

Taking Notice: Through the Lens

Using photography as a tool for learning and expression



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VSA arts is an international, nonprofit organization dedicated to providing educational opportunities in the arts for children and adults with disabilities.

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On the cover: Matt Palmer, participant of *VSA arts of Kentucky's* Taking Notice program

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Foreword

The ability to capture one's own environment in the unique way that photography does separates it from all other forms of expression. To photograph is to grasp one's reality, to claim the picture as proof of existence. Photography is also about self-awareness. With camera in hand, one wakes to shapes, forms, people, and activities as if the camera were a new pair of eyes through which the photographer could see. The resulting photograph gives us a glimpse of the artist's own view of the world.

"Taking Notice: Through the Lens" is an artist-in-residence program that cultivates artistic expression and self-awareness in youth, with and without disabilities, through the art of photography.

VSA arts was awarded a generous grant from the GE Fund to develop this educational program using photography. *VSA arts* affiliates from Florida, Kentucky, and Rhode Island collaborated with local educational institutions and photographers to design an approach to meet the needs of their students. Each program was specifically tailored to the teaching skills of the photographer(s), capacity of the educational institution(s), and ages of students being served.

VSA arts of Rhode Island collaborated with Potter-Burns Elementary School to create an innovative social studies curriculum using photography for third and fourth graders. *VSA arts of Florida* worked with Miami-Dade County Public Schools and the Miami Museum of Contemporary Art to create an educational model wherein 15 high school students taught photography to 15 elementary school students with disabilities. *VSA arts of Kentucky* teamed up with Kentucky State University and the Wilkinson Street School, a facility run by the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Department of Education, to teach digital photography to students ages 11-18.

Through this grant, the GE Fund provided at-risk, urban students who otherwise would not have been able to participate in such a program, with a life-changing opportunity. *"Taking Notice"* offered students a venue to discover themselves, learn new skills, and assimilate their environments. More importantly, the program gave them the tools to express themselves and present their significant worlds from their own perspective.



Arts in Education



“Taking Notice: Through the Lens” is a realization of *VSA arts’* commitment to the arts as essential to the education of every child. Engaging in the arts means creating, experimenting, exploring, making choices, developing ideas, and enjoying new experiences. In short, the power of the arts and creativity is learning.



VSA arts is committed to extending the power of creativity to people with disabilities. Beginning with arts-based learning in early childhood settings, our educational agenda promotes ongoing involvement in the arts throughout school and the opportunity to pursue and demonstrate excellence in the arts throughout life.



The arts have demonstrated and documented influences on the school and academic performance of students. Much public attention has focused on the “Mozart Effect,” which documents improvement in application of math principles after listening to and practicing music. Further studies have confirmed this relationship between music and learning in mathematics, as well as science. New studies also show that drama helps children develop verbal and interpersonal social skills, dance develops skills in spatial relations, and visual arts activities enhance reading comprehension. Teachers report that using the arts in their classrooms provides innovative and effective ways of educating all of their students. The students themselves indicate positive views of themselves as learners and demonstrate more involvement in school activities when they learn in an arts-rich environment.



For *VSA arts*, the question is not whether students with disabilities need the arts. They do. *VSA arts’* challenges are to define how the arts can be more influential in the learning process, and to create more opportunities to teach and learn through the arts. The artwork contained in this catalogue shows us that these children have a lot to tell us. We are here to listen and ask for more.

Photos: Participants in *VSA arts of Rhode Island’s* Taking Notice program

VSA arts of Rhode Island: **Discovering Our World through Photography**

VSA arts of Rhode Island's mission is to open doors for children and adults with disabilities, allowing them to explore their creativity by actively participating in high quality arts programs. *VSA arts of Rhode Island* creates opportunities for intensive 'hands-on' arts experiences for special education students and their teachers in Rhode Island schools; develops awareness of the local arts and cultural resources available to the educational community by providing for collaboration of artists and educators; increases awareness of the creative potential of all people; and promotes the importance of arts education in lifelong learning.

The "Taking Notice" program sponsored by *VSA arts of Rhode Island* provided an inclusive arts experience for 34 students, with and without disabilities, in the third and fourth grade at Potter-Burns Elementary School in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The 34 students were divided into two groups. Each group worked with the photographer-in-residence twice a week for 28 classes, and participated in 17 field trips. The photographer-in-residence worked closely with the social studies teachers to enhance their required curriculum. Teachers revealed the significance of art as an effective vehicle for both education and personal creative expression by using photography to reinforce the traditional elementary curriculum.

Potter-Burns Elementary School has 600 students and is located in an urban environment, with Pawtucket being the fourth largest city in Rhode Island. The student body includes students with disabilities and those at-risk due to the economic and social conditions of the area. The urban environment influences their perspective. The land is covered with asphalt; their houses are built inches apart; there is little space for trees or grass to grow. These urban elements can also make very compelling design components and both individual and community stories can be told through a powerful picture. The methodology presented here may be used to encourage others with comparable conditions to effectively implement this program within their community.



Brittney Strom's
Portrait with Pattern

SIGNIFICANT GOALS OF THIS PROGRAM

For the students:

- Sharpen observation and communication skills including improved listening, speaking, spatial awareness, vocabulary, and reading skills;
- Explore personal observations, dreams, ideas, and emotions while enjoying the process of creative self-expression;
- Tap multiple intelligences of special needs students in new, dynamic ways to improve learning and retention of school curriculum content; and
- Improve interaction between special education students and their peers, thereby encouraging respect and appreciation for differing abilities.

For the teachers and schools:

- Promote the educational goal of literacy in the arts;
- Improve comprehension and usage of the State of Rhode Island's Arts Frameworks;
- Work with professional artists; and
- Gain new skills and expanded knowledge of how the arts may be used to integrate special needs students, as well as strengthen and enhance curriculum for all students.

“There are places in this country that we look at everyday, but we never really see. They are the landscapes of heritage; places that seem so natural that they often go unrecognized...”

— **Robert Melnick,**
author



Gail Porter with
Brittney Strom



Kayla Soares gets focused

METHODOLOGY

Where in the world is your hometown?

Through this program, the participants discovered not only more about themselves, but also their hometown of Pawtucket, Rhode Island. When nine- or ten-year-old children are asked the question where their hometown is located, their answers could situate their hometown anywhere on the seven continents. The majority of third and fourth grade students have difficulty visualizing and conceptualizing the ideas of city, state, and country. These concepts require a considerable amount of abstract thinking and cognitive processing, which children at this age are often just beginning to develop and grasp.

The Rhode Island Skills Commission Social Studies Standards, which are in alignment with the national standards, require that children demonstrate knowledge of geography—the study of people, places, and environment—from a spatial perspective. These standards also require students to understand and appreciate the world they live in on a local and global scale. Jeannine Chartier, *VSA arts of Rhode Island's* executive director and practicing artist with a disability, used the national standards guide for educational goals to create a comprehensive photography program.

The national and state standards of learning and performance present challenges in developing appropriate methodologies to meet accepted competency levels. Teachers of students with disabilities often face even greater challenges when trying to achieve and sustain the same competency goals for students with varying developmental and learning abilities. The teachers at Potter-Burns Elementary School strongly believe that by integrating art into their curriculum and professional artists into their classroom, they can provide a meaningful way through which their students, with and without disabilities, can successfully achieve, learn, and excel.

Photographers Combine Reporting and Art

By Annie O'Gorman
PAWTUCKET, RI—A class of 34 third- and fourth-graders did not go on one field trip this spring. They went on 17 field trips! Their goal was to learn new things and then communicate their findings through art and photos.

With cameras, notebooks, and pencils in hand, the young photographers visited firefighters and police officers. The kids watched the action in a hospital emergency room. They toured the mayor's office, a water station, and many other places in their community.

"We asked questions and took notes," said Thomas Edwards, 11. They also took photos.

A professional photographer helped the kids set up a darkroom at their school.

Thomas liked the chemical process. "We developed negatives," he said. "Then we put the negatives inside a container. We let the chemicals sit. Then we poured liquid in and out until we had pictures."

Alex Beaugard, 8, liked being a reporter. "We learned a lot about our community by asking questions," said Alex. "I liked finding out all about recycling."

The kids also learned about design. "We looked for patterns, lines, shapes, and texture," said Amanda Lopes, 8. "We used the design elements in our photos."

After three months of field trips, the kids turned their photo work into an artistic display.

"That was the best part," said Alexandra Jarl, 8. "We got to listen to each other's explanations."

Teachers Doris Lawson and Margaret Orchel created the project. "Kids all learn differently," said Lawson. "Some have visual problems that make them see things differently. Looking through a camera lens might help them zoom in on what they should be seeing." ▲



A classmate took this photo of Alex Beaugard at the Slater Mill historic site.

PURPLE MOUNTAIN
2008



Kayla Soares

This program enabled Doris Lawson, a special needs teacher for a third–fourth grade inclusion class, Margaret Orchel, a third grade teacher, their teaching assistant Alice Tootell, and Gail Porter, the photographer-in-residence, to create an innovative, collaborative program. Following several preliminary meetings intended to integrate the curriculum, the group met weekly to prepare the detailed content of the lesson plans by reflecting, reinforcing, and coordinating what specific lessons would be taught. Initially, teachers searched for historical photographs of the school, the city of Pawtucket, and the state of Rhode Island. Parents were asked to contribute early childhood photos of the students and older family photos.

Next, students worked with Gail Porter to learn photography’s history, vocabulary, and the parts of a camera through a ‘hands-on’ application with such early photographic equipment as a camera obscura. They created cyanotype photograms under the sun’s exposure, practiced with current 35mm cameras, and learned to operate the school’s digital camera. Students learned about the elements of design (such as point of view and framing) and subject matter (landscapes and portraits), and then were given several photo assignments through which they captured themselves and their community on film.



Christopher Pacheco catches
Gail Porter for a shot

Students took pictures of their neighborhood, places of work, places of government, and historic locations. This experience allowed them to understand and appreciate abstract concepts of geography and the spatial relationships of area. The adults working in these places were interviewed and documented during field trips. Students looked at aerial shots of the city and state, along with maps of these areas, to learn where their hometown was located with respect to the rest of the state and the world. To meet the third grade social studies standards that deal with history, the students created a timeline using their photographs and the historic photographs.

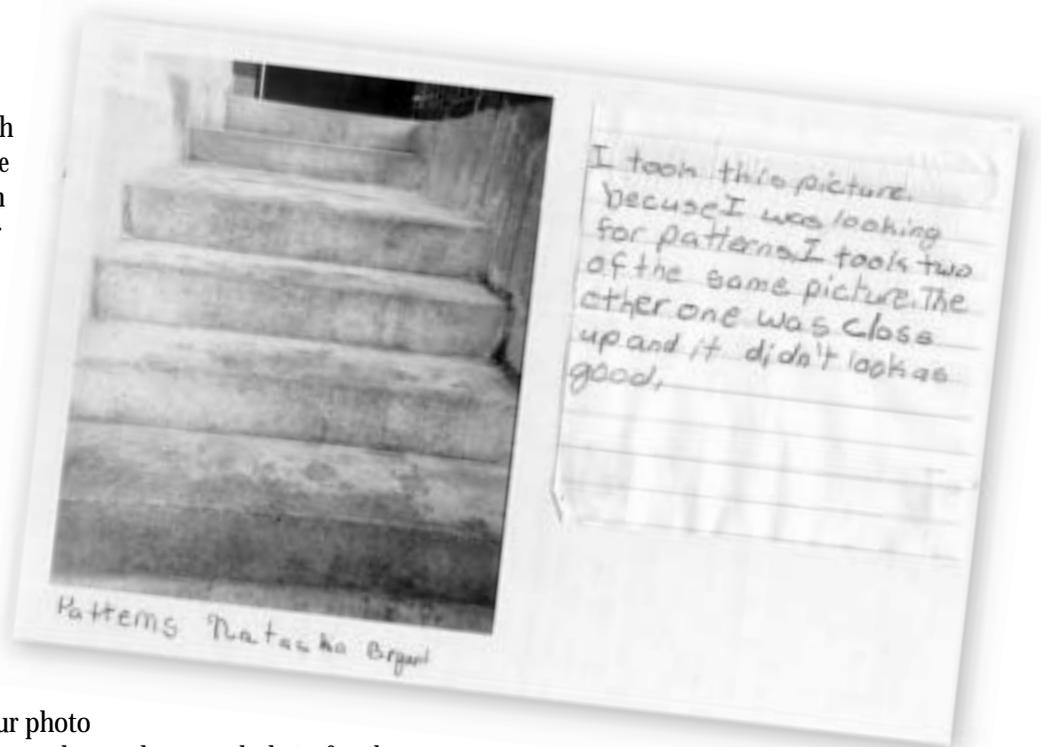
Students kept a journal, wrote about themselves, and submitted stories about the project to student news outlets such as *Purple Mountain*. They compared the differences and similarities of their personal and artistic perspectives. They compared and contrasted pictures of their urban community to suburban settings and described how their community changed over time. In completing these assignments, students were given freedom to make choices, allowed to explore their creative expression, and encouraged to develop decision-making skills. For example, in the portraiture assignment, photos could be taken of each other, school personnel, family, or community members. The elements

of design assignment, which sometimes resulted in more abstract images, was used as an inspiration for poetry or imaginative writing.

After the students' initial shooting assignments were completed, all participants transformed the classroom's supply closet into a darkroom, using such collected items as opaque trash bags, black construction paper, and masking tape. Students learned to mix the chemicals, develop, enlarge, and print the film. Since one-hour photo developing has become the norm, the students and their family members were excited that they were mastering this process. The students enjoyed the process of developing film. The teachers appreciated the students' enthusiasm and used this process to develop teamwork.

After the photos were printed, the teachers and artist led student discussions ranging from understanding the specific concepts that were previously taught to artistic interpretations, personal choice, diversity, and use of visual art for nonverbal communication. The students were encouraged to swap ideas during slide shows, share their aesthetic decisions, and study the work of famous photographers.

During the course of the program, numerous photographs were used to illustrate each of the social studies curriculum goals and to provide the basis for discussion topics addressing Pawtucket's past. Such topics included invention and manufacturing, farm to factory, labor, commerce, transportation, and the interdependence of our natural, technological, and human resources, pollution, and the recovery of an environment. The buildings, old machinery, and landscape offered the students many options to apply the photographic skills they learned.



Patterns by Nataska Bryant



Class fieldtrip

To complete the final photographic assignment employing the skills they learned and practiced, the students went on their culminating field trip. The Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority gave bus passes to the students, accompanied by a transportation escort who taught the students about the local transportation services. Students traveled to Slater Mill and the Blackstone River. Every “hometown” has a “most historic site” and this is Pawtucket’s. The Blackstone River provided the waterpower for America’s first factory and changed the face of America by giving birth to the Industrial Revolution. The 200-year history of Slater Mill and the river were well documented in both dramatic photographs and documented stories that were used as an integral part of their project. This last assignment allowed the students to connect in a concrete way to their hometown’s past, while providing a unique photo-safari experience.



Reporter Douglas Hadden interacts with program participants

The completion of this program included a presentation to the Potter-Burns Elementary student body and a culminating exhibition at the Pawtucket Visitors Center. During these exhibits, students showcased their photos and writings, conducted docent tours of their lessons, showed how they constructed and worked in the darkroom, and gave a variety of photographic demonstrations. Students assisted in distributing a media press release for each site and invitations for teachers, parents, and community representatives. Aside from generating awareness for the program, the events provided the students with additional speaking opportunities, increased positive interaction between the students with disabilities and their peers, and fostered respect among all students and the larger community. Dignitaries at the event included the Pawtucket School Superintendent, the Rhode Island Department of Education Director of Special Needs Dr. Thomas DiPaola, and community members. The reporter from the local paper, *The Times*, who was also interviewed during the program, covered the program in a front-page story — an exciting recap for the students to review and treasure in future years.

Throughout this program, the teachers reported that this collaborative approach had the greatest impact on the students with disabilities. For the students with learning disabilities, the program provided a means of addressing their visual perception problems. Using the camera together with their focusing skills allowed them to understand things that they might not have



Visitors reminisce



Samantha Houle
explains her approach

readily understood with their eyes alone. For students with developmental disabilities, the pictures they held in their hands assisted in their retention and recalling of information. For students with speech and language expression difficulties, the ability to use photography assisted them in conveying the messages of what they learned. Teachers also reported improved competency skills, including a more thorough understanding and better retention of core curriculum subject matter, which resulted in better grades.

The teachers and the photographer also observed improved problem-solving, speaking, and listening skills, vocabulary usage, as well as improved patience, communication, behavior, teamwork, self-esteem, and self-confidence. In the end, all of the students satisfactorily attained the standards required for the third and fourth grade social studies curriculum, interpreted their world and surroundings through photography, and introduced their accomplishments to the larger community through presentations, “show and tell” demonstrations, the culminating exhibit, and resulting public relations efforts. The collaboration resulted in a satisfying, positive experience for all participants.



Group shot of participants



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VSA arts of Florida: **Making Mentors and Friends**

VSA arts of Florida provides direct services to more than 45,000 people with disabilities and 200,000 teachers, parents, and organizations annually. Every year, *VSA arts of Florida* trains more than 5,000 teachers for re-certification credit, as well as hundreds of artists, administrators, and health care providers. Through statewide arts educational programs, rotating arts exhibits, arts festivals and performances, *VSA arts of Florida* is committed to promoting the arts, education, and creative expression for children and adults with disabilities.

The “*Taking Notice*” program sponsored by *VSA arts of Florida* brought together 15 Exceptional Student Education students from Biscayne Gardens Elementary/Middle School and 15 photography students from Northwestern Sr. High School in Miami-Dade County. The Miami-Dade County Public School System is the fourth largest school system in the United States. Approximately 72 percent of the students from this ethnically diverse region are minorities. Working together, the students and their mentors explored their community with cameras and then wrote essays that reflected their experiences.

“Whoever you are, there is some younger person who thinks you are perfect. There is some work that will never be done if you don’t do it. There is someone who would miss you if you were gone. There is a place that you alone can fill.”

— **Jacob M. Braude,**
author

The program’s collaborators included *VSA arts of Florida*, Dade County Public Schools, and the Museum of Contemporary Art located in North Miami. Three photographers including Michael Phillips, an established photographer with a disability, Peggy Nolan, and Priscilla Ferthman, served as the photographers-in-residence. Two teachers, Lynn Rheam, a photography teacher at Miami Northwestern Sr. High School, and Rosemary Wolfson, art teacher at Biscayne Gardens Elementary, developed the curriculum and sessions for each set of students. They developed instructions catering to the entire group and other activities tailored specifically for the individual and mentor framework. Through the program, students participated in a sharing experience that strengthened their confidence, self-esteem, and decision-making skills. Participants also gained a deeper understanding of themselves, each other,



Natalie La Porte
Dade County Public Schools

STEPS TO TAKE

- Solidify support from the school systems, both high school and elementary school;
- Identify students willing to participate;
- Solicit instamatic or loaned cameras and photo supplies;
- Secure darkroom use at a local high school or area business;
- Plan the bus service and chaperones;
- Locate photography teacher(s) and a photographer with a disability;
- Plan a visit to a local museum with space for training;
- Work with a local business to develop film and frame final pieces; and
- Identify local gallery space for final exhibit and reception.

WORKING TIMELINE FOR THE PROGRAM

- Schools selected 15 special education elementary/middle school students and 15 high school photography students;
- Collaborators chose a photographer with a disability for a one-day artist-in-residency at the Museum on Contemporary Art in Miami;
- Collaborators identified photography teachers within the Miami-Dade County School System;
- Teachers arranged field trips for students to visit each other's schools and to meet with their mentors;
- Special education elementary/middle school students visited the photography lab at the high school;
- Teachers invited all students to the museum to work and interact with a photographer with a disability, i.e. Michael Phillips;
- High school students received formal instruction and explored the neighborhood to take photographs;
- High school students collaborated with special education elementary/middle school students to assist them with taking photographs of the neighborhood from their perspective;
- Photographs were professionally developed and contact sheets were reviewed;
- All students selected their final photographs and prepared written statements regarding their work and their participation in the program; and
- Photographs were professionally matted for the 60-piece culminating exhibition, including an opening reception, held during the last day.

people with disabilities, and their community. The program activities took place from March 1 to June 16, 2001, with a culminating two-week exhibition at the Ambrosino Gallery in North Miami.

SIGNIFICANT GOALS OF THIS PROGRAM

- To teach students to use photography as an art and communication form;
- To implement a culminating event that highlighted the work of the students; and
- To introduce students to photography as a career choice.

Peggy Nolan and Priscilla Ferthman, who initially presented an instructional class on photography, also met with the students to discuss the importance of professional presentation. They reviewed their own photography and discussed the preparation and background necessary to become a professional photographer. The students' exhibition at the Ambrosino Gallery reinforced the experience. Through gallery representation, the students learned about the selection process before a photograph is included in the final exhibition, professional matting and framing, installation, crafting a press release, and audience development.

Through this program, students increased their knowledge of photography as an art form. The senior high students were taught the general use of a 35mm camera and the elements of composition. These mentors were then able to support the

"A strong friendship bond developed between the high school students and the ESE students. When each group visited the other's school, the students took great pride in introducing their new friends. In addition, a sense of ownership and excitement developed that was not witnessed within the classroom; the students gained new insights into their peers and community."

— Ray Azcuay,
supervisor for art education,
Dade County Public Schools

learning process for the younger students. In addition, all students and their family members gained a greater understanding of their creative abilities and an enhanced appreciation for the abilities of all people.

Michael Phillips served as a positive role model of someone living with a disability, sharing his experiences, and demonstrating the achievement of his career goals. His mother also educated some families of children with disabilities by providing information on their rights and sharing community contacts that might be helpful. Some unexpected outcomes were the development of friendships between the two groups of students and the commitment of the Dade County Public Schools to replicate and extend this program to two additional schools next year.



“In photography, light is used to develop an image and that same light has opened the door of the imagination for these ESE students. Photography has shown these students what they can do, not what they can’t. A picture is worth a thousand words, and every image draws a reaction from these kids. I really enjoyed sharing this experience with my ESE student, David, because I’ve helped to open a hidden closet filled with talent. Whenever I see an individual with a disability, I now ask myself ‘Why not?’ instead of ‘Why?’ ”

— Barrington, mentor

Vanessa and
Donna Pierre-Paul
Dade County Public schools



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VSA arts of Kentucky. **Moving Beyond the Boundaries**



Zack Woodard

VSA arts of Kentucky promotes the arts, education, and creative expression for all, with an emphasis on persons with disabilities, thereby strengthening the human spirit. *VSA arts of Kentucky* provides experiential opportunities in the arts for children of all abilities in inclusive environments. Every congressional district in the state of Kentucky is served by *VSA arts of Kentucky's* art education programs for the youth and children. Through the arts, *VSA arts of Kentucky* helps children develop literacy and pre-literacy skills, improve communication skills, strengthen self-esteem, and experience joy through the creative process.

The “*Taking Notice*” program sponsored by *VSA arts of Kentucky* provided an experiential opportunity for 20 students from the Wilkinson Street School located in Frankfort, Kentucky. The Wilkinson Street School is operated by the Frankfort Independent Board of Education and the Franklin County Board of Education, in cooperation with the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Department of Education. The school maintains a specialized education and treatment program for youth ages 11-18, as an alternative to the public school setting. Photographer-in-residence, Reba Rye, worked with the school director, Rita Rector, and the students’ teachers in meeting the students’ needs by customizing instruction to Individual Education Plans. The program’s intent was to prepare the students for successful re-entry into other school settings.

Teachers designed the photography program to give students a sense of success and to contribute to their self-awareness by giving them a tool to explore their environment. The size of the group was kept to a minimum to provide as much individualized attention as possible. Students learned how to operate a digital camera and practiced taking pictures around the school. Students communicated their life experiences through their photographs and through their journals. Students used the digital photography lab at Kentucky State University to print the photographs. They published a commemorative book of the photographs and journal entries. The program activities took place from December 4, 2000 through June 15, 2001, with a culminating exhibition held during the beginning of June at the main office of Farmer's Bank and Trust in Frankfort.

DEVELOPING THE PLAN

The Director of Wilkinson Street School, Rita Rector, in consultation with staff members Vicki Zeigler, Deb Pelletier, Brittany Rezek, and Lyn Lewis, selected 20 students as a core group to work directly with the artist. In selecting students for this program, consideration was given to students who were, on some level, willing to be mentors in the future for other students.

The photographer-in-residence conducted an in-service training program for the benefit of the five participating teachers. The team learned digital

“The at-risk youth that we deal with often times do not have advanced academic skills or outstanding talents where they would possibly receive the recognition from their community. The program served as the vehicle for students to be successful and to find a talent that might have otherwise stayed hidden. Their peers, as well as family and community members, praised the uniqueness of their photographs. The project also allowed each student a chance to write and reflect on his or her photographs, a more creative project than we are often able to accomplish within the walls of the classroom.”

— **Rita Rector**,
director of the
Wilkinson Street School

EXCERPT OF JOURNAL ENTRY:

STUDENT RYAN EVERSOLE AND STAFF MEMBER DEB PELLETIER

One on one is one on one. What does that mean? How do words form a picture? How do the pictures form words? What does it do to our sense of connection with the people around us, as well as the air, water and soil, when we step outdoors? Especially when we go to places just right off our beaten path that we've never been to before? The places we've traveled to, in small

groups, small enough to visit without yelling or being silent, were sometimes risky climbs to places on the Kentucky River of big water power – churning, bubbling, foaming white that settles to a satin flow.

Sometimes we were in tamed places of thoughtful order that calms and soothes like the Liberty Hall Garden (but even there, we dipped over the edge, down the wild bank to the River again). We took a camera that helped us to see, to focus on the small things we would normally step on, as well as broaden

our vision to take in the patterns of distant smoke and tree limb drawings in the sky. We also saw junked cars and lonely, abandoned shirts. Turning our eyes to find simply “interesting shapes and textures” opened passages of self-awareness, and philosophical musings often followed close behind. Walls dissolved. We wrote, with no rules except the requirements to keep the pencil moving and try to follow the flow. We met four at a time to investigate using a computer lab as a darkroom: resizing, improving exposure and contrast, dodging and burning. The following pages are samples of those pictures and words. More importantly, they are samples of experiences: the creative power of being outdoors and responding to what's right in front of us. I returned one day for a follow-up write, meeting with everyone at once in the school cafeteria. They resembled only vaguely the same students. Rowed and indoors, most were distracted, distant, and bordering on defiant. But, the photographs were before us, visual clues to different realities that we can hold in reserve.



Reba Rye

photography and established a system for the students to print their images.

Four students at a time participated in two-hour walking field trips to take photographs. Students engaged in journal writing exercises that allowed them to reflect on their personal emotions and feelings about the environment.

Students also learned computer printing on a laser printer. Two students at a time, a teacher, and the photographer traveled to Kentucky State University's art facilities to print archival photographs on an Epson 2000P printer in preparation for the commemorative book. Volunteer art education majors provided technical assistance for printing the completed pictures in the photo lab at Kentucky State University.

Parents and guardians were required to participate in periodic Individual Treatment Plan reviews, along with teachers, counselors, and community personnel. This program hosted several review sessions that were intended to gather input from parents and guardians, with respect to their personal perceptions of the value of the project and possible ways to expand its benefits.

A final exhibit was prepared, installed, and publicized. The exhibit increased the audience's awareness of the creative potential of the students by demonstrating the diversity and depth of expression of the participants. This particular exhibit also taught those who viewed the artwork that disability is a matter of perspective.



Doug Chapman



Amanda Bickers

SAMPLE TEACHING STRATEGY BY PHOTOGRAPHER REBA RYE

Students were given very basic aesthetic instructions. They were to look for interesting shapes and textures, concentrating on the details of life or visual stories. We talked about the simple trick of moving the camera around, looking at the LCD screen, until the image 'looked right.' This is a very effective way to get students to use their eyes, preventing an overload of too many verbal rules for balance and composition. We talked about the fact that there was no right or wrong way to approach this exercise. They were outside of the traditional classroom, with no tests or hard, fast rules of process. This approach is always effective in engaging students of all ages and levels, but especially for students who, for varying reasons, do not excel in traditional classroom settings.

The journal exercises were likewise casual and rule free. We would, at some point, sit down in the setting where we had been taking pictures. We chose a word or phrase that everyone used to begin writing. Emphasis was on moving the pencil quickly, following our train of thought wherever it led. Students were encouraged not to worry about spelling or grammar; simple lists of words were okay. We discussed the fact that their thoughts might wander far from the original word or phrase inspiration. There was no time limit; everyone sat quietly and waited for all to finish. We then read aloud. Students, who usually were extremely reticent to write in the classroom, very willingly wrote in this relaxed environment. Staff was especially impressed with the writing of one student who ordinarily would not write.

GOALS AND MILESTONES OF THIS PROGRAM

- To provide experiences for students that will both inspire and insure success in expressing themselves artistically;
- To provide the students with a sense of accomplishment and completion through the both the exhibition and publication of a commemorative book;
- To provide an opportunity for students to discover and learn more about themselves and their perspectives through the art form of photography;
- To provide the school with an opportunity to highlight the artistic development of its students through an exhibition; and
- To design a model photographic project that can be expanded or replicated by other schools, as digital technology becomes more commonplace.



Tabitha Noble



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Helping Others Take Notice

“The first time a youngster looks through the lens of a camera, a remarkable transformation takes place. The students that took part in this photography project learned that disability basically



means doing things differently. For the first time, they realized that technology exists that will enable them to perform the tasks necessary to photograph the simplest of objects. The beauty of the droplets of water cascading in a courtyard fountain could be permanently captured on film, or even the play of their fellow classmates splashing in that same courtyard fountain! Not only were the children excited about how they could use Assistive Technology to access a camera, their parents expressed their enthusiasm and [spoke of] how this one experience helped them to

raise their level of expectations for their children. This project gave the students a sense of accomplishment, and the realization of being able to do something that they never thought possible without the assistance of others.”

— **Michael Phillips**,
photographer-in-residence (Florida)



“When we take students outdoors, especially to places right around their daily environments where they have never been before, they’re newly awakened. When we do this in small, family size groups, then dialogue is possible and true communication evolves. In such settings, anything can happen. They easily see and respond to the simple beauties, under our feet and up in the sky, that can sustain us in complicated times, and, more miraculously, they are willing to write. There were no discipline problems, not a single student refused to write, and best of all we talked. It really is that simple: outdoors, small groups. They were simply told to look for interesting shapes and textures.”

— **Reba Rye**,
photographer-in-residence (Kentucky)



“Through this photography project, students truly were able to ‘take notice’ of their environment and community. By learning the photographic concerns of light, contrast, and other design elements; by photographing members of their communities at their places of employment; and by giving back to the community the valuable discoveries they had made in the form of a public presentation and exhibition, they successfully achieved many artistic and scholastic goals. Children surprised themselves, as well as their teachers and parents, by excelling in areas of learning considered to be their weakest, expressing pride and delight in their accomplishments. Teachers explored and discovered ways to incorporate parts of their curriculum around photography related themes. This was a wonderful, positive experience for all involved.”

— **Gail Porter**,
photographer-in-residence (Rhode Island)

Web Resources

Accessible Arts, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing equal access to the arts for children and youth with physical, emotional, and psychological disabilities. During “Tell Your Story,” a collaborative program with Kansas University’s Medical Center’s Child Development Unit, at-risk youth attended a photography workshop and were given disposable cameras to tell their story through pictures. <http://accessiblearts.org/what.htm>

Arts Education Partnership has resources on the essential role of the arts in the development of every child and in the improvement of America's schools. <http://aep-arts.org/>

The Center for Creative Photography is an archive, museum, and research center dedicated to photography as an art form and cultural record. Their vast collection includes more archives and individual works by 20th-century North American photographers than any other museum in the nation. Each year, the Center for Creative Photography provides new teaching resources for elementary through college educators through its program of changing exhibitions. Educators across the curriculum are encouraged to explore exhibition images, issues, and related topics as opportunities for inquiry and interdisciplinary study, both in the museum and within their classrooms. This series of guides offers educators everywhere images selected from the CCP collection and suggestions for integrating the exploration of photography and its fascinating range of artistic interpretations into diverse curricula. <http://dizzy.library.arizona.edu/branches/ccp/education/guides.html>

George Eastman was a high school dropout, judged “not especially gifted” - when measured against the academic standards of the day. He was poor. Nevertheless, even as a young man, he took it upon himself to support his mother and two sisters, one of whom had a severe disability. In the century following his founding of a new photographic dry plate business, that firm became the world-renowned **Eastman Kodak Company**. Today, it ranks as a premier multinational corporation and one of the 25 largest companies in the United States. The Kodak site offers several lesson plans that include tips to integrate photography with other learning experiences. <http://www.kodak.com/global/en/consumer/education/lessonPlans/indices/photography.shtml>

George Eastman House, an independent nonprofit museum, is an educational institution that tells the story of photography and motion pictures. George Eastman (1854-1932) was the founder of Eastman Kodak Company. Opened in 1949, the Museum includes Mr. Eastman's restored house and gardens, an archives building and research center, galleries, two theaters, and an education center.

http://www.eastman.org/4_educ/4_index.html

Literacy Through Photography was launched in the Durham Public School System in 1989 as a two-week project through the Center for Documentary Studies. Now, almost 10 years later, it thrives in 14 public schools, including a day treatment center for students with behavioral and emotional disabilities.

<http://cds.aas.duke.edu/ltp/index.html>

Through the Eyes of a Child - Under the tutelage of a dozen professional photographers, 12 children from a variety of cultural backgrounds armed with cameras photograph their worlds.

<http://www.eyesofachild.com>

The University of Central Florida's Casio Classroom maintains a site that is designed as a reference tool that puts educators in touch with creative educational applications for digital cameras in educational settings. Submitted lessons and applications that have been used successfully in the classroom are displayed for other educators to view and print.

<http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~ucfcasio/qvuses.htm>

Access and Opportunities

Following are two excerpts from *Access and Opportunities: A Guide to Disability Awareness*, a publication written and distributed by *VSA arts* in Washington, D.C.

AFFIRMATIVE PHRASE

- Person with a disability
- Person who is blind; person with a visual impairment
- Person who is deaf; person with a hearing impairment
- Person with a mental illness
- Person with mental retardation
- Person who uses a wheelchair
- Person with a physical disability; person with a mobility impairment

NEGATIVE PHRASE

- The disabled; handicapped; crippled; suffers from a disability
- The blind
- The deaf; deaf and dumb; suffers a hearing loss
- Crazy; psycho; lunatic
- Retarded; mentally defective
- Confined or restricted to a wheelchair; wheelchair bound
- Cripple; lame; handicapped; deformed

For more information, or to request complete copies of *Access and Opportunities: A Guide to Disability Awareness*, please contact:

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Speaking with Awareness

“People-First” Language

Excerpted from *Access and Opportunities: A Guide to Disability Awareness*

Language shapes the way those around us speak and act toward one another and conveys the respect we have for others. The use of appropriate language about people with disabilities can be an important tool in building a community that accepts all people.

Appropriate language is both sensitive and accurate. *VSA arts* promotes the use of “people-first” language—language that puts the focus on the individual, rather than on a disability. People-first language helps us remember that people are unique individuals and that their abilities or disabilities are only part of who they are.

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

Avoid euphemisms such as “physically challenged,” “differently abled,” or “handi-capable.” Many disability groups object to these phrases because they are considered condescending and reinforce the idea that disabilities cannot be spoken of in an upfront and direct manner.

Do not sensationalize a disability by using terms such as “afflicted with,” “suffers from,” or “crippled with.” These expressions are considered offensive and inaccurate to people with disabilities.

When referring to people who use wheelchairs, avoid terms such as “wheelchair bound” or “confined to a wheelchair.” Wheelchairs do not confine people with disabilities — they provide freedom of movement to assist them in traveling throughout the community.

When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, emphasize abilities rather than limitations, focusing on a person’s accomplishments, creative talents, or skills. This does not mean avoiding mention of a person’s disability, but doing so in a respectful manner and only when relevant to the situation.

Ten Commandments of Etiquette

For Communicating with Persons with Disabilities

- I When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter.
- II When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.)
- III When meeting a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
- IV If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
- V Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.)
- VI Leaning or hanging on a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.

- VII Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue in and guide your understanding.
- VIII When speaking with a person in a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.
- IX To get the attention of a person who is hearing impaired, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to determine if the person can read your lips. Not all people with a hearing impairment can lip-read. For those that do not lip-read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth while speaking.
- X Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later." or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to a person's disability.

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*Promoting the creative power
in people with disabilities*

VSA arts promotes the arts for children and adults with disabilities, strengthening the human spirit and improving the quality of life for everyone.

VSA arts is an international nonprofit organization founded in 1974 by Jean Kennedy Smith to promote education and lifelong learning opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities. More than 6 million people participate in *VSA arts* programs annually. Many of them participate in programs sponsored by a worldwide network of affiliate organizations. *VSA arts* programs in music, dance, drama, creative writing, and the visual arts develop learning skills, encourage independence, and promote access and inclusion.

<http://www.vsarts.org/>



GE Fund

The GE Fund, the philanthropic foundation of the General Electric Company, invests in improving educational quality and access and in strengthening community organizations in GE communities around the world. All together, GE, the GE Fund, GE Elfun, and GE employees and retirees contributed nearly \$100 million to community and educational institutions last year.

<http://www.gefund.org/>



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