



Other People Work on Thematic PhotoBooks

Here is a few stories how some teachers and parents implemented Thematic PhotoBooks into the routine of their lives, and the results they saw in a few short weeks.

Table of Contents

Devon’s Story	2
Ms. Treena and her kids.....	5
Danny’s First PhotoBook	8
Daily Routine	11
PhotoBook “Go Anywhere”	13
PhotoBook “Playground”	13
PhotoBook “ Rest Time”	14
PhotoBook “Free Play”	14
PhotoBooks on Manners and Friends.....	15
Children.....	15
Children’s Progress	16
Mr. Kajow’s Classroom	22
Committee Work	27
Playground Games	30
Recommendations	32

Devon’s Story

Elisia is a mother of a seven-year-old autistic boy and a non-autistic five-year-old girl. Elisia was introduced to the concept of PhotoBooks and used them to help her to reach her son, Devon. Her biggest concern was his rude behavior when she would have a friend come to her home for a cup of coffee or to just talk about something.

Devon would demand Elisia’s attention to such a degree that Elisia began to feel that

she had no life other than Devon. She wanted help changing this behavior.

Devon had been in his own world ever since he had been diagnosed with autism just before his third birthday. He had always been a quiet child, but after her daughter, Reece, met and surpassed his language skills before she was one, Elisia realized that something was very wrong with Devon. He had been a fussy baby, very hard to quiet or comfort. He never really made eye contact with her, and never sought out physical demonstrations of comfort. By the time he was preschool age, Devon was obnoxious in his efforts to get Elisia's attention, especially if she had an adult friend come over to visit. Elisia tried everything she could think of to either distract Devon or to get him to leave her alone for even five minutes of adult conversation. It was to no avail. Devon had no concept of manners, and the more his mother wanted him to go and entertain himself, the more insistent he became for her time. If Elisia were alone at that time of day, Devon would have easily found something to do.

As time went on, Devon began to demonstrate typical autistic behaviors where he would stim by twirling the brass fastener on the side of his bed, something he could do for hours on end. Devon also had a fascination with balls, and would roll and twirl a ball for hours and hours. If Devon had a ball in his hand, he would pay no attention anyone or anything. One of Devon's teachers instructed Elisia to take all balls out of the house and not let him have them. Elisia was reluctant to take away the one thing that seemed to really relax and settle Devon. She found an article on the internet where a doctor said that when an autistic child stims, they have a need of some sort for that object. Rather than trying to control them, he recommended supporting that particular behavior, and so Elisia bought balls. She bought big ones, medium sized ones, small ones. She and Devon would play all sorts of games with the balls, but she was growing more and more frustrated because Devon would pull all the balls out of

the crate she used to store them, but then would never put them back in.

After hearing about the PhotoBooks, Elisia decided to create a PhotoBook of Devon and his balls. She had an older digital camera that she didn't mind teaching Devon to use, but she started first by taking pictures of Devon while he was playing games with his many, many balls. When she looked at the resulting photos, she noticed that his face was very relaxed, something that was unusual, because Devon always seemed to be on edge. Perhaps there was something to supporting Devon's desire to be surrounded by balls. Elisia took more pictures of Devon, playing games of dodgeball (played with soft nerf-style balls) with his little sister in the house. She took pictures of her husband playing with Devon. Until she had a number of photos, Elisia didn't show the photographs to Devon.

When she felt she was ready, Elisia had all her materials ready. She chose to use the three-ring binder method with page protectors. She purchased lightweight cardstock in 8-1/2" x 11" size of various bright colors. She tried to match the colors to the various colors of the balls. She said she wasn't quite sure why she did this, but when she introduced Devon to the project she was glad that she did. As soon as she started showing Devon the photographs, she was astounded at his reaction. Devon was enraptured with his image on the pictures, and he loved that the pictures were of his beloved balls.

Elisia mentioned that Devon could take pictures of his balls so that he could make a whole book about them, Devon was instantly a cooperative student. He insisted on doing this his way, as was typical for him, but as soon as Elisia showed him on the back of the camera that the picture might not have been what he was trying to get, Devon began to listen better, and started to take better and better photographs. What Devon wanted to do was first to take pictures of all the same colored balls. He would

gather them all in one space and then take pictures of all of his yellow balls. When they printed the photographs, Devon wanted to put them on the yellow cardstock. They were able to then type a label for that page that said, Devon's Yellow Balls. They went through all the colors and created a page for each color of ball that Devon owned. Then Devon decided he wanted to take pictures of all of his big balls, then the small balls. He wanted pictures of balls high up on the table, and low down on the floor where he took pictures from the upstairs landing overlooking the living room. Elisia was stunned to see how creative Devon was about his balls and the creation of his PhotoBook.

Before too long, Devon would actually obey Elisia's suggestion to get his PhotoBook of Balls to look at when she wanted to have an adult friend over for coffee. Devon would spend long periods of time going over and over the pages of his PhotoBook. This was Elisia's only PhotoBook project at the time I spoke with her, but she had numerous ideas for future PhotoBooks. "I can't believe how easy it was to work with Devon on this project. It was the most fun the two of us have had in a very long time!"

Ms. Treena and her kids

As a preschool teacher at a specialized preschool for special needs kids. Ms. Treena works in a classroom that is considered to be higher functioning. She works with one other teacher and has aids throughout the day as they are available. Three things that made Ms. Treena's work successful are : 1) dedication, 2) willingness, and 3) true understanding of her kids.

Ms. Treena made a concerted effort to know her kids, then she focused on behaviors she wanted to change. Each child had a different diagnosis, history, and background. Some were complicated by a history of severe abuse, others because they didn't speak English. It didn't matter. Ms. Treena established a goal for each child and

she worked toward that goal.

Ms. Treena also took the PhotoBook idea and had the kids make pages of their scheduled daily activities. She would leave the pages posted on the wall for a week before putting them back in book form where it could be used when a child needed a reminder. This might have been viewed as punishment, but because every PhotoBook contained several pictures of each child, the identification each child felt when they viewed themselves in a photograph was very motivational. Ms. Treena spent a lot less time correcting bad behaviors. Once one book was removed from the wall, another one was already created and subsequently posted on the wall.

After Ms. Treena had been introduced to Thematic PhotoBook methods, she was asked to report, in her own words, of her experiences. She was asked to give a description of her typical day, how it used to be and what it is like now that she's incorporated the use of PhotoBooks in her classroom.

Ms. Treena:

Let me tell you, when I was first introduced to Thematic PhotoBook idea, part of me was really, really excited. The other part of me was pretty darnn skeptical. I know that kids like pictures to be taken of them, but I'd never actually done much more in the past than to take pictures of kids and put them on an ornament of some kind, like popsicle sticks so they could take it home and hang it in their room. It just never occurred to me to do anything like this.

I have one little boy who was especially troubled, Danny. His background is really sad, he has a diagnosis of "shaken baby syndrome" and he's already been diagnosed as having post-traumatic stress disorder among other things. I believe he was abused by his parents from the time he was born and was taken away from his parents and is now living with his grandmother along with his other siblings. Because his grandma has to work, she brings Danny to school here.

I'll never forget his first day here. He was a holy terror! Everyone thought so, and quite honestly, they were ready to tell Danny's grandmother that we couldn't take him. He was horrible! But, he wasn't in my room yet, I hadn't even met him, I'd only heard about Danny. I happened to go into his room for something, and I saw him. I knew right away who he was because he was causing all kinds of trouble, but when he looked at me, I could just see something in his eyes. I didn't want to give up on him. I volunteered to take him into my classroom, and he's been with me since that day. We actually made some kind of connection that day, maybe because I chose him to come into my room. I really don't know. What I do know is that he was not much better behaved in my classroom.

Quite frankly, I thought I'd made a mistake. The first two days, he was actually pretty good, but by the third day, he was feeling his oats again and he began to act out. I didn't know too much about his history at that point, but I knew he had to have some basis for his violent behavior. He would hit his classmates with his foot, his fist, with a toy. He'd throw chairs, bins of toys across the room. And when his rage got the better of him, he would just start shrieking uncontrollably.

The very first thing I noticed about Danny was that he didn't talk. His grandmother said he'd never said a word to her, and she was worried that perhaps he was deaf. We had him tested, and he wasn't deaf by any means. He simply didn't talk. He didn't talk to me. He didn't talk to any of the other students, and according to his grandmother, he didn't talk to his

siblings when he was at home with her. Once I realized that he didn't talk, I began to think more and more about that PhotoBook idea, and I started thinking that maybe using photographs could help Danny to learn to communicate. I understand that they have been used for other non verbal children, so I wanted to do the best I could for Danny.

Danny's First PhotoBook

I decided right then and there to create a PhotoBook just for Danny. I started by bringing my digital camera to school, and first I asked his grandmother for permission to take pictures of Danny. She didn't care as long as I tried to reach Danny. I could see her heart was just breaking. I took pictures for two straight days. I took a lot of the other kids, but I most took pictures of Danny. For the most part, I tried to take pictures of him when he wasn't looking at me, because if he saw the camera he became a different person. He'd either ham it up, or hide his face, or just seem to be embarrassed by all the attention. When I had enough photos, I put them together into a little photobook.

I cut out words that I had printed on the computer and made a title for the cover of the book called "Danny's Day". The first picture was one of Danny's grandmother holding his hand, bringing him into my classroom. Then one by one, I showed Danny what he did all day. I had pictures of him painting or coloring and I called him an artist on those pages. Then I had pictures of him during music time and I called him my musician on those pages. I put in pictures of him during storytime, during recess, at

naptime, during lunch and snack time. I made sure I only put in pictures of Danny behaving properly. I wrote captions that were complimentary and encouraging for Danny. I know he can't read yet, but when I read his book to him, I want him to think of himself as a good boy.

I have to tell you, the day I gave Danny his book, I cried. I called him over to me and I told him that I had a very special present that was just for him. I wanted him to keep it here at school, but he would be the only one who could use it. I could see his eyes, him thinking, "Yeah, right." Then I handed him the box so he could open up his present. It occurred to me that Danny didn't really have much experience receiving presents. His little hands trembled just a little as he ripped open the paper. When Danny opened the book and saw his own face staring back at him his eyes widened. I don't know if he was in shock or what, but just as I was afraid he would throw the book down in disgust, he rushed over to the mirror where he looked at his face in the mirror and then he looked back down at the picture of him on the cover of the book. He did this for a couple of minutes, and then as if he finally realized that the picture really was of him, he hugged the book to his chest and refused to let anyone near it or him. He wouldn't even let me open the book to show him the other pictures in there. At that moment, it was just enough for him to see his picture on the cover.

When it was time for Danny to go home, I tried to take his book away from him because I really wanted it to stay at school so we could use it. Danny

had other ideas. He started screaming so much that I just decided to back off. I did ask his grandmother to please try to bring the book back the next day because I really wanted to try to start using it to see if we could change some of his behaviors. His grandmother agreed to try to bring it back, but she made no promises. It was pretty obvious even then who was in charge in that home.

I don't know if I was surprised or not the next morning, but Danny marched into the classroom with his PhotoBook hugged to his chest, his other hand dragging his grandmother behind him. It was as if he couldn't wait to get to school. As soon as he caught sight of me, he tugged his hand out of his grandmother's hand and ran over to me. He held out the book to me and smiled a real smile. For the first time since I'd met him, he was giving me a real smile. Then he ran over to his grandmother and tugged her hand to bring her over to where I stood. Still holding his grandmother's hand, Danny opened the book to the first page where I could see the picture I took of Danny holding his grandmother's hand as he came into the classroom that day. I looked at his grandmother, and she smiled at me a little tentatively. I think we were both hoping that we could actually communicate with Danny after all.

For the next several days, I just watched Danny with his PhotoBook. He identified very closely with it. From time to time he would open it and look at a picture and then look around the room as if to reassure himself that he was in the right place. Every now and then he would bring the

PhotoBook over to me and make guttural sounds, showing me a picture of lunchtime when we were doing storytime, or something else. It was pretty obvious he was asking to do something other than what we were doing. It was pretty amazing to realize that he was trying to communicate, but I still would insist that he go back to doing what the rest of the classroom was doing.

Daily Routine

After seeing the effect the PhotoBook had on Danny, I jumped into the PhotoBook idea with both feet. I had my other teacher and my aides start taking photographs of the children, and a little at a time we created PhotoBooks that showed our daily routine. I have to tell you, before we created the PhotoBooks for our daily routine, I really didn't have one. We did pretty much the same things every day, and we generally did them the same way and about the same time, but my classroom was pretty chaotic. The kids are always pretty unpredictable, and I guess I just let that feed my own sense of chaos. Our first daily routine PhotoBook was called "Mealtimes". This we created pretty quickly and posted because our mealtimes were about the worst part of the day for me. Frankly, the kids were sort of monsters. I always wondered how they behaved at home, because they did not behave very well for me.

Mealtimes – every meal: We had the children sit down at the table, and once they were quiet and attentive, we would sing a "hand" song. This is a song where they repeat our hand motions while we sing. It helps to develop fine motor skills. This song has the children say Please, Thank

You, and You're Welcome in English, then in Spanish, and then in sign language. After we're done with the hand song, we sing the "Manners" song that has clapping and snapping of fingers, again working on their fine motor skills. We took pictures of every child during these songs, because they seemed pretty happy during this time.

The next part is kind of strange, but I just thought of it one day and it worked, so I've been using it ever since. Because the kids don't have very good table manners, I taught them to "put a bubble in their mouth and put their hands on their head". All this means is that they pretend to hold a bubble in their mouth, and they have to keep their mouths really still or they'll pop the bubble. The hands on their head is self-explanatory, that way they can't grab at the food while we're putting their plates out. Once everyone has been served, then they can start to eat.

While they're eating, we're working on using manners to ask for more food. They must always either say the word please, or sign it when they ask for more of something, and then when they said thank you. Again, we took photos of the kids signing.

We insist that the kids all stay at the table until all their friends are done, and yes, we do have pictures of this too! Once everyone is done, they must ask permission to leave the table. Danny just looks at me and signs please. I let them take their trash to the trash can and then they are free to leave the table.

I wanted our Mealtime PhotoBook to be the first one because we had such trouble with this activity. Once we had all the pictures, we stayed behind one day to decorate all the pictures, make labels, and put them in page protectors. The next day, I showed the book to the children first as a book because I'd put it in a three-ring binder. Then as we prepared to have lunch, I took out each page and we talked about what we were doing, and I showed them the pages. I pinned the pages to the wall next to the table where we eat. Mealtimes have gone a lot more smoothly since we created that PhotoBook!

PhotoBook "Go Anywhere"

Anytime we have to leave our classroom, whether it is to go down the hall to music room, outside, or anywhere we have a certain routine. I have the kids line up at door. Once they're paying attention I ask them, "What's in the hall?" They're all supposed to answer, "A giant!" Then I say, "Shh. He's sleeping. Let's keep him asleep. Remember, bubbles in your mouth and hands on your head!" Once everyone's in position, we take our journey down the hall. This is a quick little PhotoBook, but is really fun. My class is now the quietest and best behaved when we're in the hall!

PhotoBook "Playground"

Once we're outside, I'll do a roll call. I'll say each child's name, and they're supposed to answer either by saying hello or here. Outside, they just play. I just make sure they don't hurt themselves. When it is time to go in, I tell them that it's time to park the cars. That's our message for them to

clean up. Again, this is a really short quick PhotoBook but it's a fun one, and I realized pretty quickly that the PhotoBooks are pretty popular with the kids, and if I don't have enough for each child to look at one, then we're in for trouble!

PhotoBook “ Rest Time”

Before they go down for their nap, we have to do potties, where we have them go to the bathroom. While one adult is in charge of that, we put their cots out. Each child has his or her own specific cot and they are to go and sit quietly on their cot until they are called to go potty. Once they are done, they are to go to their cot and go to sleep. Before naptime I don't let them have a toy or a book because if I do they won't go to sleep. Once they get up from their nap, they go potty again, and then they can take a toy or a book back to their cot until the rest of their friends wake up. This PhotoBook is full of pictures of the kids looking at the various PhotoBooks we've made so far. It's pretty neat.

PhotoBook “Free Play”

This is free time for the kids. They need to learn more about sharing. We often have problems with some of the kids hoarding toys, so we take a lot of pictures of when the kids are doing the right things, when they're sharing, and when they're playing nicely together. Once playtime is over, they need to help us clean up. This PhotoBook has been great because we created kind of an extension of it. We have placed a picture on each bin of what is to go in there. We have to have the kids sort the toys into

groupings. We now have pictures of

- building blocks
- legos
- giant beads
- tactile toys stuffed with plastic parts with bumps
- cars
- dolls, and doll clothes
- kitchen stuff, fake food

Once we put up the pictures, this part of my day has been simplified tremendously!

PhotoBooks on Manners and Friends

We created some general PhotoBooks on Manners and Friends. We tried to make sure we took those rare pictures when certain kids who don't usually do something good, doing that something good! That way, they see a picture of them doing something they don't usually do. I don't know, it might be kind of a reverse psychology, but I think it's making a difference.

Children

For those who know children as well as I do, you have probably guessed by now that all the other children in my room became very jealous of Danny's PhotoBook of himself. They all wanted one of their very own. I started this process just by taking pictures of each of the kids, and then putting them on their locker where we keep their personal things. This

was one way to keep the children from taking something out of another child's locker.

You're right, while this step was helpful to me, this was not good enough for the kids. They all started asking for a book about them. So, we got to work. The hardest part at first was deciding what kinds of pictures to include in each of their books, but once we sat down and talked about each of the kids, and what our particular problems were with them we were able to focus on getting shots of when they were demonstrating good behavior, and created captions under each of those pictures that would further impress upon the child that they really capable of good behavior.

Children's Progress

Here are the kids' PhotoBook summaries. The first part under each name shows some of the behavior we wanted to change. The second part shows you how the child changed as a result of getting a PhotoBook that focused on them performing well. I was amazed.

Pryor

Before: At the start of the year, Pryor was completely nonvocal, but would whine all the time. He would lie on the floor, wriggling around on his belly like a brand-new baby sucking on his pacifier. Our goal was to eliminate the pacifier, try to see if we can get him to talk and not whine quite so much.

After: Now Pryor only uses his pacifier at naptime. He will say “tissue, please” when he needs a tissue. He is capable of short sentence structure. His whining has diminished, and sometimes he will even laugh.

Ellie

Before: Ellie has been at our establishment from the time she was an infant, so she should be very comfortable here, but at the beginning of the year, she was always sad, whining, and constantly had her blanket with her.

After: Now Ellie loves to run, play, laugh, play with bubbles. She loves to help clean up. She interacts with the other kids, especially playing house. Best of all, she smiles all the time now.

Adam

Before: Adam was pretty aggressive. He would run at another student from across the room and hit them, push them, step on them if they were lying down on the floor. If he were to be poked himself, he would burst into tears and quickly go out of control.

After: There is almost no hitting now from Adam, less pushing, and no out of control temper tantrums. He listens better to direction most of the time. Overall, his behavior really has improved.

Christina

Before: Christina would cry at everything and she had absolutely no

concept of sharing. Anything she put her hand on she believed belonged to her and if another child just looked at it, she would burst into tears and start screaming. She always said no. She refused to potty. It didn't matter how well the other kids modeled this behavior, it had no impression on her.

After: Now she is much more cheerful and actually initiates playing with the other children. She potties most of the time without a problem. She offers to help anyone without being asked to by me.

Kaden

Before: Kaden was too cute for his own good. He loved to be the boss, and because he's so cute, adults would let him get away with anything. This made my job really hard. Every time I would ask him to do anything he would throw a fit, cry, scream, gnash his teeth, kick, punch. Pretty violent.

After: Now he understands that most of the time Ms. Treena is the teacher and he must listen to me. I will let him be the "teacher" from time to time if his behavior is really good by letting him choose our next activity. We've developed more of a "partnership" rather than one of us being the boss.

Sarah

Before: Sarah was adorable and she knew it. I think she's going to be a comedienne later in life. She had a problem listening and following directions. She was very easily distracted and it was hard to keep her

focused.

After: She's still adorable, and still knows it. But, she is much better at keeping on task, knowing when to be serious and when it is OK to be silly. We have a way to go with her, but she's made great progress. She loves her PhotoBook as much as Danny does.

Damian

Before: Damian's parents are from India and he came not speaking any English. He would throw a fit anytime things didn't go his way, but I think his biggest problem was his inability to communicate. He also had a problem when his sense of order was compromised; for example if we put out juice, cheese and crackers, but forgot the grapes, he would throw a fit. He hates any kind of change, and would throw a fit any time we would change activity, leave the room, come back to the room. He was quite a challenge.

After: We worked most with Damian on the concept of change. He has made the most use of the pictures we've posted around the room. It also helped him to see that not every lunch and snack time has exactly the same food. We worked hard to help him to anticipate what would be coming next so he knew what to expect. He speaks some English now, and uses sign language a lot. The PhotoBook seemed to be the best communication tool for Damian.

Danny

Before: I've already shared a lot about Danny. When he came to us he was a mess. He would bite, hit, throw chairs, turn over bookcases, throw baskets of toys. He figured out how to climb the pony wall and go into the next classroom. He would take markers and draw on the other children. When he'd throw a tantrum he would scratch himself, drawing blood, sometimes would hit his head with his fists or a toy. He was completely nonvocal. He would refuse to sleep at naptime, and when he did sleep he had horrible nightmares.

After: Danny is a different boy now. His first word was "stay". He said this to me because I would sit with him at naptime and sing to him while he looked at his PhotoBook. I allowed this because he seemed so disturbed and agitated. One day, just as I was about to leave him because I thought he was asleep, he opened his eyes and said that one word to me. Then I knew he could talk, so we started adding a LOT more to his PhotoBook. Now Danny talks with medium sentence structure. He smiles all the time, and we haven't had one instance of aggression. Anytime a child or adult leaves or enters our room he greets them or says goodbye to them. He signs songs. He has no more nightmares, though it is hard to get him to sleep still. When he sleeps, he wakes up singing. He does a lot of sign language and his favorite is to sign "I love you" to me. My goal now is to create a PhotoBook of Danny to give to his grandmother. She almost weeps now with relief and gratitude that her grandson has made such a turnaround.

In fact, Danny became a director when we started working on PhotoBooks

for the other students. At first, it was because he was the only one with a completed PhotoBook, but after that the other children just followed his lead and they allowed him to keep that role.

In Closing:

I've talked a lot, but I just had to share some of the really amazing things that have happened in my classroom in the last couple of months and it is a direct result of using Thematic PhotoBook methods. One of the best things I like about this idea is that it could be turned into a real book by sending it off to Kodak or lulu.com and have it printed and bound. I'm doing this for Danny and his grandmother, and I plan to give it to them as a gift. This way they will have a permanent record of this time of huge change for their family.

The rest of my PhotoBooks are three ring binders in page protectors. I do this because I find myself taking pages out as a teaching reinforcement tool for the children. We also keep all our completed PhotoBooks on the shelf so that if someone new comes into the classroom I can have one of my older students "teach" the newer student how we do things in my classroom.

The only thing I chose not to do is to do the Good vs. Bad photographs. I think that is a better one-on-one activity. I didn't want to use it in a setting where other children could see their "bad" behavior, it would only serve to embarrass them. Not all kids understand that something they're doing is wrong. It takes time and patience to try to figure out why a child is doing

something wrong. For my class, I focused on good behavior, and made all our PhotoBooks about good behavior, trying to reinforce what I wanted them to do, rather than trying to punish them for something they might not understand.

I hope that my experiences will inspire you to try some of Thematic PhotoBook methods. They have made a huge difference in my classroom. I'd say the most important thing is to not take yourself too seriously. Have fun with the project, and when you're having the kids help you with the project, make sure you're only working on it while they're having fun too. Once they are tired or done with it, stop. You can always come back to it tomorrow. If you do that, they'll be eager to continue working on their own personal development.

Good luck.

Mr. Kajow's Classroom

Mr. Kajow works in a traditional public elementary school as a Special Education teacher. In his school, as with many schools around the country there can be as many six or seven autistic children in his classroom at any given time. In the past, autism was considered to be a relatively rare condition, and many public schools were simply not able to take on the complications of the autistic children in their classrooms. Today, because there are so many autistic diagnoses every year, it is more and more likely to have more autistic children in a public school than ever before. A survey done about ten years ago showed that teachers believed that at least 1.5% of their children had disabilities related to ASD.

Mr. Kajow's shared with me a list of characteristics of those with autism and the difficulties they may have when interacting with people in the general public. He understands that his students' words and actions can often be misinterpreted as being disrespectful or hostile. A person with ASD might:

- Not understand what is expected of them, often misinterpreting a movement or verbal prompt
- Not respond to commands
- Not respond to nonverbal cues such as facial expressions or tone of voice
- Run or move away when approached rather than being open to approach
- Be unable to communicate with words, often turning away in frustration rather than in disinterest
- Be unable to express feelings
- Only repeat what is said to them, sounding as if they are mocking, when they're really trying to join in the conversation
 - Only talk about what interests them, even when that topic is of no interest to anyone else
- Avoid eye contact, giving the appearance of being disinterested
- Appear argumentative or stubborn, unyielding, shunning overtures of friendship because they misinterpreted a social cue
- Say "No!" or "Yes!" in response to all questions
- Have difficulty judging personal space, coming far too close and being perceived as annoying, or standing far apart giving the impression of being disinterested in the activity
- Try to avoid sensory input (e.g., flashing lights, sirens, crowd noise) due to hypersensitivity of sight and sound

- Have a decreased cognitive ability when experiencing heightened anxiety or frustration, giving the impression of being slow and stupid rather than just confused
- Become anxious or agitated, producing fight or flight responses or behaviors such as screaming, hand flapping
- Speak in a monotone voice with unusual pronunciations
- Reverse pronouns (“Can you play?” instead of “Can I play?”)
- Have problems speaking at the correct volume, either far too loud or soft
- May, if verbal, be honest to the point of bluntness or rudeness, not understanding the concept of tact

Mr. Kajow’s dedication to his occupation cannot be ignored. He believes that it is his responsibility to make the experience of being in school easier for autistic children, and has made it his life’s mission to help others understand the behavior of autistic children. He has recognized that autistic children have little or no concept of social cues. They do not understand that a raised voice indicates anger or frustration. They do not perceive angry looks on a person’s face because they usually avoid eye contact with other people.

Mr. Kajow believes he may have a slight degree of Asperger’s himself, and felt that while he was in school as a boy no one wanted him around. His teachers often excluded him from common activities in the classroom. He recalled numerous times when he was actually “put in his own class” where the teacher would make him sit in a chair at a desk that had tall sides on it, commonly called a study corral. His teacher would say, “You are in your own math class. Do not leave this chair until you complete all these problems.” Mr. Kajow acknowledges that he had a lot of trouble in school, and had it not been for one or two kindly teachers who really made an attempt to understand him

he would never have made it through. He is now a Special Education teacher and he wants to make a difference for the autistic children in his school. His interest in PhotoBooks was most enthusiastic.

His first project was to work on helping autistic children socialize with other children in their classrooms. Most autistic children believe that the socially popular kids in their school are mind-readers of some sort, they can immediately know and understand something without anything ever being said. The autistic child has trouble reading expressions on faces, and does not understand social conventions that indicate that another child may be interested in playing with them.

Mr. Kajow decided to create a "Facial Expression" PhotoBook where he would first take pictures of the faces of each of his children. They would talk about different emotional states, anger, sadness, happiness, frustration, thinking, dreaming, hope, pleading. They worked together as a class talking about different feelings. Most of his kids were used to hamming it up in front of the camera, and for the first few days, every child would slap on a huge grin that showed their teeth and tonsils. After a couple of days of this, Mr. Kajow printed and posted these pictures on the wall. He left them there for a few days so that the novelty of seeing their photographs would wear off. Then he talked to his class. "Is this how we look all the time?" They all realized that they didn't always look like that when they were in their "normal" state. This led to a discussion about what different kinds of expression they might have on their faces at different times. Mr. Kajow suggested that when they see one of their classmates doing something they thought was "interesting" that they were given permission to go and take a picture of that person, then to say "Thank you," when they were done. By the end of the week, Mr. Kajow had dozens of pictures. He made certain that every child had numerous expressions that had been captured on film so that each child could create his or her own

PhotoBook on Expressions.

Once they had pictures of one another, Mr. Kajow talked to teachers in the students' mainstreamed classrooms and asked permission for his kids to take pictures of various activities that go on in the other classrooms. His main goal was to get his autistic spectrum kids to understand expressions were a form of communication, and he wanted his kids to learn how to take what they were learning in his classroom and transfer that knowledge into other areas of their lives at school.

Another week passed, and again, most of his kids did a pretty good job of capturing various events in other classrooms. They photographed tables of students working together on a project showing focused faces and sharing of materials like pencils and crayons from jars in the middle of the table. They brought in pictures of children on the playground playing different games like jumprope or kickball. They brought in pictures of students in the cafeteria, lining up to get their hot lunch and at the tables eating. Mr. Kajow's students were very busy photographers. It was the first time they felt as though they were "special" in a good way because no one else in the school was going around taking pictures of various activities.

Once they had gathered all the photographs together, Mr. Kajow selected several social situations that he believed his children faced on a regular basis. One was to work "committee style" on a regular classroom project. The other was to learn how to join a game on the playground. Mr. Kajow's entire class worked together on the two PhotoBooks. He hoped that once they completed the classroom PhotoBooks that it would later be used for new students in his classroom next year. Once the classroom book was done, he wanted each student would be able to choose a PhotoBook topic for him or herself.

Mr. Kajow's school belongs to a cluster of schools in a larger metropolitan area,

and while each school cannot have a trained interpreter or facilitator, they have the services of one who travels from school to school working with the autistic spectrum students. This individual helps the children to work on understanding the vast variety of communication styles humans utilize. A little known fact about communication is that when people are face-to-face, ninety percent of their communication is actually nonverbal. This is a very difficult statistic for those on the autistic spectrum. Most autistic individuals have little skill reading facial expressions and body language, interpreting tone of voice, especially sarcasm, and voice pitch. This facilitator would come in once every two weeks to coach the students on various social interpretation topics.

As they worked on the PhotoBooks, Mr. Kajow noticed that many of the children talked about anger as something “red” and “hot” and “feeling like your going to explode”. He would gently suggest that faces depicting anger be placed on paper of a corresponding color. His experience has taught him that helping his students to color code to feelings they sometimes performed better when they were able to just think of the color rather than trying always to remember the hundreds of expressions the human face can make.

Committee Work

For the Committee PhotoBook, Mr. Kajow had the students decide on a project that they might be working on in their regular classroom. Most of his students were required to work “committee style” which forces all children to learn to work and interact with the other students in their classroom. They decided to focus on a Social Science project where they were to take news clippings from the middle of the table, choose one that they were interested in, cut it out, past it in the correct place on their worksheet, then

they had to draw a picture depicting their topic and write a title. Each student is required to work independently, but shares space at a large table. In the center of the table are containers of pencils, scissors, crayons, markers, glue sticks. There is a stack of many news clippings on sea animals. There is also a stack of worksheets.

This provides the students with numerous opportunities to see how they can work with a group of other children sharing materials while creating their own page. Mr. Kajow insisted that they take pictures showing good sharing techniques. He also suggested that they might take some pictures of people who refused to share, or were hoarding their materials. Each day Mr. Kajow's class worked for an hour at a time on his PhotoBook project. The first step was to decide what kinds of topics needed to be included. Sharing was the most important, but because he was still very interested in the social interaction aspect, Mr. Kajow also suggested that they include the faces of children who were working hard, of the children who were talking, of the children who were not "on task" looking around, or misbehaving in some manner.

Little by little, Mr. Kajow's PhotoBook on Committee Work came together.

- Page One: The first page showed an empty table with all the supplies and necessary papers in the center of the table. The caption read, "Project Time".
- Page Two: This showed pictures of the students sitting at the table before they began their project. One picture showed a student who was looking over his shoulder, and that had a caption of "Pay Attention". The main page title was "Time for Work".
- Page Three: This page showed students with their hand out, obviously asking for something. These had a caption that said something like, "Please pass the scissors". A picture next to it would show another student handing scissors over in a safe manner with a caption that said, "Here you go." A third picture on this page

showed the original student saying, “Thank you,” and finally a fourth picture that has a caption saying “You’re welcome.”

- Pages Four – Eight: These pages were very similar to page three, but they showed different students asking for a worksheet, a glue stick, a pencil, certain crayon colors, etc. All the pages repeated the captions that depict the students asking politely for another student to pass them something, then saying “Thank you,” and “You’re welcome.”
- Page Nine: This page showed the students working hard, with appropriate captions praising their industrious behavior.
 - Page Ten and Eleven: These pages showed a time or two when a student was not working on task, or was hoarding some of the supplies.
- Page Twelve: This page had pictures of the students holding up their completed projects.

Time spent on the Committee Work PhotoBook was very helpful for Mr. Kajow’s students. He noticed that while they were in the process of creating the PhotoBook, he heard more discussion of manners and more words of “please” and “thank you” than he’d ever heard in his classroom before. Once they completed the PhotoBook, they decided to post each page up on the walls of Mr. Kajow’s classroom so that other students would see it. That week the school held a Parents’ Night, where parents came to meet the teachers and their children’s classmates. Nearly every parent in the classroom exclaimed over the PhotoBook pages that were posted on the wall. They all wanted to try the activity at home, but claimed they didn’t know where to start. Mr. Kajow said, “Just do it!” It’s easier than you think!

Playground Games

Mr. Kajow's next PhotoBook project was entitled "Playground Games". Every time he was on the playground, Mr. Kajow would try to encourage his autistic students to join in some of the games with the other students. He noticed that they constantly misread the signs other students were making. For example, he would try to encourage one student to join in a kickball game. When one of the players kicked the ball at his student, the boy turned in fear and ran away. He believed that the ball kicked in his direction had been an act of aggression. Mr. Kajow had to explain to him that when someone kicked a ball at him, he was to kick it back. Mr. Kajow understood that this was a little more difficult a topic than he first expected, so he and the school language facilitator would take pictures of various scenes on the playground for the students to use in their PhotoBook. Because his students were so socially inept, he knew that they would have a much harder time understanding the very subtle nuances of body language, facial expressions, and physical actions.

In order to keep his students interested in the project, however, he continued to have them take pictures of different events on the playground, and when they sat down to work on the PhotoBook every morning, he was very pleased to see them really focusing in on the faces of their classmates. That way they were able to talk about what different expressions meant, when someone was friendly and approachable, and when someone was angry, upset, and best left alone.

Again, they worked on the PhotoBook one page at a time. Every morning, Mr. Kajow would read from the Committee Work PhotoBook that they had completed in time for Parents' Night to remind them of good behavior when working on a group project. By this time, Mr. Kajow had also printed and laminated photographs of the classroom committee tables showing where he wanted all the supplies were kept in the center of the

tables. Each morning, before work on their favorite project, the PhotoBook, started, Mr. Kajow asked certain students to make the tables look like they did in the pictures. This way he was able to give his students the task of preparing the work station. Little by little, more and more photographs were appearing throughout Mr. Kajow's classroom that hadn't been put into a PhotoBook yet, but he was using the technique in other areas of his teaching.

The Playground Games PhotoBook was laid out in this way:

- Page One: This showed an empty playground with no children milling about.
- Page Two: Page two showed a picture of three of Mr. Kajow's students standing on the outskirts of various activities with many children playing in the background. A second picture of the same students was a closeup, and the sadness and longing in their faces was really heartbreaking.
- Page Three: Showed two girls swinging a jumprope with a third girl jumping.

One of Mr. Kajow's female students was in the background, again looking longingly at the jumprope.

- Pages Four – Five: These pages showed other children in various games on the playground: on the swingset, on the slide, on the teeter-totter, playing marbles, on the jungle gym, playing kickball, playing tag.
- Pages Six – Eight: These pages showed a closeup of a student with a ball in his hands, his eyebrows are up, his mouth was open and the caption on this one was a big, huge, "Wanna Play?" Another picture showed a little girl extending her hand with the end of the jumprope in it, implying that she wanted someone to twirl the rope for her. There was another picture showing one student pushing another on the swingset. When Mr. Kajow would read this book aloud to his class, showing them the pictures, they would spend the longest amount of time on these pages.

- Page Nine – Ten: These showed pictures of Mr. Kajow’s kids playing on the playground with other students, and he had at least one closeup of each of his kids with them smiling to one degree or another. These smiles were not the same “fake” smiles the kids usually gave when someone came around them with a camera. These were real smiles of pleasure and joy.
- Pages Eleven – Twelve: These showed pictures of children enjoying their playground activities, with captions that were positive reinforcements. “Don’t run away, we want you to play!”

Recommendations

Mr. Kajow understands that a single PhotoBook would not completely ease his students’ feelings of being uncomfortable and unsure in social situations, but he believes that he sees a difference already, and can tell that his kids are beginning to visualize themselves as being more successful in their social encounters.

One more thing that Mr. Kajow tries to teach his students is that they should try to find fellow classmates who share an interest in something, whether it is music, running, or bugs. He explains to his students that they will make more friends in the life when they share things with people who are already interested in them too.

When Mr. Kajow first began the PhotoBook projects with his students, he asked his kids to take pictures of what they considered to be appropriate social behavior. Some of the pictures his kids took and demanded that he print were pretty strange. Pretty soon he realized that he had to let go of the idea of what makes up a “good” picture. All too often adults project their own ideas of perfection onto the kids. Without meaning to, we’re putting them down, somehow diminishing their efforts. Try, whenever possible, to include most of the photos that the kids take. Discard them only if the child has a valid

reason for discarding. You don't have to use every picture, keep extras in a folder. He also reports that some of his students are bringing pictures of their home life, many of them are of their pets, of their room, or of the supper table. He continues to encourage this kind of behavior, and is very excited to see it bleeding over into other aspects of their life outside of school. Most of the parents in his classroom are supportive, but they're not sure they really understand the purpose behind the photographs. Mr. Kajow admits that he was skeptical too when he only heard about the idea and hadn't yet seen the book, but now that he's seen some of the results of all their efforts, he really believes that the PhotoBook idea has a lot of promise.

Social understanding includes everything from facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, figurative vs. literal language, and that all important but most confusing category of "feelings". People on the autism spectrum have a very difficult time expressing themselves in terms of "feelings" and yet they can tell you when they feel left out. They certainly know that they are different. The use of PhotoBooks can help them on their journey of discovery learning just a little bit more than they knew the day before. PhotoBooks don't work quite as well when talking about tone of voice, it is pretty difficult to show sarcasm in a photograph, but showing facial and physical cues in a photograph is often enough to begin a conversation that will bear fruit eventually.