

The Boston VTS Consortium



Transforming Education Through Art

October, 2011 Volume I

EdVestors and VTS Teacher Development

150 educators from the Hennigan and Mather schools use VTS to deepen their teaching repertoire.



Mather teacher Mike Garland facilitates a 4th grade VTS Lesson

Since the founding of VTS, more than twenty years ago, Co-Founder **Abigail Housen** has wanted to examine how teachers learn to practice VTS pedagogy and what, if any,

impact the approach has on teaching beyond VTS lessons.

For years teachers have reported that they use VTS in other curriculum areas -- most often science, language arts and, perhaps surprising, Math, but the organization has never been able to look systematically at how teachers incorporate the method into their larger teaching repertoire. Until now.

Thanks to a two-year grant from EdVestors, a local philanthropic agency committed to driving school improvement through investments in high leverage school reform initiatives, two Boston elementary schools are engaged in whole-school implementation and documentation projects. At the start of Year 2 of the project, teachers and administrators at both: the Mather, in Dorchester and the Hennigan, in Jamaica Plain, report that VTS is already having an impact on the culture of teaching and learning at the two schools.

“The level of conversation is higher,” commented Mather Principal **Emily Cox**. “It’s really impressive to see students at every level not only talking more, but being

able to justify their statements with reasoned evidence from the images.”

Kathleen Edwards, a fourth grade teacher from the Hennigan noted that “Students, more and more, respectfully disagree with one another. Also, more and more they say what they see and then immediately add why they say that.”

Where Year 1 efforts focused on the technical elements of VTS, Year 2 is emphasizing links between VTS and writing. *(continued on p.4)*

Exploring Adolescent Development Through VTS

Because of the generous support from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the Nathaniel Saltonstall Arts Fund, Boston is the site of a new VTS program focused on middle level (grades 6-8) teachers and students. Teachers from the Murphy K-8 and the Perry K-8 are focusing on delivering traditional VTS lessons with images specially chosen for adolescents.

Working closely with **Michelle Grohe**, of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and VTS Co-Founders **Philip Yenawine** and **Abigail Housen**, the Middle School project aims to test the adolescent image set and pilot a specialized approach to training teachers of this unique age group.

Built on the premise that the adolescent brain is uniquely suited to benefit from VTS discussions, the Middle School project is tracking both student and teacher development over the course the three years of implementation and documentation. *(continued on p.4)*

Partner News

The Boston VTS Consortium benefits from a wealth of expertise shared across our partner museum communities. 2010-2011 has been a year of significant expansion and improvement across the area. Below are some highlights.

ISGM Prepares for Grand Reopening



The new Gardner Museum building will open to the public on January 19, 2012, providing visitors with new amenities and learning opportunities. The inaugural exhibition will feature photographs and writing from Tobin's 3rd grade class documenting their journey from their school to the Gardner last spring. This year we are also working with VUE to deepen our understanding of how VTS works at the middle school level, testing images and approaches to teacher professional development. The Museum will close for nine weeks beginning November 14, 2011 to finalize preparations. To learn more about the Gardner's new wing, visit www.buildingproject.gardnermuseum.org.

MFA and VUE Share a Staff Member



Beginning in August, 2011, VTS Regional Coordinator, *Sarah O'Leary* (pictured left) began a new role as Coordinator of School Partnerships at the MFA. Her new post places her at the center of VTS activity in Boston Public Schools and represents, for the first time, a full time focus on VTS school implementation in the region. In addition to providing core training for VUE's six VTS schools, Sarah provides pedagogical and logistical support for the MFA's four partner schools as well as organizational support for the MFA's volunteers corps of Gallery Instructors. She is pictured here with School Teacher Programs, *Suzi Fonda* (center), and Head of School Programs *Willamarie Moore*.

HAM Hosts School Trainer Institute



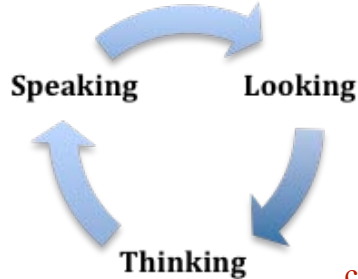
Twenty five educators from as far away as Egypt and Spain gathered in Cambridge and Boston this past July for the inaugural School Trainer 2 Institute. Hosted by the Harvard Art Museums and the MFA, participants concentrated on honing their skills at delivering all-school implementation programs. The Harvard sessions featured two trips to the university's off-site storage facility in Somerville, where participants got to work, in an intimate setting, with collection highlights. Objects were carefully chosen by Director of Education *Ray Williams* and Senior Art Educator *Corinne Zimmerman* expressly for the purpose of facilitating VTS discussions.

Spotlight on Early Childhood

VTS was originally designed for Elementary students (ages five through eleven). More than two decades of research and testing have shown the program to be effective in fostering both language and critical thinking skills in children at this level. However, as more and more attention focuses on early childhood learning, VTS developers are also taking a closer look at what our youngest viewers are doing when they learn using VTS.

Currently, early childhood initiatives are occurring in New York, San Francisco, Hartford, and here in Boston, where students at four schools, the Haynes Early Childhood Center and Higgenson K-8 in

Roxbury, the West Zone Early Learning Center in Jamaica Plain, and Mather Elementary in Dorchester, are integrating VTS discussions into their oral language lessons and early literacy.



It makes sense that VTS should have a positive impact on language development; the discussion-based nature of both the method and curriculum provide students with unique opportunities to participate in meaningful conversations. As more emerging readers experience VTS, trainers and developers will be watching closely to probe the manner in which discussions of art fuel reciprocal developments in language and thinking.

Summer Scenes: VTS on the Fenway



During a break (prompted by a fire drill), participants of July's School Trainer Institute 2 lingered outside the MFA's newly-opened Fenway entrance and enjoyed a perfect, humidity-free Summer morning. Nancy Welch captured these moments.



Top: New York Regional Director Amy Chase Gulden and New Mexico educator Linda Lynch pause between discussions.

*Middle: Montserrat Morales facilitates an impromptu VTS discussion of one of the "baby heads" (more accurately known as *Night and Day* by Spanish artist Antonio Lopez Garcia) flanking the Fenway steps.*



Bottom: Nancy Welch and Hala Eldemellawy enjoy the sunshine.

Mark your Calendar

Fall Consortium Events

November 17, 2011

A Community Conversation
at the Concord Art Association

November 18, 2011

New England Museum Association
Hartford, Connecticut
Introduction to VTS in the Region
with New England Regional Director
Jacqueline Cossentino

November 20, 2011

VTS at the MFA: A Family Event
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
A special afternoon of viewing for
children and their parents

For more information
Contact Sarah O'Leary
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visit us at
www.visualthinkingstrategies.org

EdVestors (continued from p. 1)

Teachers are collecting a portfolio of writing samples and will work with VTS trainers throughout the year to analyze those samples using rubrics focused on critical thinking. “We know that VTS provokes critical thinking in students,” commented Dr. Housen, “and we know that many teachers value that skill. What we need to learn more about is how teachers make sense of the kind of thinking stimulated by art viewing, and how that kind of thinking can enhance the general work of teaching.”

Alison Stevens, EdVestors’ Director of Grantmaking, agrees. “One of the reasons we’re excited about VTS is its ability to put the focus squarely on student learning; learning to listen carefully, observe details, and foster rigorous discourse is at the heart of student-centered learning, and VTS helps us see what that can look like.”

Part 1 in a series of reports on the EdVestors Project

Adolescent VTS (continued from p.1)

Because the aim of the project is to produce an implementation that can be scaled to the district level, VTS trainers and developers are working closely with BPS central office staff to bring together middle-level educators from across the district to consider the unique needs and opportunities associated with teaching students between ages of eleven and fifteen.

Teacher Workshops at the MFA

The Department of Education at the MFA is pleased to host a monthly series of complimentary workshops for teachers. Drawing on highlights from the museum’s collection, along with Massachusetts curriculum frameworks, each session features a speaker and time in the galleries. Fall sessions include:

Degas and the Nude

Nov 9, 2011, 4–7pm

Aphrodite and the Gods of Love

Dec 14, 2011, 4–7 pm

To learn more: E-mail teacherresources@mfa.org.



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