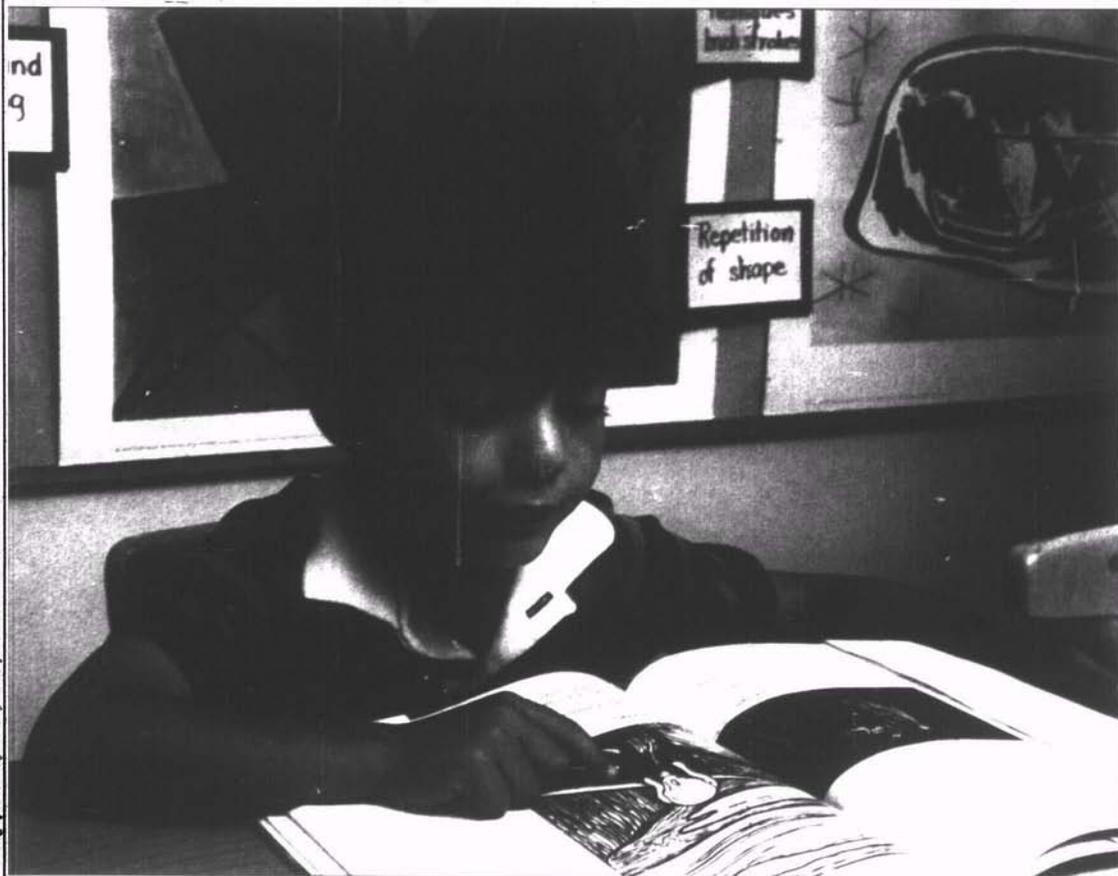


# Making Art Important for Every Child

The Getty Institute for Educators on the Visual Arts is nearing the end of a five-year research and development effort to implement discipline-based art education in the Los Angeles County elementary schools.



Photographs courtesy the Getty Center for Education in the Arts

*Naturally adept at making art, first-graders are surprisingly receptive to learning how artists use techniques to convey their ideas.*

*In the South Bay area of Los Angeles County, first-graders investigate a large reproduction of an abstract painting by Wassily Kandinsky, the father of nonobjective painting. Several children note a "transition" of small to large triangular shapes.*

*In a district east of the Los Angeles Civic Center fourth-graders view a filmstrip about 17th century Dutch landscape painting. The teacher explains how freedom from the domination of the Spanish monarchy resulted in artists' expression of great pride in paintings of the land and waterways of their beloved country.*

These lessons are not typical of art instruction in most schools. They are, though, the types of lessons taught by teachers who have participated in staff development programs of the Getty Institute for Educators on the Visual Arts.

Elementary subjects are usually taught with a semblance of continuity, consistency, and concern for content; and teachers urge students to study these subjects conscientiously. The visual arts, however, if present at all, are usually treated as a time filler—a recreational diversion from rigorous academic study. Too often there is little concern for developing students' understanding of and appreciation for the world of art.

This unsatisfactory state influenced the J. Paul Getty Trust to make the improvement of art education one of



*When students learn to understand art, there is no substitute for seeing the actual works, not just small-scale reproductions where light and color may be distorted.*

its major priorities. Subsequently the Trust established the Center for Education in the Arts to investigate how best to contribute to improving art instruction.

After a yearlong series of interviews with leading art educators, the center

decided to support a *discipline-based* approach to art education. In fall 1982, the center created the Getty Institute for Educators on the Visual Arts, charging it with developing and testing a model for the implementation of discipline-based art education.

### **Art Content from Four Perspectives**

Discipline-based art education treats art as a subject for study, rather than as a recreational activity. Thus, art content is derived from four *disciplines*: art production, art history, art criti-



*School teams of principals and teachers visited art museums and listened to lectures during courses sponsored by the Getty Institute for Educators on the Visual Arts.*

cism, and aesthetics. We believe, in other words, that art should be studied from the perspectives of artist, art historian, art critic, and aesthetician.<sup>1</sup>

This approach clearly differs from traditional practice and, therefore, requires a vehicle for classroom imple-

mentation: a curriculum that organizes content sequentially and cumulatively in the same way other academic subjects are presented to students. Such a curriculum enables teachers to teach art as effectively and comprehensively as other subjects.

Only a few published art curriculums can be considered discipline-based; for example, the SWRL Elementary Art Program, disseminated by Phi Delta Kappa, one of three programs adopted by California.<sup>2</sup> This filmstrip/teacher's manual program includes aesthetic analyses of natural and manufactured environments, basic art-making techniques, and critical and historical analyses of works of art.

The availability of discipline-based art curriculums is essential, of course, in improving art education. But, we asked, would school districts accept externally produced art curriculums; and, if they did, how would the new approach become institutionalized within a district?

#### Getting Started

We knew that overcoming the prevailing attitude—that art is more a Friday afternoon activity than a fundamental part of the curriculum—would not be easy. The Getty Institute staff decided, therefore, that we would look for "targets of opportunity," districts that wanted to make art a substantial subject and an integral part of a balanced school program.

After consulting with a group of superintendents, we initiated a five-year collaborative effort. Early in 1983, we invited interested districts in Los Angeles County to send teams of principals and teachers to a staff development course to be followed by curriculum implementation. Each district sent a team of two teachers and the principal from each of two schools, plus the superintendent and several board members. Special sessions were planned to orient board members and superintendents. Initially we selected seven districts to participate in a three-week summer course and the implementation activities that would be required during the following school year. In 1984 we added two

more districts to the group: 12 new districts joined in 1985.

#### Summer Staff Development Courses

The institute realized that long-term support would be needed. We determined that for two years we would develop district leadership teams; then during the next three years we would increasingly turn over responsibility to these teams.

For the first two years, in three-week summer courses, participants studied art curriculums and resource materials and observed classroom demonstrations of lessons from the curriculums. They learned both leadership skills and strategies for putting

**"Since 1983, the Getty Institute has involved hundreds of teachers and thousands of students in what has become one of the most extensive experiments ever conducted in art education."**



discipline-based art education into practice. We arranged lectures by experts in the art disciplines and visits to art museums; we also remained available for inservice meetings during the school year. Nationally known art educators participated in these courses; after the first two years, several of them became the faculty for two-week area workshops to train people to assume leadership roles in their schools.

### **Implementation in the Schools**

Once they returned to their schools in the fall, participants followed the curriculums their teams had selected. The teams then worked out strategies for providing inservice for their colleagues. These activities ranged from after-school discussions about discipline-based art education to a series of ten two-hour sessions on the use of the art curriculum.

To maintain the momentum generated during the summer courses, the institute conducts a variety of activities and events. In the fall and spring, all participants meet to share implementation experiences and learn more about the visual arts. The institute also distributes an "Information Bulletin" twice a year to all participants, with articles about activities, information about museum programs, and instructional aids developed by participants. Advisory panels of district representatives, superintendents, and board members also meet in the fall and spring to share successes, to solve problems, and to receive feedback from district representatives about plans for future programs.

In addition, during the last three years, the institute has held overnight retreats for school board members to familiarize them with discipline-based art education and the nature of the commitment required to implement such a curriculum. Of course, the best way to convince board members of the value of this approach is to arrange for them to visit classrooms where the new curriculum is being taught. There they can see firsthand the preparation of children to participate in the cultural life of their communities.

## **"Discipline-based art education treats art as a subject for study, rather than as a recreational activity."**

### **Evaluating the Experiment**

Since 1983, the Getty Institute has involved hundreds of teachers and thousands of students in what has become one of the most extensive experiments ever conducted in art education. From the beginning the center has been assessing teams' responses to elements of the summer courses (lectures, workshops, and observations, for example) and the extent to which they have implemented their art curriculums and provided inservice for their colleagues.

The institute staff have also visited classrooms to see for ourselves how participants are teaching art and how school teams are working. Through observation and interviews we are acquiring data about effective techniques as well as deterrents to successful implementation. Now the center is developing achievement tests to estimate the institute's impact on children's artistic skills and their understanding of art. The purpose of these evaluation efforts is to inform the Getty Center of the program's progress and to obtain feedback so that we can improve strategies and procedures.

### **Findings and the Future**

Our evaluations indicate that when classroom teachers have a comprehensive curriculum to guide their efforts, they can teach the arts more effectively. Furthermore, the more inservice a teacher receives, the more effectively he or she teaches from a discipline-based perspective. In addition, with strong support from the principal, the program proceeds rapidly throughout the school.

Superintendents' reactions to the institute's offerings can be summarized as follows:

- The institute has made a "revolutionary" change in the way art is taught.
- Discipline-based art education, implemented through a prepared curriculum, provides a framework for identifying the content and sequence of a district's art program, something that was not always possible before.
- Children are learning to examine art and are acquiring some sense of its history, as they continue to develop their creative skills.
- This approach is also needed at the secondary level, where often only art making is emphasized.

The success of this experiment has encouraged the Getty Center to expand its effort. Recently, funds have been provided to eight regional sites to plan their own staff development and curriculum implementation programs. As school districts across the country implement the discipline-based approach, they will make it possible for every teacher to teach art well, and thus to start every child on the road to lifelong participation in the arts. □

1. This is similar to the approach advocated by the National Art Education Association and in many State Art Frameworks, including California's.

2. Both of the other adopted curriculums, *Discover Art* and *Art in Action*, are graded textbook series.

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