

An Art Curriculum for All Students

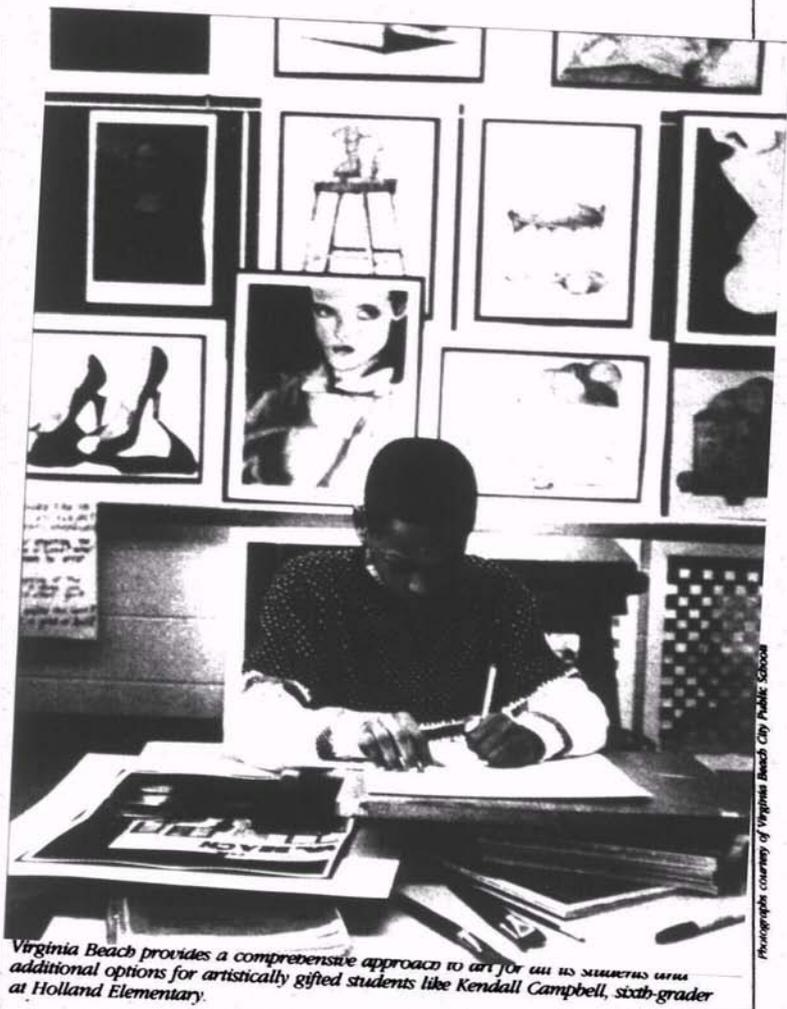
For the last ten years, Virginia Beach art teachers have taught a highly structured yet creative curriculum that is as balanced and specific as those in the basic subjects.

Educators and the public sometimes question whether art studies are essential for all students because they doubt the necessity of finger-painting, ceramics, or papier-mâché sculpture. "Making art" may be interesting and rewarding but is hardly crucial in the context of the child's total education.

In Virginia Beach, we believe that making objects should not be the goal of art education. Rather, art education should center on a core of art knowledge that is essential for the intellectual development of *all* students. We also believe that an art curriculum should be as specific as any other curriculum, communicating clearly to other educators and to the public.

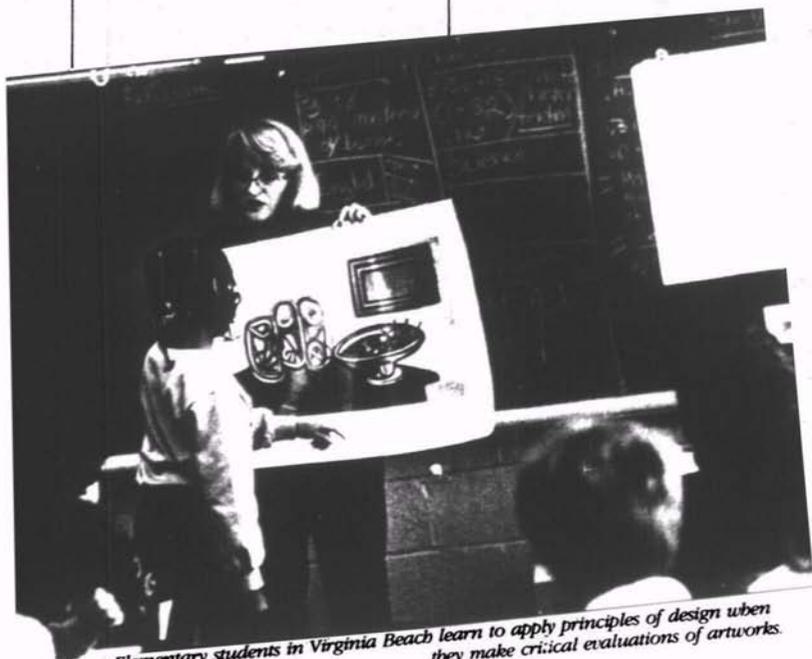
About ten years ago, we began to develop such a curriculum for the more than 65,000 students (K-12) in our 66 schools. We selected five goals: (1) heightened awareness of self and sensitivity to the environment, (2) ability to express ideas visually, (3) ability to think creatively, (4) knowledge of our cultural heritage, and (5) ability to make qualitative visual judgments.

Next, we divided art knowledge into major components to serve as the organizational framework for the curriculum: Perception and Sensitivity, Principles and Elements of Design, Artists and Works of Art, Critical Evaluation of Art, and Making Art. Each topic appears at all levels K-12, serving as a rubric for the objectives. We completed this scope and sequence guide first; it was indispensable in maintaining direction and balance in the rest of our work.



Virginia Beach provides a comprehensive approach to art for all its students with additional options for artistically gifted students like Kendall Campbell, sixth-grader at Holland Elementary.

Photographs courtesy of Virginia Beach City Public Schools



Elementary students in Virginia Beach learn to apply principles of design when they make critical evaluations of artworks.

Using the scope and sequence, we wrote curriculum guides for each level and course. The guides were written in draft form and field-tested in the schools. Then they were revised, reworked, and put in final form.

Program Outline, K-12

In kindergarten through grade five the curriculum provides for a concept-based, balanced program in art for all students. In grade six, we move to a transitional program, still required but based on themes that are more closely linked to studies in other subjects. Units become more complex, and lessons are longer. In grades seven and eight courses are similar to those in grade six but are based on the study of cultures.

At the elementary level, a program for students with outstanding talent in the visual arts offers specific art instruction for fourth- through sixth-grade students at a Center for the Gifted. These artistically gifted students are admitted after screening of portfolios, review of recommendations, and assessment of performance.

Students attend classes at the center one day per week during the regular school year, contingent on continued outstanding performance.

The secondary program consists of four general studio art courses, each featuring several media. Choosing not to develop specific media-based art courses such as design, painting, or ceramics, teachers demonstrate the breadth and scope of art studies throughout the high school years.

A semester course in art appreciation was developed to assist students with meeting graduation requirements that include a semester credit in the arts. The course is designed to benefit a range of student interests and abilities and to appeal to students who do not want to "make art." The success of the course can be seen in a dramatic increase in enrollment in art courses at the high school level, even though offerings in the other fine arts are also available.

In high school we offer advanced placement courses in art history and studio art, both developed according to College Board guidelines. Students

can qualify for college credit by submitting artwork for evaluation or by taking the Advanced Placement Examination.

For students who have decided on advertising design as a career or who want in-depth training, we offer a two-year vocational program in advertising design, including practical experience in the art business world. The advertising design program has enjoyed a high placement rate of students in jobs or higher education programs.

The Fruits of Our Labor

The program we have described is highly structured, yet there is room for originality. A strong background in basic theory gives students a framework within which they can apply their creativity. The quality of the artwork is high, and quantity is not diminished, even though significant time is given to developing discussion and criticism skills.

Evaluators from the Rand Corporation, who evaluated the program on behalf of the Getty Center, reported:

Virginia Beach has a remarkably strong art program: its curriculum guides prescribe common instructional goals and require a balance among art production, art history, and art criticism. . . . And it enjoys the same status and support in the district as other subject programs (The Getty Center for Education in the Arts 1985, 26).

By making art education more discipline-based, we have not detracted from the uniqueness or appeal of the arts; we have developed a framework for more consistency, more accountability, and more understanding of what art is all about. □

Reference

The Getty Center for Education in the Arts. *Beyond Creating: The Place for Art in America's Schools*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 1985.

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