

# Thematic Photobooks System: A Strategy for Autistic Personal Growth

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## ABSTRACT

*This article presents the Thematic Photobooks system as an innovative approach to fostering the development of special children. Drawing on the theories of L.S. Vygotsky and the Activity Theory by A. Leontiev and S. Rubinstein, it emphasizes the crucial role of mediating agents in a child's intellectual and personality development and the importance of a social medium in this process. Thematic Photobooks, created through a collaborative effort between an adult and a child, act as a bridge between the child and their environment. The article explores how photography and photo stories contribute to a child's development, offering both a goal and a process that helps cultivate essential life skills and knowledge. The structure, application, and benefits of this system are discussed, illustrated by a real-life case study of a special child.*

## Keywords

Thematic Photobooks, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Autistic Personal Growth, Visual Learning, Life Skills Development, Educational Tools.

## Positive Forces of Defect

A child's defect is often viewed negatively, but the positive forces created by the defect should not be ignored. It is based on the phenomenon that along with a defect appear some struggling psychological tendencies and the potential for overcoming the target defect. Defectology studies children with physical or mental defects, focusing not on the defect itself but on the child affected by it.

W. Stern [1] highlighted the dual role of a defect in development and personality formation. T. Lipps and A. Adler theorized that a defect acts as a psychological dam, stimulating mental development. According to Adler, a defect drives the nervous and mental system to compensate, becoming a motivating force in the child's psychological development. However, compensation may lead to either success or failure, depending on various conditions, such as the degree of the defect, the compensatory potential, the social environment, and external influences. The development of a child with a defect is both a physical and psychological process, creating a unique personality.

L. Vygotsky [2] introduced the concept of special children as a

developmental process rather than a static condition. He argued that defects should not be seen as tragedies but as unique developmental paths. Vygotsky emphasized focusing on the child's health, not disorders, and recognizing the qualitative uniqueness at each developmental stage.

Children with disabilities develop differently from typical children due to the social environment and established rules. For example, if a child with a defect reaches the same developmental level as a typical child, they achieve it uniquely. The special child's reaction to their defects forms a continuous adaptive process that requires support. It is crucial to help the child channel their development positively to avoid destructive behaviors.

## Development Complicated by A Defect is Always a Creative Process

The correlation between a defect and a child's strengths and attempts to overcome it gives uniqueness to the development of a special child, stimulating creative forms of growth not seen in typical development. Adler stated, "A nearsighted child will want to see everything; a hearing-impaired child will want to hear everything; a child with a speech defect will want to say everything." Similarly, children with difficulties in walking or jumping may have a strong desire to fly. He observed that physical disabilities often transform into psychological drives toward compensation and overcompensation (1927). As I. P. Pavlov noted, obstacles are essential for goal achievement, with tension needed

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for full, fruitful development (1951). The study of compensation reveals the creative nature of development in these cases.

Psychologists like W. Stern and A. Adler have linked the origins of giftedness to this understanding. Stern famously stated, "What does not destroy me makes me stronger," emphasizing that strength can arise from weakness and abilities from deficiencies [1]. However, the process of compensation does not always end in success. It may lead to either victory or failure, with many possible outcomes in between. Regardless of the outcome, development complicated by a defect is always a creative process. It involves the reconstruction of adaptive functions and the formation of new processes, creating unique paths for development.

The study of disability thus explores a world of diverse developmental forms and trajectories. The "defect-compensation" line is a major developmental path for a child with disabilities, highlighting the creative and transformative nature of overcoming obstacles.

### **Development is Shaped by a Social Environment**

The positive uniqueness of a special child arises not from the failure of one function but from the new formations caused by this failure. For example, blind children develop features not observed in sighted children. K. Burklen suggested that a society of only blind individuals, without interaction with the sighted, could lead to a distinct type of people.

Under social pressures, these special features develop in a way that the overall personality of a child tends to achieve a certain normal social type. Compensatory processes that create unique personality traits in a child do not develop freely but are directed toward specific social purposes. Social conditioning of a special child involves several factors. The effect of the defect is indirect. The child is not directly aware of their disability but of the difficulties it causes. The direct consequence of the defect is the reduction of the child's social position, realized as a social dislocation. All interactions, roles, and daily social functions are reordered. As A. Adler noted, organic and congenital factors influence development indirectly through the child's reduced social position. Understanding these hereditary and organic factors psychologically is crucial for accurately interpreting their role in a child's development.

### **Inferiority Complex and Social Conditioning in Child Development**

According to A. Adler, disability creates a special psychological position for a child. This position, rather than the defect itself, affects the child's development. Adler termed the psychological complex that arises from a child's reduced social position due to their defect as an "inferiority complex." If the child fails to meet certain life challenges during defect compensation, they develop an inferiority complex. While every child feels inferior, only those who fail to compensate correctly develop this complex. The defect evokes compensation indirectly through feelings of inferiority. For Adler, the primary goal of education was to combat the inferiority complex. Thus, a child's fate is determined not by the defect but by its social and psychological consequences, and the adaptive processes aimed at overcoming the difficulties it creates.

A child's development is socially conditioned in two ways. The first is the social effect of the defect, which leads to an inferiority complex. The second is the social pressure on the child to adapt to circumstances created for a typical human type. The entire developmental process is driven by necessity toward a final goal set by social demands.

L. Vygotsky also viewed disability as a developmental process rather than a static condition. He distinguished between primary disabilities (organic impairments) and secondary and tertiary disabilities (cultural distortions of socially conditioned, higher mental functions). Ignoring developmental processes by focusing solely on primary reasons for disability overlooks the complexity of disability. Primary disorders can lead to a child's exclusion from socio-cultural and educational environments, causing secondary (socio-cultural) disability. Vygotsky argued that secondary complications, the social and psychological consequences of primary disabilities, could be prevented and eliminated through medical and educational means.

In the 1930s, Vygotsky presented the concept of social situations of development, describing the unique relationship between a child and their reality, primarily the social reality surrounding them. Vygotsky saw the social situation of development as a dynamic relation, not a static context. According to him, the social environment is a source of development, mediating the relationship between language and cognition. Through interaction, children can extend their internal limitations and exceed their developmental zone.

W. Stern emphasized that individual functions might deviate from normality, but the whole personality or organism might still belong to a normal type. A child with a defect is not necessarily defective; their degree of disability or normality depends on their social adaptation and the final formation of their personality. Substitution and compensation arise where the defect prevails, supporting the possibility of social compensation even where direct compensation is impossible.

W. Lindworsky affirmed that mental defects are based on the relationship between various factors. A mentally disabled child should not be seen simply as disabled. Understanding the specific intellectual deficits is essential, as there are possibilities for substitution. Experimental studies confirm the existence of different types of intelligence and intellectual defects. Practical intellect, or the ability for rational, purposeful activity, is a separate sphere of research, relatively independent of other intellectual activities. This aspect of rational behavior can combine with other forms, creating a unique developmental picture for each child. The diversity in intellect reveals new perspectives for the development of children with disabilities.

### **Activity Theory and Social Interactions in Child Development**

L. Vygotsky is not the only Soviet psychologist who contributed to the theory of activity. A. Leontiev and S. Rubinstein also made

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significant contributions to this field. Their work is based on the idea that a person can be best understood through their activities how they set goals and reach them. The basic concept in this theory is that activity is goal-directed.

### Activity Theory by Leontiev and Rubinstein

In analyzing activity, the basic structural unit is an action, which is a process aimed at realizing goals. By carrying out certain activities, a person keeps the image of the goal in mind, making action a conscious manifestation of human activity [3,4].

A. Leontiev explained consciousness development as a meaning-making process driven by goals and motives, in which individuals or groups choose to participate. This process includes both mental and physical principles that are intertwined. Events and consequences within an activity can qualitatively change the participant, their goals, motives, environment, and the activity itself. Leontiev's work focused on understanding how mental and observable activities could be regarded as a single unit of analysis, and how their interaction affected both the individual and the environment. His definition of activity allowed researchers to explain human learning as a series of object-oriented activities.

### Vygotsky's Internalization, ZPD and Scaffolding

Vygotsky used the concept of internalization to explain how individuals process what they learn through mediated action to develop individual consciousness through social interactions. He stated that every function in a child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, then on the individual level. Vygotsky also introduced the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to explain the potential learning of children while collaborating in problem-solving activities with an adult or peer. The ZPD is the difference between what a child can do alone and what they can do with assistance. This assistance might come from teachers, peers, or co-workers.

Through interaction with others, children become independent and can function as individuals. Part of this process is cognitive development, which occurs through social interactions. With the support and guidance of adults, children can learn material that is not available for self-study. This process, known as scaffolding, enables a child to solve problems, perform tasks, or achieve goals beyond their individual efforts. Scaffolding is closely associated with the concept of the ZPD. It involves providing just enough support to enable a child to accomplish a goal, which is gradually withdrawn as the child becomes more competent.

### Significance of Activity Theory

The activity theory views a person as an active agent rather than a reactive one. Unlike reflexology and behaviorism, which perceive humans as responsive beings, the activity theory posits that any activity is active, generated by internal goals. This perspective has been instrumental in understanding how individuals interact with their environment and how social interactions shape cognitive development.

In summary, the activity theory and concepts like internalization, ZPD, and scaffolding provide a comprehensive framework for understanding child development through activities and social interactions. They emphasize the active role of the individual in their development and the importance of social context and support in learning and achieving goals.

### Principle of Unity of Consciousness and Activity

The principle of unity of consciousness and activity, introduced by S. Rubinstein in activity theory, posits that an individual's activity develops their consciousness. This principle highlights that consciousness does not merely control activity from the outside but is integrally connected with it as both a prerequisite and a result of the activity. The individual learns about the world and acquires knowledge by actively engaging with and changing it.

### Key Elements of the Principle

#### *Organic Unity*

Consciousness and activity form an organic unity rather than an identity. This means that while they are interconnected, they are not identical. Activity is not just a series of reflex responses to external stimuli; it is governed by consciousness. Consciousness, in turn, manifests and evolves through activity. It is not directly accessible for introspection but can be understood through the individual's activities and interactions.

#### *Role of Consciousness*

Consciousness includes motives, goals, images, status, and skills, all of which influence and are influenced by the individual's activities. The mind and consciousness, formulated through activities, are expressed and developed in the same activities.

#### *Development of Personality*

The development of a child's personality is influenced by both hereditary and social factors. According to L. Vygotsky's cultural-historical concept of the development of higher mental functions, natural mental functions evolve to higher levels through social interaction.

### Vygotsky's Contributions

**Transformation of Mental Functions:** L.Vygotsky asserted that all mental functions, initially natural, are transformed into higher cultural functions. For example, mechanical memory becomes logical, associative views turn into goal-directed thinking or creative imagination, and dynamic action becomes arbitrary. These transformations are facilitated by direct social contact with adults, highlighting the role of social interaction in cognitive development.

**Compensation for Mental Defects:** L.Vygotsky's research demonstrated the possibility of compensating for mental defects by developing and improving higher mental functions rather than merely training elementary functions. He emphasized the interdependence of social and cognitive development, with social impact being a vital source for forming higher mental processes.

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**Importance of Collective Activity:** L.Vygotsky placed great importance on collective activity, cooperation, and collaboration. He believed that these elements are crucial for cognitive and social development, as they provide the context in which children learn and internalize higher mental functions.

### Summary

The principle of unity of consciousness and activity underscores the intrinsic connection between an individual's activities and their consciousness. It asserts that consciousness develops through activity and that activity is governed by consciousness, forming an organic unity. This principle, along with Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, emphasizes the critical role of social interaction and collective activity in the development of higher mental functions and the overall personality of a child.

### Thematic Photobooks System as a Developmental Tool for Special Children

The principle of unity of consciousness and activity is crucial when working with special children. This principle emphasizes that an individual's consciousness develops through their activities and that these activities are governed by consciousness. For special children, their disorder can restrict their means of understanding the world, making it essential to find effective ways to engage their senses and enhance their perception. Given that sight is a primary channel through which individuals receive information, working with visual perception can significantly aid in developing a holistic understanding of the world for these children. For children with autism, in particular, the visual channel is a key to world recognition.

The TPB system is designed as a developmental tool for special children, leveraging visual aids to enhance their understanding and interaction with the world. The system involves creating photobooks on various topics through joint creative activities between the child and an adult mentor. The TPB system is based on years of practice and the theories of L. Vygotsky, A. Leontiev, and S. Rubinstein, particularly their ideas about activity and consciousness. TPB system is a process of a child development through creating and using self-made Thematic PhotoBooks about a child and his life in collaboration and interaction with an adult-mentor PhotoBook, a main tool of that system, consists of a set of photos, related to a child's life, combined with text describing each photograph, all coming together to form the plot of a coherent story that a child can understand and relate to. The themes of photobooks are chosen based on a child's interests or needs.

Creating such a book requires many different skills which a child masters along the way: such as cutting, gluing, poking holes, using a cutter, sorting pictures, decorating pages, and some basic knowledge such as colors, numbers, letters. Taking pictures is a process with many opportunities for learning important skills as patience, focusing, attention to details and so on. The TPB system is based on years of practice with children of different levels of development, different abilities and inclinations. Activity Theory and ideas of L. Vygotsky, A. Leontiev, and S. Rubinstein, give solid theoretical basis for that practical work.

### Thematic Photobooks system and Activity Theory

As previously mentioned, "Consciousness and activity form an organic unity. Consciousness includes motives, goals, images, status, and skills." The Thematic Photobooks system incorporates all these elements. The TPB system is a child development process that involves creating and using self-made thematic photobooks about a child's life, in collaboration with an adult mentor.

The goal of the adult in the TPB system is to foster natural motivation in the child, help set goals, and guide the creation of the photobook. This involves teaching the child new skills, so the child gradually assumes more responsibility in making the photobooks and begins to show initiative. Unlike systems that use food or toys for motivation, the TPB system fosters productive, purposeful interaction based on equal cooperation towards established goals. The core tool of this system, the photobook, is a collection of photographs related to the child's life, paired with captions describing each photograph. Together, they form a coherent story that the child can understand and internalize. Topics are selected based on the child's interests and needs. Creating such a book requires the child to learn various skills along the way, such as cutting, gluing, punching holes, using a cutter, sorting pictures, and decorating pages. The child also gains basic knowledge such as colors, numbers, and letters. Additionally, the process of photography offers many opportunities to develop important skills such as patience, focus, and attention to detail.

The TPB system is grounded in many years of practice with children of varying levels of development, abilities, and inclinations. Activity theory and the ideas of L. Vygotsky, A. Leontiev, and S. Rubinstein provides a solid theoretical foundation for the TPB system.

### Three Successive Stages to involve a child in a creating TPB process

Thematic Photobooks (TPB) system serves as a developmental tool specifically designed to enhance the cognitive and social skills of special children through creative visual activities. The TPB system builds on the principle of unity of consciousness and activity, emphasizing the importance of engaging children in meaningful activities that develop their understanding of the world. This approach is particularly beneficial for children with autism, for whom visual channels are crucial in recognizing and interacting with their surroundings. TPB helps mentors and parents connect with special children, fostering trust and encouraging dynamic participation in their development. There are three successive stages to involve a child in a process of creating Photobooks.

#### Stages of the TPB System

##### Diagnosis Stage

The goal of diagnostic stage is to study the child's behavior, identify problem areas, and understand the child's strengths and preferences.

- An adult plays a role of an "entertainer," allowing the child maximum freedom to express themselves.



- Offer a variety of activities and observe which ones the child enjoys and engages with the most.
- The mentor should be kind, sympathetic, and understanding, even if the child displays problematic behavior, provided it is not dangerous, carefully observing the child's actions and reactions in different situations to identify their interests and capabilities.

It helps to establishing a bond where the child values time spent with the mentor and sees them as a source of fun and understanding.

### Experimental Stage

The goal of Experimental Stage is to determine the child's personal qualities and identify effective methods of influence.

- Gradually an adult shift from being an entertainer to a mentor with own plans and expectations, challenging the child's sense of leadership. Defending its position, a child shows remarkable ingenuity, and there is a chance to learn much about the child's personality. An adult presents some interactive activities that, encouraging a child to display their personality and problem-solving skills.
- It is very helpful to a mentor to use various methods to influence the child as praise, appeals to kindness, ambition, or responsibility. Important to note child's responses to different approaches. Mentor should demonstrate consistent behavior, keep promises, and explains own actions to the child.
- Participating in a cooperative relationship, children willingly understand that they gain more through collaboration than through resistance.

### Creating Stage

The goal is to actively involve the child in the creation of TPBs, leading to the gradual development of various skills. It includes.

- **Skill Integration:** Ensure newly acquired skills are consistently practiced in everyday activities. For example, if a child learns to cut with scissors, this task should become their responsibility.
- **Consistent Practice:** Maintain a routine of practicing skills to prevent forgetting and reinforce learning.
- **Structured Learning:** Follow a principle of continuity and repetition, with detailed and understandable explanations to ensure comprehension and retention.
- **Rule Adherence:** Implement agreed-upon rules strictly, with natural consequences for any breaches. Material rewards should be unexpected and not used as incentives.

### Outcome

The Thematic Photobook (TPB) system provides a structured and engaging way to develop a child's potential. By progressing through these stages, the child gains trust, learns to cooperate, and develops various skills. The creation of a photobook serves as both a developmental tool and a record of achievement, helping the child to become an active participant in their own growth and in the social system around them. This leads to enhanced self-esteem, independence, and cognitive development.

## Thematic Photobooks System as a Motivating Activity

TPB system helps establish productive interactions with the environment by providing a structured yet flexible approach to learning and development. Creating photobooks helps children develop higher mental functions by combining visual and verbal elements to form logical stories. This process is directly aimed at achieving specific goals, ensuring the visual and verbal content is meaningful and understandable to the child.

### Techniques and Principles

**Scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development:** Adult guides and supports the child, focusing on tasks within the child's zone of proximal development. The mentor gradually reduces assistance as the child masters new skills, ensuring they never perform tasks the child can do independently.

**Double Experience:** L.Vygotsky's concept of "doubling of experience" is integral to the TPB system. The process involves planning, creation, and using the photobook, allowing the child to experience tasks multiple times and contexts.

**Creativity and Motivation:** L.Vygotsky emphasized the importance of creativity in development. Creating photobooks stimulates creativity and provides an emotional and motivational boost. The process of making something tangible, like a photobook, fosters a sense of responsibility, pride, and satisfaction.

### Practical Considerations

**Reading and Interaction:** Photobook creation can enhance interest in reading, crucial for cognitive development. Children who cannot read can participate by choosing books and turning pages, fostering a sense of involvement and interest in reading activities.

**Photography Benefits:** Photography enhances motor skills, focus, and creativity. It is a multifaceted activity that engages children in various ways, promoting active participation and skill development.

**Unexpected Outcomes:** While teaching one skill, children might show interest in another area, providing an opportunity to switch focus and develop new skills. The key is to keep the child engaged and motivated.

### Outcome

The TPB system is a comprehensive tool for developing special children's cognitive and social skills. By building trust, understanding, and gradually increasing the child's responsibility and engagement, mentors and parents can help special children become more active and productive members of their communities. The visual and interactive nature of creating photobooks makes learning enjoyable and effective, catering to each child's unique needs.

## Structural Units of the Thematic Photobooks System

The Thematic Photobook (TPB) system is grounded in the principles of activity theory and follows its structural units: activity, action, and operation.

## 1. Activity: Motivated by Interests

- o **Definition:** Activity in the TPB system is driven by the child's intrinsic motivation.
- o **Role of the Mentor:** Initially, the mentor's task is to engage the child by aligning activities with the child's interests and passions. This engagement forms the motivational foundation of the TPB system.
- o **Importance of Inner Motivation:** Vygotsky emphasized that mental development is closely tied to motivational factors. TPB does not rely on material incentives but seeks to find and nurture the child's inner motivation. For example, the child might be motivated by the desire to create a gift for parents or to document something of personal pride like a favorite toy or collection.

## 2. Action: Goal-Oriented Processes

- o **Definition:** Actions are processes directed towards achieving a specific goal, which, in this case, is the creation of a photobook.
- o **Role of the Mentor and Child:** The mentor keeps the end goal in mind throughout the process, guiding the child towards it. Initially, the child may not have a clear idea of the final product, but as they engage in the process, they become aware of the goal and begin to take conscious actions towards achieving it.
- o **Development of Initiative:** As the child becomes more involved, they transition from being reactive to active, proposing new themes for photobooks and suggesting how to execute specific tasks. This shift aligns with A. Leontiev and S. Rubinstein's activity theory, where the unity of consciousness and activity helps the child reveal and develop their abilities and preferences.

## 3. Operation: Context-Dependent Tasks

- o **Definition:** Operations are specific tasks aimed at achieving conscious goals within the context of creating a photobook. They involve shooting and printing photos, writing descriptive texts, and designing the photobook.
- o **Role of the Mentor:** The mentor initially assists the child with simple sub-operations, gradually moving to more complex operations as the child's skills develop. This method ensures the child learns to perform each operation independently.
- o **Skill Development:** As the child masters smaller tasks, they progress to larger, more complex ones, continuously developing new skills. This process also involves analyzing the creation process, which helps the child gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

## Artifacts and Their Role in Development

A photobook serves as an artifact in the TPB system. According to L. Vygotsky, an artifact is a man-made carrier of sociocultural information, vital life meanings, and a means of communication. The photobook, as an artifact, becomes a developmental tool for the child.

## Key Points about Photobooks as Artifacts:

- **Dynamic and Editable:** A photobook should not be static. Allowing the child to edit, replace photos, change page layouts, and redesign keeps the book relevant and engaging. This dynamic nature helps the photobook serve as a continuous learning tool.
- **Teaching and Communication Tool:** The photobook facilitates new actions and operations, tracks the child's progress, and demonstrates their understanding and awareness. It also becomes a medium for the child to communicate with the outside world, both during its creation and through its usage.

## Outcome

The TPB system, with its foundation in activity theory, emphasizes motivated activity, goal-oriented actions, and context-dependent operations. By engaging the child's intrinsic motivation and gradually increasing their responsibility and independence, the system helps special children develop cognitively, emotionally, and socially. The photobook, as a dynamic artifact, serves as a powerful tool for learning and communication, embodying the principles of Vygotsky's theory and fostering a productive interaction with the child's environment.

## Thematic Photobooks System in Practice

### Activity-Motive

Erica is a six-year-old autistic girl with limited speech, who lives at home and attends a special education class in a public school. At home, she enjoys watching the cartoon "Dora the Explorer". Erica also likes playing with necklaces and eating certain dishes. Her communication with others is limited, and she tends to be more absorbed in her own world. To involve Erica in the activity of photobook creation, her mentor Mia seeks to help Erica consciously participate in the life around her. Mia's first step is to create a motive for Erica, encouraging her to willingly join in the photobook creation process. Mia decides to make a photobook focused on Erica's favorite thing-necklaces- to draw her into the activity.

### Action-Goal

Mia's goal is to create a photobook about Erica's necklaces. The process is broken down into three main operations:

1. Shooting pictures
2. Printing photos and creating a story
3. Assembling and decorating the photobook

### Operation-Conditions

Operations are determined by specific conditions and factors, including Erica's behavior. Each operation is divided into simpler sub-operations with scaffolding applied as needed.

### Shooting pictures

Mia chooses Erica's favorite necklaces as the topic for the photobook. If Erica hesitates to part with her necklaces, the topic can be switched to her favorite dishes. However, Erica is willing to share her necklaces. Mia takes pictures while trying to engage Erica by asking her to select and arrange the necklaces. This

interaction helps Mia understand Erica's abilities and preferences. Erica's limited speech means she mostly uses single words. If she says "RED," Mia incorporates this into their conversation, reinforcing Erica's language and keeping the interaction positive. Mia documents Erica's involvement in the shooting process, ensuring the first interaction with the camera should be enjoyable.

### Printing Photos and Creating a Story

The next step is printing the photos and engaging Erica in simple tasks, like selecting her favorite photos and helping to write descriptions. Mia encourages Erica's participation with praising her actions, making her feel like a vital part of the process.

### Assembling and Decorating the Photobook

The final step is assembling the photobook. Erica can help choose the paper color and cut paper with Mia's assistance. Depending on her abilities, Erica can use markers, crayons, or stickers to decorate the pages. Mia ensures Erica's participation is documented with photos, and the finished photobook includes Erica and Mia's photos and names on the cover as authors of the book. When guests visit, parents can use the photobook as a game, asking guests to find necklaces depicted in the photos. This indirect interaction helps Erica communicate and receive positive feedback from others.

### Continuing the Process

The photobooks become a developmental tool for Erica. It motivates her to engage in new creative activities. For example, making a necklace for Erica's favorite aunt Nina's birthday and for other relatives, creating a photobook about making necklaces (below figure 1).

This can expand Erica's vocabulary and involve her in meaningful social interactions. Besides, there is an opportunity to learn numbers and sizes. Then move to more difficult tasks with different colors and sequences. Each reaction of those receiving Erica's

gifts should be documented on photo for her to see the result of her work (below figure 2).

Each new photobook project can be shared with her school, showcasing Erica's progress and encouraging her peers to engage with her work.

### Outcome

The Thematic Photobook System provides a structured yet flexible approach to help children like Erica develop their skills and expand their world. By breaking down complex tasks into manageable operations and involving the child in each step, the system fosters motivation, communication, and creativity. This personalized, positive reinforcement approach helps special needs children reach their potential and discover their unique abilities.

### Benefits of Photography for Special Children

Photography serves as a fundamental block in the Thematic Photobook system, offering numerous developmental benefits for special children. It aids mentors in guiding the children and functions as a self-teaching tool, fostering a variety of skills and enhancing overall development.

### Learning Photography

The process of learning photography challenges children to expend effort, test their limits, and achieve the goal of producing good photographs. This process involves several stages:

1. **Taking Photographs:** Encourages children to learn and refine their photography skills.
2. **Creating Photobooks:** Children work towards compiling their photographs into thematic photobooks, engaging in a creative and structured activity.
3. **Skill Development:** Throughout the process, children acquire new skills, including hand-eye coordination, focus, and attention to detail.



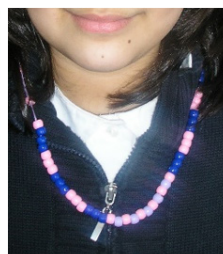
**Learning process  
of making necklaces**



**Learning shapes, size,  
numbers**



**Learning sequence**



**Steps of complexity**



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## Communication and Mentorship

Photography also supports the learning process by facilitating constant communication between the child and mentor. This interaction allows mentors to understand the child's personality and developmental needs better. Benefits include:

- **Following Instructions:** Children learn to follow step-by-step instructions from their mentors, a useful life skill.
- **Language Skills:** The process exposes children to new words, helping to expand their vocabulary and improve language skills.

## Attention to Details

Photography relies on capturing details, which helps children develop a better understanding of their environment. Skills learned through photography include:

- **Paying Attention to Details:** Children learn to notice and appreciate different qualities in their surroundings.
- **Visual Discrimination:** They develop the ability to distinguish colors, patterns, and textures.

## Benefits of Using a Camera

The use of a camera involves basic physical and mental functions that special children often need to develop. Key benefits include:

- **Steady Posture:** Learning to take photographs helps children develop a steady posture.
- **Hand-Eye Coordination:** Handling a camera improves hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills.
- **Focus and Attention Span:** Photography requires concentration, which can enhance a child's ability to focus for longer periods.

## Benefits of Outdoor Photography

Outdoor photography is a stimulating activity that encourages children to explore beyond their usual indoor environment. Benefits include:

- **Motor Skills:** Moving around to find subjects to photograph involves physical activities like bending and squatting, improving motor skills.
- **Environmental Awareness:** Children gain a better understanding of their surroundings, including visual entities such as colors and patterns.
- **Vocabulary Expansion:** Learning the names of various objects and features in the environment enhances vocabulary.
- **Understanding Visual Relations:** Exploring zoom features helps children understand concepts like relative size and distance.

## Benefits of Indoor Photography

Indoor photography helps children develop acute skills that require attention to detail. Themes often include personal belongings, daily life skills, and still-life compositions. Benefits include:

- **Spatial Relationships:** Children learn concepts such as spatial relationships, size, and colors by arranging objects for still-life photography.
- **Language and Manners:** Photographing people and

objects indoors encourages polite interactions and language development.

- **Attention to Detail:** Children learn the importance of positioning and composition for achieving desired photographic results.

## Benefits of Working with Printed Photographs

The benefits of photography extend to working with printed photographs, which play a significant role in mental development. Activities include:

- **Categorization and Sorting:** Children learn to categorize and sort photographs, enhancing cognitive skills.
- **Analysis and Comparison:** Choosing the best photographs involves analyzing and comparing options, fostering critical thinking.
- **Descriptive Skills:** Describing photographs improves language and communication skills.

Photography is an invaluable tool in the Thematic Photobook system, offering numerous developmental benefits for special children. It enhances physical and cognitive skills, improves language and communication, and fosters creativity. By engaging in photography, children expand their horizons and gain a deeper understanding of their world, all while participating in an enjoyable and meaningful activity.

## Social Role for a Child

The structure of a creative approach to child development includes three main stages: studying, experimenting, and creating. To understand the purposes of these phases, consider a project to create something from an unfamiliar material. First, one observes and studies the material to see how it behaves on its own. Then, one interacts with the material, testing its response to various approaches and developing a better understanding of how to handle it. Finally, armed with this information, one works with the material to create the desired object.

In the second stage, we choose social roles for a child and observe if they fit. In the third stage, we develop and solidify these roles, whether it be as an assistant, partner, or even leader, can be teacher or designer. A child should understand and embody their social role with the help of the Thematic Photobook (TPB) system. In the case of Erica, presented in this article, she brings joy to people with the necklaces she makes with Mia's help. Photobooks should capture the happiness people feel when receiving these gifts from Erica, which could be her motivating force. During the creation of the photobooks, Erica acts as Mia's assistant, but possibly later as a partner in photobooks production or a partner in the "necklace business". These roles should be emphasized for the child. Children can wear IDs with their status during "business time," making the process more engaging.

New stimuli and motivations can be introduced along the way to keep her interested. The photobooks featuring the necklaces can be discussed by others and even let them be borrowed to teach



their children. Mia could expand the production and suggest also to start making bracelets, if Erica got an interested in the idea. The TPB system is designed as a powerful tool for long and dynamic cooperation between the child and the adult, contributing to the child's mental development and revealing their potential as fully as possible.

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