

DALE S. NELSON AND
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Combining the Arts and Humanities

Seven years ago in Richmond, Virginia, art, music, and physical education specialists pooled their talents to help children better understand the relatedness of all forms of art. The program they began unifies arts and humanities instruction for the city's elementary and special education students and broadens the students' exposure to creative pursuits.

With the overall theme, "My World:



"In understanding and participating in the humanities, children can learn something that brings true joy to life."

Explore, Understand, Create," teams of specialists developed the Elementary Program of Arts and Humanities. Sub-themes include "Feelings," "Make Believe," "Footprints," "Hidden Treasures," and "Belonging." Each team, consisting of an art, music, and physical education specialist, contributes activities in each discipline, activities that interrelate the three disciplines,

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and activities that integrate other basic subject matter.

The Arts

Arts offerings include dance, dramatics, and creative writing, as well as visual arts, music, and physical education and movement. Instrumental music is taught separately.

Most of the time one specialist works with one class of students, but at times teams of specialists work together. Special programs, performances, and celebrations are presented by and for children for holidays and historical and cultural events. Large numbers of students participate on stage or watch from the audience. Other prototypes for instruction include cultural centers, mini-museums, field days, guest artists, and performances by professionals in the arts. Students in choirs, bands, dance groups, gymnastic teams, and theatre groups from college through middle school are invited to perform for the elementary students.

Children travel to museums and performances in the city throughout the year. The Richmond Symphony, ballet companies, two children's theater companies, and other visiting groups perform for thousands of children in local theaters. Each child participates in approximately five activities each year, most of which are free. Parents decide whether their children will attend activities that involve a small fee.

Some 16,000 elementary children in grades pre-K through 5 have opportunities to share their talents with the school community and the public on a citywide basis. Through school arts festivals, PTA meetings, and special programs, the visual and performing arts receive attention. Annual citywide activities such as "Rainbow of the Arts" provide an opportunity for children to perform in concerts and productions with children from other schools. A "Day in the Park" at Richmond's Maymont Park is an afternoon of sharing for the whole family. Music in Our Schools Week, National Sport and Physical Education Week, and Youth Art Month are national activities also observed locally.

During Youth Art Month, children's art work is exhibited in banks, businesses, and libraries. School officials and community leaders are often recipients of "Youth Art" for their recognition of the importance of the arts in education. A special art exhibit in Richmond is "Art in Action" held annually at a local department store. Over 500 pieces of children's art work are

displayed in the stores.

The Humanities

Another component of the program is the Humanities Center. At the Center, students and teachers work throughout the year in painting, sculpture, crafts, photography, cinematography, dance, music, drama, creative writing, and historical research. Both the visiting poet and visiting artist programs in the schools are coordinated by the staff of the Center. The Center staff also works regularly in the schools.

The total number of visits by the humanities teams in each school during



the 1979-80 school year was 25. All children in the school participate with their team of arts specialists during each visit. The number of teams for each building is determined by the total number of regular classroom teachers in the building. For example, a school having 24 teachers would receive services from four teams of specialists: The humanities teachers work with half of the students for two hours in the morning and the remaining students during the afternoon. The regular classroom teachers are freed of teaching duties during this period and participate in staff development sessions coordinated by the build-

ing curriculum specialist.

Staff development for the arts specialists also occurs on a regularly scheduled basis every 15 school days throughout the year. Staff development sessions include workshops by specialists and experts. Teachers also attend arts workshops sponsored by The Alliance for the Arts at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

Two other special features of the Elementary Program of Arts and Humanities are the flex time activities and the methods used for follow-up activities by the regular classroom teachers. Between the morning and afternoon sessions taught by the arts specialists is a period of approximately one hour referred to as flex time. During this time, the arts specialists carry on varied activities including working with gifted and talented students and students with special needs and interests. Choirs and musical groups, gymnastic groups, dance groups, art groups, and groups of regular classroom teachers are assisted by the humanities teachers during flex time.

By working with the regular classroom teachers and media specialists, the arts specialists provide a means of truly integrating the arts into language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. Available to all teachers are curriculum guides for all disciplines. By joint planning, the regular classroom teachers and the arts specialists are aware of what each is doing. After each visit by the humanities team, the classroom teacher is given a follow-up form with suggested activities in art, music, and physical education to integrate into daily activities.

We believe that all students should be exposed to all the arts. We want children to reach out to the city and the world by bringing joy to others through art exhibits, concerts, and other performances which are available to citizens. We also want children to reach inward and to discover there an appreciation of what being human means. By doing these things, we believe our young people can come to understand the humanities. In understanding and participating in the humanities, children can learn something that brings true joy to life. This, we believe, will serve them well long after they leave school. ■

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