



**GE Fund**

*in disabilités*

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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

## 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  R  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*"





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.

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. Such es apoit of tviewanddfamsng )and lsubjti mater t(and.scape and opotsraits) and thee

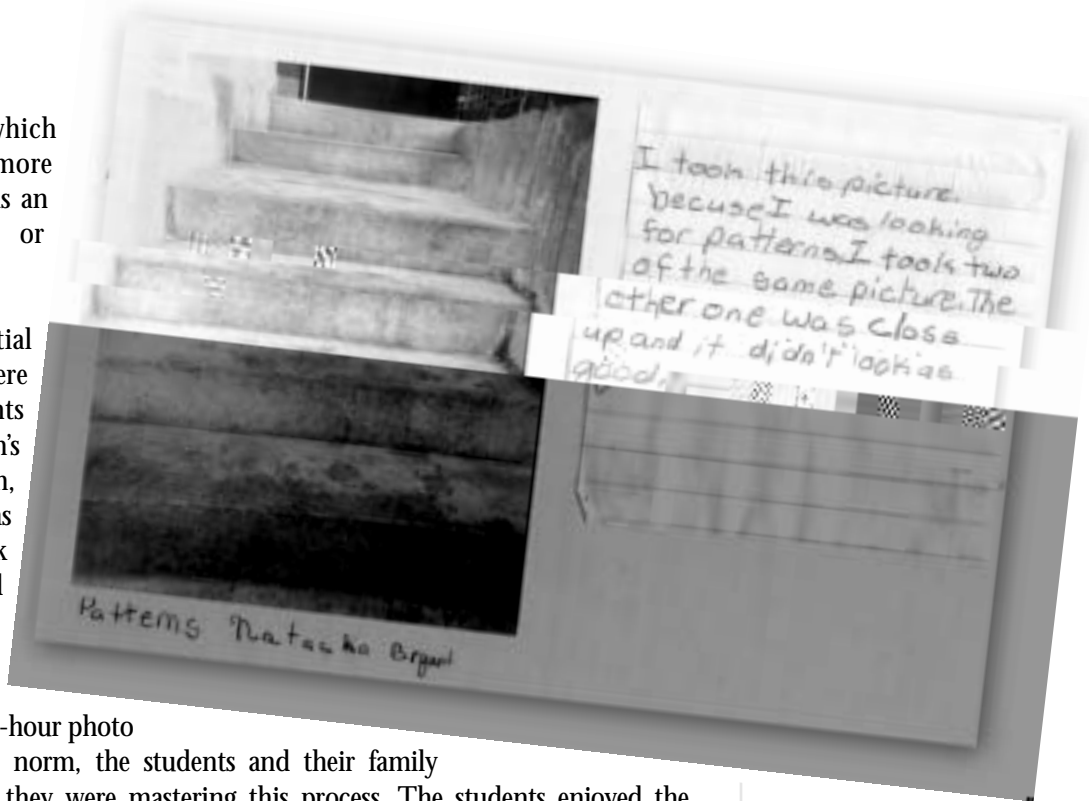
of design assignment, which sometimes resulted in more abstract images, was used as an inspiration for poetry or imaginative writing.

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.



Pa by Nataska Bryant



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.

# *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.

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,

## 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.

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



learning process for the younger students. In addition, all students and their family

## *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

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



## 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.

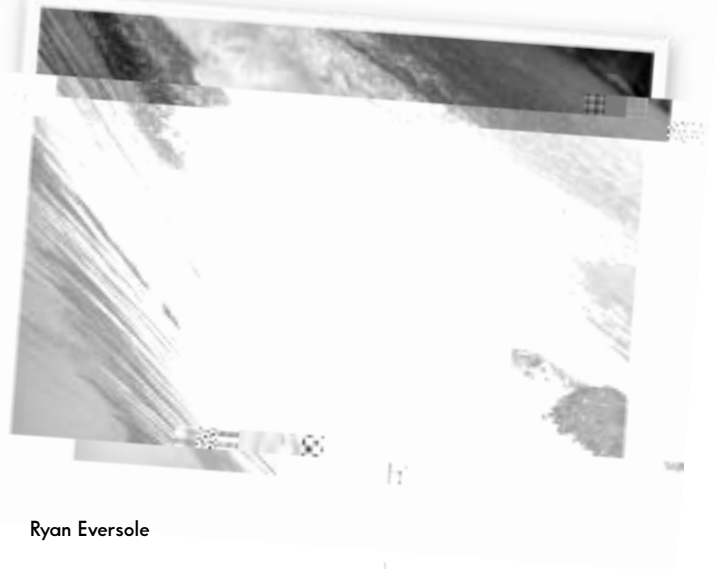
The journal exercises were likewise casual and rule free. We would, at some point, sit down in the setting where we had been taking pictures. We chose a word or phrase that everyone used to begin writing. Emphasis was on moving the pencil quickly, following our train of thought wherever it led. Students 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



Ryan Eversole

# 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,

“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



## 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](http://www.eastman.org/4_educ/4_index.html)





# 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*

*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/>



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.

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