras are charged and have an empty card before the workshop.
- Check that the date and time on the cameras are correct. This makes downloading and filing images much easier later on.
- Set each camera to take the highest quality jpeg and largest image size it allows.

Camera handling (15-20 minutes)

Working through what may seem like the very basics (how to pick up and hold a camera, how to turn it off and on) helps ensure that people who, unusually, may have no exposure to cameras are not left out.

How to hold a camera:

- Camera strap around the wrist / neck. Explain to participants how it's easy to drop a camera, so this is always the first step.

- One hand underneath the camera body (and lens if it protrudes) as in picture to keep it steady. This is particularly important as it keeps images steady and free from shake.



- Show the participants how to place their other hand so they can see the screen, and then press the shutter button.

You can then work through:

- How to shoot using the Auto function. It's usually a green camera symbol. You want them to express themselves, not get bogged down in information, so the Auto function works well.
- How participants review their images.

Now, divide the group into pairs and give each group a camera to try out. Go around the group and check in that each person can hold the camera safely and correctly.

Shooting and Pressing the Shutter Properly

This is such a critical part of taking good photographs, so take time to ensure that the participants understand the rationale for each stage. It is important that the young people understand how the shutter works (and that you should not move the camera while it is taking a picture) in order to take a picture that is correctly focused and is not blurred.

- Stand firmly: Holding the camera correctly is the first step. Ensure that participants are standing firmly, no crossed legs, feet planted firmly on the floor. Have them tuck their arms in so that their elbows are resting on the ribs rather than out to the side.
- Frame the picture: Explain to the participants that everything they want to be in their photograph should appear in the frame as they see it, and that nothing strange (that they don't want in the photograph) is entering the frame from the edges.
- Focus: Show the workshop participants how to lock focus on the subject (their partner) by half-pressing the shutter and listening for the beep or green light. This means that the camera is focused. Then they should squeeze the button down the rest of the way so that it takes a picture. There will be a click and the screen will go blank for a moment.
- Follow through: It's vital that participants learn that **they must not move the camera** until the screen comes back on. If they pull the camera away too quickly, they will not have left the camera enough time to work and will get a blurry picture that does not feature their subject. The flash might go off or

it might not: either way is fine – with the camera on Auto, you should get a relatively well-exposed picture.

Have the young participants swop the camera over between them, in their pairs, so that everyone becomes familiar with using it properly.

Photo Challenge (40 minutes: 10 minutes talking about what the various prompts could mean; 30 minutes shooting)

This is where they get to go and shoot images that are of interest to them.

Introduce the idea that they are going to do a challenge or photo safari. They will have 30 minutes to shoot one of the items from the challenge on a handout, such as the Brú challenge below.



The Brú 10 Photo Challenge

Take 1 photograph of each of these:

1. Something that is your favourite colour
2. A Pattern
3. Something Round
4. 2 people Jumping
5. Something far away
6. Something close up
7. Something Big
8. Something Small
9. Something Fast
10. Something you think nobody else will have noticed.

Remember the 4 "F'S

Framing: What needs to be and what doesn't

Focus: Press the button half way down with the subject in the centre and only finish it when you know it has focussed and you have what YOU want.

Follow Through: Keep your camera still for a second after you take the picture so there is no blur

Flash: Do you need it? Is it bright? Where is the light coming from? Can you turn it off or on?

Take photos of things no one else will photograph in a way no one else will photograph them!

Spend some time, as the facilitator, going through what each of the shots might be by looking for examples from the room. Talk about what might be necessary for each one. For example, a photographer needs to communicate very well with people jumping in order to catch the shot. Try an example in the workshop room with the youth workers and two participants. The key is that the photographer instructs the subjects when to jump, perhaps by calling out a countdown, having first made sure that they have locked their focus. It is tricky, but great for communication, the sense of achievement and the simple fun of jumping and making silly pictures.

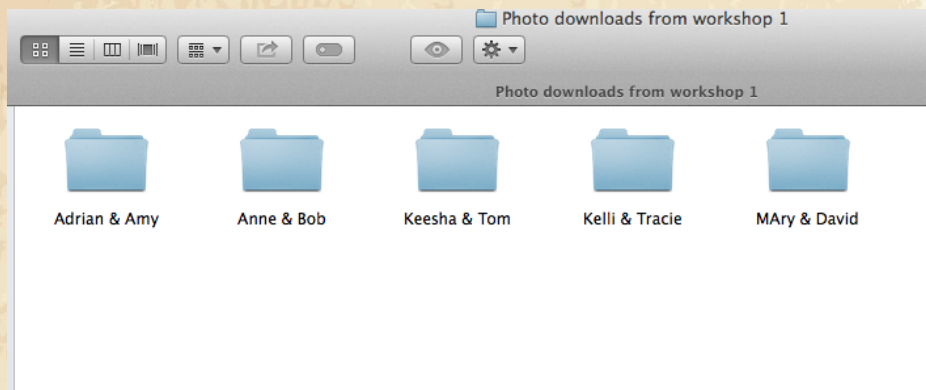
Now, send the participants outside/around the building in pairs to do their photo challenge; you can circulate to monitor them (for safety as well as learning) and to offer advice as you see fit. It's great, if they have got the hang of taking photos at all, to let them take the pictures and figure things out as best they can. They can shoot each one more than once if they want to get it right.

Encourage the young people not to delete images as they go, since there might be interesting work that they are throwing away too quickly.

Downloading and Sharing Images

You should have some folders made on the computer, named for each of the pairs of participants, before they come back in from their shooting challenge. This will make the process of downloading the images faster for you – and interfere less with the flow of the workshop.

The normal copy and paste function on your computer interface is the best means to download the photographs. Use this function to view the images too, so that you are not stuck in a struggle with software at this stage. Both Windows and Mac offer simple ways of viewing images through the browser windows. Other software can be problematic, as it creates unnecessary filing systems and can store images in hidden folders, or worse, automatically deletes images from the card once they have been downloaded.



Give the young people responsibility for putting away the cameras, or some other activity like clearing up the space, while you are downloading the images. Or you could maybe give them a snack break to occupy them while you work through the different pairs' photographs.

Bring the whole group back together when you are finished the downloading so that you can project the images up on the screen. (If you don't have a projector, you'll just have to crowd around the computer or laptop.)

Ask each pair to come up and talk the group through what they shot for which prompt, and what they were thinking as they did. Check to see if they have a favourite picture, either in terms of the result or the taking.

It is important that all participants listen to and respect the efforts of the different pairs during the presentations. Make sure to have a

round of applause for each pair after they talk the group through their photographs; this helps to build the group dynamic.

It is a good idea for the facilitator to take notes of what is being said about the images as each group is presenting because it can be useful later as the basis for captions or if you (or the participants themselves) want to develop ideas for mini photo stories.

Feedback

You can get participant feedback as each group goes to present, asking the young people what they liked or didn't like, or use Post-its or evaluation forms to gauge how the young people felt about the process. If you are running this workshop as part of a series, I suggest leaving formal feedback forms until the end of the programme.

It's great, though (and really useful to you as a youth worker or facilitator), to get a more informal impression from everyone: What did you enjoy most? Were there things that surprised them? You can often glean this information while the different pairs are coming up to talk about the image that they shot during the challenge, or maybe while you are downloading their images.

Ask the participants to help you pack away materials, flipcharts and cameras: it's a good idea to teach them good camera care. You can also use this informal time to assess how they felt the workshop went; it often offers valuable material to supplement formal feedback/evaluation with anecdotal data and qualitative insight.



Workshop Development

The workshop as a whole – and the photo challenge element – can be readily adapted to tackle different issues and deliver different outputs, such as portraits, photo essays addressing social issues, emotions etc. Work with the level that is appropriate for the group once the first challenge has been done and they are familiar with the concept and process.

This is also the type of session that can be revisited with young people at a given after their first run at it to demonstrate how far they have come in their skills since the first time, or as research for other art or social projects.

©National Youth Council of Ireland 2018

