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A picture's worth ...**Kids use photos to develop sense of expression, confidence**

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Tucked away in the mountains of Knott County is a portrait of opportunity for students with dyslexia.

A summer program at the Hindman Settlement School, the only program of its type in central Appalachia, teaches students with dyslexia to communicate with society through photography.

With a sense of confidence uncommon for many who have similar learning differences, the 13 students during a class last week quickly entered the classroom, took their seats and gave their full attention to their instructor, Beth Reynolds, who also has dyslexia.

The students, excited about that day's assignment, learned they would be going to take portraits of Hindman matriarch Virginia Combs.

The program, a summer camp, is modeled after the "Literacy through Photography" program developed by teacher and photographer Wendy Ewald. It's a combination of storytelling, writing, and communicating through pictures, Reynolds said.

"I learn more from them than I teach them," Reynolds said. "They prove to me all the time that no hurdle is too big to jump over."

The cameras were handed out, and Reynolds reminded the young photographers to capture different angles and to be careful, and they departed.

During the three-week program, students are given a one-time-use camera and told to photograph what they love and what's most important in their lives. Reynolds teaches them photography skills and helps them develop visual literacy. The students get assignments to take pictures of the community and of one another. Then they learn to write captions for their pictures, and, in an effort to boost their self-esteem, write what they like about their pictures.

Self-esteem is a major issue among students with learning differences, said Mike Mullins, executive director of the Hindman Settlement School.

One night, Mullins received a phone call from a teacher whose daughter could not read before she started the summer program and had to have everything thoroughly explained to her while playing board games with the family, Mullins said. After just three weeks in the program, her daughter was able to read everything.

"Having the camera gives them a sense of control in their life," Reynolds said. "Having a learning difference, you always feel like things are out of control."

Reynolds said that one day during camp last week, the assignment was to photograph one another and themselves. The students chose the angles and had the option of posing the person; they were the directors, Reynolds said.

When they were finished with the assignment, Reynolds said, one student exuded a confidence that was uncommon for him. He beamed about what he had accomplished.

"Just wait until you see my portrait," the student, Timothy Tackett, said. "It is so good. You are going to love it."

Many students with dyslexia don't think about goals because they are accustomed to failure. This picture helped him look toward the future and see it in a different way, Reynolds said.

Four years ago, Reynolds, a photojournalist and professor at the University of South Florida, met Hindman Settlement School board member Jack Combs. After learning that she had dyslexia, he persuaded her to visit the school to take pictures and write a story. After visiting the school and seeing so many children with "minds like hers," she found a photography curriculum she could bring back to them, and she has returned every year since.

"Never in my wildest dream did I think I would develop a relationship with kids in Eastern Appalachia," Reynolds said.