CREATIVE ARTS ADAPTATIONS

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There are relatively easy adaptations to the creative art program in order to make it accessible to students who are blind or visually impaired. While younger students typically participate in creative art within the classroom, most school age students take advantage of this time for an inclusive opportunity with typically developing peers.

Whether art activities take place in your classroom, or in the art room, the creative art area is a place where students can explore a variety of interesting materials. If you have creative art activities within your room, incorporate materials to make the activities more tactual. Add scents and textures to dough and paints. It provides them with a means of self expression and originality. Students can explore a variety of materials, textures and colors, and develop fine motor skills. You can make this time more meaningful to the student who has low vision or is blind by adding scents and textures and using a variety of dimensional materials.

Provide the students with verbal directions about all parts of the activity. When the student hears other students receive directed descriptions of the project, they will not only gain the advantage of hearing the communication for her own reinforcement, but the student will also realize that other students also need guided directions.

Unless the student with a visual impairment has had previous art experience, they may not know where to begin with a creative project until they are presented with an example. Be aware that an example likely will tempt them to reproduce it to some degree rather than produce something that is truly original – and thereby limits their own imagination. Remember that art is often an abstract representation of visual impressions (Why does cotton represent snow?) Help the student to understand the association. When possible, provide real objects that the craft represents. If time and encouragement do not give them the motivation they need, an example can be used. If you are assembling a “craft”, introduce the student to a model of the finished craft first. Guide the student’s hands and indicate landmarks and associations.

Adaptations for Students with Low Vision
For students with low vision, present materials on trays of contrasting color and use materials that have good contrast in general. Use high contrast materials. Highlight outlines of pictures with a black felt tip pen, or color it is supposed to be colored. You may also want to help the student trace the outline and locate important features in the project. When gluing objects on paper, such as the triangle eyes of a jack-o-lantern, it may be helpful to show the student a finished model first, so that the student can see the end result. Encourage students to use their low vision devices to identify color words on crayons/markers and on worksheets.

Adaptations for Students with Minimal or No Usable Vision
For students with minimal vision, initially help the student understand the representation of the picture or project, and the location of materials, by helping her to“look” with their hands and fingers. Guide the student’s hands to locate the “landmarks” with verbally associated descriptors. If the student needs to color an area, place the paper on top of a mesh screening or sandpaper so they get a tactual feedback when they color. You will also want to create a tactual outline or border of the area they need to color in. There are a number of ways to create a tactual border. You can use
dimenional glue or paint, a glue gun, wikki sticks or a sewing pattern wheel poked from the underside to provide tactual information of lines. You will also want to provide indicators for where to apply glue, shapes or materials.

**Art to Develop Cognitive Skills**
The creative art area is another station that lends itself well to teaching concepts. Discuss likes and differences in textures and looks of art materials available; Discuss placing materials in and out of paint, glue, etc.; Discuss how thick and thin material is; Match art materials of the same texture; Discuss if art materials are hard or soft; Discuss if materials are rough or smooth; Discuss shapes of materials; and Discuss paint jars or glue bottles as being empty or full.

**Art to Develop Fine Motor Skills**
Try finger painting with finger paints, shaving cream or pudding to promote finger sensitivity. Provide materials that provide firm input into the hands (squeezing play-doh or putty, play in water or beans, pulling on elastic bands, etc.) to promote tactual discrimination. Squeeze and mold clay or dough to develop hand strength. Practice tearing and cutting paper for arts and crafts activities to develop skillful hands.

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