

ROUGH EDITED COPY

John F. Kennedy Center

"Creative Control: Arts, Self-Determination, and Student-led
IEPs"

February 9, 2016

3:00 p.m. EST

CAPTIONING PROVIDED BY:
ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION SERVICES, LLC
P.O. BOX 278
LOMBARD, IL 60148

* * * * *

This is being provided in a rough-draft format.
Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) is provided in
order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a
totally verbatim record of the proceedings.

* * * * *

>> SARA MITCHELL: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the February installment of our VSA webinar series. I'm Sara Mitchell, your webinar moderator. Today's webinar is called "Creative Control: Arts, Self-Determination, and Student-led IEPs" and is a part of a monthly webinar series that comes out of the office of VSA and accessibility at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. This series addresses topics related to the arts, disability and education.

If you would like to view live streamed captioning of this webinar, you can follow the link you see on this slide and in the chat box of the control panel located on the right side of your screen.

Before we get started, let's make sure that you are familiar with the Go to Webinar control panel on the right side of your screen. This control panel can be hidden by clicking on the orange arrow in the top left corner.

If you need to leave the webinar early, you can exit out of the program by clicking on the "X" in the upper right-hand corner. A recording of the webinar will be available afterwards so that you can catch up on any parts you miss.

Make sure that you have selected either telephone or mic and speakers to correspond with how you are connecting to the webinar. If you're calling in from your telephone, please make sure that you mute your computer speakers.

You have the ability to submit or answer questions using the chat pane located near the bottom of the control panel. If you prefer to say the question instead of typing it, please click on the "Raise your hand" icon in the control panel and I will unmute your microphone during the questions portion near the end of the webinar.

Otherwise, those questions will come directly to me. During the designated question and answer time at the end of the presentation, I will relay them to the presenters.

Within the week, we will send out a follow-up E-mail with a link to the recording of today's presentation, a copy of the PowerPoint presentation and a copy of the webinar transcript. This means you don't need to frantically scribble down notes during the presentation. Instead, you can go back to watch the recording and review the supplemental materials.

I'd like to invite you to join us next month for Poetry in Motion, a Poetry Dance Play for the Middle School Special Education Classroom on Tuesday, March 8th at 3 p.m. Eastern Time. If you haven't already, you can register for it right now by clicking on the link in the chat pane.

If you're active on social media, I invite you to connect with us using #VSA webinar. On Facebook, we are VSA

International. And on twitter, we are@VSAINTL. My colleague, Courtney, will be live tweeting during the webinar, so if you are active on twitter, please say hi to her over there. She would love to engage with you.

And with that, I will turn it over to today's presenters, Susan Oetgen, Eliza Derick, Naté Dearden, and Mo Thomas.

>> SUSAN OETGEN: Good afternoon, everyone. I am Susan Oetgen. Welcome to the VSA webinar entitled "Creative Control: Arts, Self-Determination, and Student-led IEPs." I'm going to minimize that. So I think everyone now sees the same screen that I do. So again, my name is Susan Oetgen. I am an arts and conflict resolution specialist with an organization called SchoolTalk DC. I am delighted to be online today with my colleagues, Naté Dearden from the Utah State Office of Education, Mo Thomas from Two Rivers Public Charter School, and Eliza Derick from Eastern Senior High School.

So this webinar came about as an extension of a presentation that the four of us worked on together last April in Washington, D.C. for a student-led IEP professional learning community meeting, which happened under the auspices of OSSE, which is an acronym for the DC office of the State Superintendent of Education. And by way of a little bit of context, I just would like to let you guys know that Naté was the secondary transition specialist prior to being at the Utah State Office of Education. She was at OSSE.

Sara's helping me out here with a little technical difficulty.

Okay. So while Naté was at OSSE, which you'll hear a little bit more about shortly in her part of the presentation, her portfolio included providing training and other resources to educators and administrators on secondary transition and student self determination best practices, which included student-led IEP practices. So my organization, SchoolTalk, we have partnered closely with Naté and OSSE over the years to support and coordinate many of those secondary transition-related programs that Naté oversaw.

So SchoolTalk's mission is to provide the DC special education community, including students, families, schools, government agencies and community organizations with conflict resolution programs and services to help all of those stakeholders constructively address each stage of conflict, from prevention to whole systems change. And since student self-determination, which is the underpinning of what student-led IEP practices are about, it's very much about preventing and resolving systems-wide conflict, it ensures that students with disabilities can and must make their own decisions about their post-school life.

So under Nate's leadership at OSSE in 2015, SchoolTalk helped to coordinate and convene the student-led IEP professional learning community, where educators like Mo and Eliza and others could have a safe place to learn together about these practices. And for our first meeting, we tapped Mo and Eliza to share their expertise about how the arts can be integrated into student-led IEP practices, as ways for students to explore and express their strengths, preferences, needs and interests, as we put them to actually participate in their IEP process and to achieve their IEP and transition goals.

So we would feel successful in our webinar today if we knew that, in telling our story about the arts and student-led IEP practices, we could provide the following to you listeners, the first one being, what is self determination and what do student-led IEP practices look like. The second one being that arts equal strategies to document and assess student IEP goals, and the third one being that arts equal ways to cultivate student self-determination and participation in their IEP process.

So before we -- you'll hear Naté, and then Mo and Eliza cover each one of those three take-ways. And then afterwards, we'll have time for some questions and contributions from you, which we're really looking forward to. But before we get started with the presentation, we thought we would find out more about you and your students and what you are doing currently in regards to student-led IEP practices.

So we have some poll questions here that Sara will help us with, I think. And the first question is if you could tell us all that apply about the students you teach, what's their age range?

And Sara, if you could help just so we could see, I'm not seeing any poll results.

>> SARA MITCHELL: Absolutely. The poll results are coming up in the poll section of your pane on Citrix. I think it says polls and then there's one popping up right now.

>> SUSAN OETGEN: Okay. Thanks. So we see many of them in the middle school years. So the next question is grades. What grades are you serving students?

Okay. So it looks like still middle school grades. That makes sense.

How about disability categories. We have sort of two separate questions here to make sure that we cover all of them so we could see the disability categories that your students are --

I'm actually not seeing any results.

>> SARA MITCHELL: Our apologies for the technical difficulties. It seems to be going through right now.

>> SUSAN OETGEN: But it looks like on my screen that there are a number of you who are serving students with multiple disabilities, intellectual disability is also well-represented. And we have a few more here. Looks like a lot of representation in speech and language impairment as well.

Okay. Let's go to our next question then so that we can hear a little bit more about who's on the line with us. We're going to change to the next slide. How long have you been implementing student-led IEP practices for your students? Looks like many of you haven't started yet, which means there's lots to learn and talk about. So that's great.

Next question. Who at your school, in addition to possibly you, is implementing student-led IEP practices?

>> SARA MITCHELL: It seems we're having a couple of technical difficulties with our poll questions, but if you are able to access them, please do. Just select all that apply.

>> SUSAN OETGEN: It looks like teachers are really the main folks in your communities who are implementing these practices, transition and special education coordinators as well.

Great. So I think this is our final question here. This question, how can your students participate in their IEPs? We'll be talking a lot about that in the next 45 minutes. But here are some options. Knowing your students, how many with learn about their rights in the IEP process, how many can explore strengths and interests and needs, how many can invite attendees to their IEP meetings, or role play and ways to participate in what to say. There are some interesting results.

Looks like exploring strengths, interests, preferences and needs, a lot of you have that possibility with your students. Also, learning about rights, inviting people to their meetings. And here's another list of ways people can -- students can participate.

So sharing samples of work from class, that's a big one. Reviewing IEP goals and progress towards them, sharing transition goals.

Okay. Great. Well, this gives us some good information who has joined us in the webinar today. I am going to go ahead and turn the webinar over to Naté Dearden.

>> SARA MITCHELL: Naté, I believe you are on mute. But why don't you try unmuting yourself and hopefully we can hear you.

>> NATÉ DEARDEN: Hi. Can everybody hear me now? Okay. I'm excited to share a little bit with you, so I'm going to lay the groundwork for kind of what self-determination is, and how we ended up doing student-led IEPs to build those self-determination skills among our students. So if you could go to the next slide, Susan.

As Susan mentioned, in the District of Columbia, my job was to support school districts, including charter schools and public schools, in preparing our students for what they were going to do after high school. So it sounds like a lot of you are working with middle school youth and maybe some elementary. You may not be as familiar with the secondary transition planning requirements and the IDEA, but those requirements mean that for students ages 16 and older in some states, and 14 and older in other states, that they have an extra part of their individualized education program that talks about what those goals are for after they leave us, and it talks about things we need to be doing now to support them and prepare them for that. And so I often share this slide and a lot of the trainings and presentations I did because I think it -- well, I hope it illustrates that beyond what's in a paper plan, we want all of these successful outcomes to be available to our students, and that includes employment. That includes training, college for some, friendship and dating, and as we looked at all of these things, what we discovered is that self-determination was a vital component of our students being successful in any of these outcomes. Next slide.

So when I was newer to this work, I wasn't entirely aware of what self-determination meant, and so there's a few different definitions floating around out there, but this is one of them. And self-determination for our students means that they know themselves. They know what they want their future to look like and how to plan for it and they're able to identify the supports they'll need to be able to have that control in their life. Next slide.

So Dr. Michael Wehmeyer, he's one of the prominent leaders in the field in terms of researching self-determination among students with disabilities and he defines it this way, self-determination is a characteristic of a person that leads them to make choices and decisions based on their own preferences and interests, to monitor and to regulate their own actions, and to be goal-oriented and self-directing. So I think as you think about that prior slide where we showed some pictures of future interests for our kids, they need these skills that he's pointed out. And later on in this webinar, as you hear from Eliza and Mo, I think you'll notice, you know, activities and things that they're doing with students to help them identify these things and build these skills. Next slide.

Another reason why we were really attracted to this theme of self-determination was that the research supports it, that as we look at students with better self-determination, they are able to advocate for themselves, and as they are involved in their IEPs and their special ed planning processes, we see increased

family and also general education teacher involvement, and we know that that's something that's lacking sometimes in the IEP process. Next slide.

So there's a lot of research out there. If you're a high school person and you're looking to do transition planning for your youth, there are also a lot of assessments, some that are free, some that you can pay for that kind of help you measure where your students are at, and that's because there's some good research out there showing that students who have stronger self-determination skills have better academic outcomes. They are more likely to access that general education curriculum, and they're more successful in independent living and employment situations. And so as we thought about this and saw the research and saw what some other states were doing, this is something that we wanted to build with our kids, because we want these same results for them.

Next slide.

I don't know what your experience has been. Now I've been in special ed in a few different states, and everybody has strengths and everyone has challenges, but I think you'll find districts or schools where you'll see one of these two pictures. And I found this from someone else who gave a presentation one time, and just thought it was a really helpful way of looking at things. The idea is that when we do all of the planning for our students, once they leave us, they are less likely to be successful. I think you can look at the picture on the right of the student who's directed their own driver's ed program, that she appears confident. She's proud of her accomplishments, and so just kind of, you know, some silly little pictures, but to drive home that point that when we think of special education planning, most of our kids have maybe been involved since they were young, and the special ed system, we do so much wrap-around and so much for students and families, so you think about kids leaving us after high school. It can be a big change and it can be very difficult if we haven't allowed them to take the reins and kind of direct their own path, especially as they're getting older and more capable. Next slide.

What we were finding when we first got started with this, and this is something I've seen in multiple places, is that regardless of whether a student knows they're in special education or knows what an IEP is, they may still not recognize that they have a disability. They may not know what an IEP meeting is or the reason for it. Even for some students who are involved in their IEP meetings, they may not really be participating in terms of helping to make decisions, and many students were unaware of what the expectations were for them

during an IEP meeting other than to sit there and, you know, be quiet and have some professional behavior.

So next slide.

As we decided that this is something we wanted to try out, we did that in the context of our secondary transition community of practice, which is a group of folks from different agencies, different schools. We have self-advocates. We have some parents, just kind of a range of people who voluntarily come together once a month to work on transition-related projects. And we had seen what Virginia's department of education was -- has been doing for the past ten years. Excellent work with students in getting them involved in their IEPs and developing more self-awareness. We also work with NSTTAC, which is the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center and what we developed was this student-led IEP demonstration project. So that included learning from Virginia. What Virginia told us was that film was a really important part of their process, and so we actually got some schools together to try and pilot this student-led IEP process, and we filmed them and the process, and some of those films are available on YouTube to watch and see what we learned. But Virginia's advice was that it helps folks to kind of break down stereotypes about how this could be difficult if they can see students and teachers and families being successful in this.

Next slide.

So one of the things we wanted to emphasize is that there's no one right way to hold a student-led IEP. When I did a lot of training, sometimes people would be really hesitant when they heard that term because they envision a student at the front of the room, you know, telling people who's going to talk next, and driving the agenda. That's not necessarily true. What the message we're trying to share today, and that we shared with our educators engaged in this is that let's look at finding creative ways to involve students in this process, and to the point where they really feel like they have a voice. And for us, that meant not just during the IEP meeting, it meant before and after, all stages, because too often we feel if kids are involved, it may just be at that meeting. And for us, what we know is that IEPs are only successful if they're implemented, and if progress is tracked and if we make changes along the way, and so the folks who really engaged in that in our pilot project and beyond found that, you know, that's the most valuable way to get kids involved, where they truly do have that leadership and decision-making role in an individualized way. Next slide.

So again, we share the message that we believe this approach can be utilized from kindergarten to 12th grade. Virginia's been doing it for years. Other states across the U.S. have

been, too. It just looks different for different kids, depending on how old they are and what their capabilities are. And I think that's kind of just illustrated in this graphic. So we can -- well, the one thing I'll point out is it talks about requires investment and preparing students and parents. Obviously this is going to take some more time than maybe what some folks were previously doing, and we believe it will only be successful if everybody works together as a team. But doing it will pay huge dividends within the IEP process, and outside, too. And I think the educators who have done it can testify to that. Next slide.

So just another quote about how it needs to be individualized and based on the student's age, needs and abilities. And just to kind of connect to how we got here today in terms of the arts piece, as we did a lot of trainings, we had educators come to us who worked with students who had more significant disabilities or challenges. A lot of teachers of students with intellectual disabilities. And so sometimes they would come to us and say well, you know, in this video, I see this student up at the front talking and leading, and I don't think my student can do that. And so what we did do is encourage our educators to have high expectations, but to also consider various ways in which students could express themselves, including the arts, including using assistive technology, photography. We really encourage people to broaden their horizons about which type of students could participate, and we believe they all can in some way. Next slide.

This comes from Jim Martin, and he's another professor in the midwest who specialized in some of this work and this is something we share a lot, too. He kind of developed this IEP participation spectrum. So again, earlier when I was talking about, you know, maybe perceptions of what comes to mind when you first hear student-led IEP, Jim Martin's approach is that there's this spectrum that you can see, and the writing's a little bit small, but you can see on the left side, we have IEP meetings taking place without the student present, which I'm sure many of you have been a part of, and then if you look on the right side, you have the student presenting and taking responsibility for most of the process. It's my experience that most folks are probably somewhere in the middle, and that's okay. And so we thought this is a great visual representation we share with students, teachers and families to show, you know, we don't care where you start. The idea is to increase participation in some way, and that's okay if you're not clear on the right end of the spectrum. But this idea that every student can participate in their own way. Next slide.

So I think I'm done. I'm off the hook. But I just want to share that this work -- I'm no longer in D.C.. I'm in Utah now doing dispute resolution, but Susan, some of her colleagues can also speak to even just how student involvement in the IEP process can benefit and dispute resolution, in that context. And through all of the work that we did with transition, and with special ed in D.C., I feel like this has really helped to transform kind of the atmosphere that is sometimes at IEP meetings, where we have, you know, a lot of conflict, and litigation sometimes, and it's just kind of breathed life into the IEP process. When I see students getting involved, I see families more excited, I see teachers more excited to collaborate and work together, and I see the team viewing the child, you know, as an individual and coming out with better goals that are more personalized, and really implementing those to help our kids be successful. So I really believe in this. I think it's also a lot of fun. So if you haven't tried it, I encourage you to do so, and these ladies are going to share some really cool ideas of how you can do that. So I'll turn the time over to -- I think it's Mo. Is it? Okay.

>> MO THOMAS: Thanks, Naté. Just to reiterate the idea around that participation spectrum, here at Two Rivers, we've taken a more holistic approach so that we're not just talking about necessarily the students' active participation within the IEP meeting itself, but also in the participation in the preparation, and sort of in a post-meeting situation where they are actually tracking their goals and their progress along the way so that they're then ready to present the next year as it relates to their IEP goals.

And in that participation, we realize that there were various ways to utilize the arts, not just as a means of expression as students are preparing for that meeting, but also as a means and a way for students to track their progress, as a means of documentation, and assessment as students are meeting and mastering their IEP goals. So we've used the arts in that form.

A couple other things that popped up on your screen right now are the ways that we've done that and I'm going to address each of those ways in today's presentation. Next slide, please.

Starting with role play. We've used role play in a number of ways with our students. First of all, we can use it to help them become aware and be prepared for what's going to happen in the meeting setting. I think a lot of students become quite anxious around this idea of what when I am leading an IEP meeting, I've never done that before, so the role play comes in to play in terms of preparing this. It's also used as a means of helping students realize some of their behavior. So we're -- particularly when we're talking about behavioral goals that

students may have on their IEPs. Role playing actually takes on a more light-hearted approach to addressing some of those really difficult behaviors that we may be seeing in the classroom. So if we are -- and of course you've got an established rapport with your student. But in the ideal setting, we're able to do a role play to talk about some of those really challenging behaviors and some of the strategies that those students can then use to improve those behaviors in the classroom.

It can also be used as a means of instruction. We've often taped videotapes of our times together and then talked about here's what we saw happening maybe in the instructional period. Here are some of the things that we're working on. If we look back at that video, we're able to use it as an instructional piece. And students are able to glean some information from that.

Also wanted to talk about memoirs. Next slide. Yeah.

So we had a student in particular who was given a writing assignment in the general education classroom, and we used writing -- creative writing as a means of artistic expression as well, and this particular student was asked to write a memoir. In fact, the entire class was, around a moment that changed their lives, or an activity that changed their lives. Hopefully for the better. And this student actually chose to talk about his participation in the student-led IEP process. Not only was it a great essay, a great memoir, I should say, about the process itself, it actually ended up being a means to track his ability to master several of his writing goals, which was an area of weakness for him. He shared his IEP memoir, and it was actually posted and published as well. So he's actually shared it at another presentation that I've done on student-led IEPs. But he talks about the process and his interaction in this process of being part of his student-led IEP for several years here at Two Rivers and how that has changed his life and his outlook on his education. So not only was it a reflective piece for him about this process, it was also a means in which we were able to see if he met his writing goals. Next slide.

Okay. This seems super intimidating. We're not asking anyone to rap on the spot. This is actually another means of, again, seeing how students are meeting and mastering goals. We've used arts as a means of expression for projects and presentations. Again, also tracking evidence. This particular idea came from a student who did not necessarily want to participate in his IEP. He had some apprehension around the number of adults talking about him and talking about some of his weaknesses, and so he wasn't quite willing to sit in the meeting, but he was willing to participate and give some of his input.

We had an actual school-wide assembly that was taking place, and he had been asked to be one of the emcees within that assembly, and he was trying to come up with creative ways to present all of the information, especially around vocabulary, where students dress up as particular vocabulary words, and he wanted to incorporate his large vocabulary in some way. He had been chosen for that role particularly because he was a dynamic student, but also because he loved words. And so in his presentation, he decided to create a rap.

Well, it turned out that the student started to create the rap and he started to use some of his elaborate vocabulary words in order to get students excited about this assembly. He came to me one day and he was like, you know, this is actually meeting one of my goals. My goal is that I use at least three or four academic vocabulary words that are grade-level appropriate within my speech during my writing. Can't we use my rap as one of those pieces of evidence? And indeed, we did. So that was his other piece of contribution -- bit of contribution to his student-led IEP, even though he wasn't in the room. He actually -- his parents were able to listen to his rap and see that he had met and mastered that particular goal.

So again, using the arts as a means to create projects, and as presentations, which are also evidence of mastery of goals. Next slide.

Another great anecdote about students being able to use their artistic ability as a means of collecting evidence and providing assessments, I had one particular student who loved to write. She was definitely an artistic student who was fluent in theatrics, as well as in music, but really took an interest in writing, particularly creative writing. She was in a creative writing class here, and she was constantly writing, even in her spare time, she was writing. And so this was truly her means of expression. But when it came around to the time when we were preparing for her IEP meeting, as we looked at her current IEP, she was like, oh, there are several of these goals I've mastered. And I was like really. You know, usually when we're talking about mastering of goals, teachers are providing a lot of data, and she said, I can provide data. I was like, well, okay. I said, you know, we're going to be looking at this -- we're going to leave these goals here for now, but we'll look at them during the meeting and if you have data to bring at that time, that would be great.

It turns out that that student brought a manila folder full of all of her particular writings, her writing journal, as well as some of the writing samples from our English class that she was able to provide to the team to show the team that she had mastered those goals. So explaining to them that some of the

things that she had mastered through the writing samples that we had given, but a lot of them that she was able to master in her own creative writing. So her personal expression ended up being a means for assessing whether she was mastering her goals or not. Next slide.

I know that we all think about PowerPoints as a presentational mode for student-led IEP, and they very well can be. A lot of my middle schoolers in particular love the Prezis, which is the moving PowerPoint, and it serves as a way, they have thematic motifs there that you can use to create your presentation, so it serves as a way to express themselves through that thematic piece. But as well, they're implementing and providing information that speaks to their goals and their participation within their IEP. And we've not only used it as a means for that presentational time during the meeting, but again, also as a means of being able to prepare thoughts, organize ideas and present them in a formal manner and being able to talk about things. I think a lot of students relied on Prezis and PowerPoints when there's a bit of presentation around presentation within a group setting. So if there's any speaking and listening grades that we're looking for in class, students will often say, may I express my ideas through a Prezis versus just having to speak the entire time. Maybe I can do some voiceover to this PowerPoint or Prezis presentation, and that often takes away some of the apprehension around speaking in public. Next slide.

I know this looks a little bit faint, but you may be able to see what is on my left-hand side, there is a puzzle, and on my right-hand side, there is a hand, and we use these visual representations as symbolic ways to talk about self-awareness. So students are often in the preparation process, particularly if they've never participated in their IEP before. It's often easier to talk about their awareness of themselves. I know that someone mentioned talking about strengths, weaknesses and what students need to be successful in the classroom. That is often our entry point in talking and preparing students for their student-led IEP. But oftentimes we can also use visual representations to do that as well. We talk about the puzzle as being the pieces of you. And so we ask students to fill each puzzle piece with something about themselves, something that they know about themselves. The same for the hand. Each finger represents some very important fact about you. And then we talk about the idea around what if one of those pieces was not there. What if the hand was missing some fingers, would you still be the same person? Would you still be represented the same way? And we talk about how important it is to know all of the parts of yourself. And then we talk about if there's anything that

has not been included within the puzzle or the hand that still represents those students. Again, this is an activity, a visual activity, that's symbolic around the idea of them understanding themselves. But it does create a visual representation so that they can refer back to that at any time if they need to just to remind themselves of the things that they know about themselves, and also helps them to understand what goals they have, their IEPs, and how they're going to meet and master those goals. Next slide.

So I believe that's it for me, as I've talked about all of the ways that you can utilize the arts in terms of collecting data, meeting students' goals on their IEP, and as a means of expression, as well as for the purpose of self-awareness.

Now I'm turning it all over to Eliza so she can talk about take-away number 3.

>> ELIZA DERICK: All right. Everyone hear me? Yeah? All right. Great.

So for take-away 3, we're going to be talking about the arts itself and how they can be used as different strategies to kind of creating that sense of self advocacy and students' voice in their IEPs. I always like to kind of preface with my students, as their teacher, as their case manager, and that I myself am an artist and visual and performing artist, and grew up with multiple disabilities, with dyslexia, with ADD, and it was through visual and performing arts that I was able to find firsthand, you know, my own sense of self, self-pride, self-advocacy. And so when I speak about these things, they resonate with me on a very personal level as well as a level as, you know, an educator.

So today I just want to share with you a couple of different activities and goals that I've been able to incorporate into my classes. I mostly work at the high school setting. But I work with our students on everywhere from our diploma tracks all the way to the certificates. So I have some students that stay till age 22 and are really with our most severe level of intellectual disabilities, autism, non-verbal students, and really trying to give them a chance to find ways to use the arts to express things about them that otherwise either they wouldn't know, or they wouldn't be able to communicate out to the outside world.

So the first activity that I love doing are called identity boxes. Basically, you take your generic box. It could be a shoe box. It can be a little box, a big box. It's really kind of up to what supplies you have. And for this one, I really like to give creative control to the students to just decorate it, design it, work on creating a collage that somehow represents themselves, things that they like, that speak to them. I think these -- for this particular set of identity

boxes, we spray painted them first in metallic colors, which, of course, they loved. But then it also leads in to an activity where they have to put three tangible objects inside the box and do a presentation in front of their class, where they talk about what these objects mean. Obviously I modified this for students that are non-verbal. But then the other piece that is incredibly crucial, I have a photograph coming up later that you'll see with all the projects, is following up with an artist statement. And again, this really ties into the writing piece and meeting writing objective goals like Mo was referring to. And not only allow for students to reflect back on their art and what they've learned, but to see most the art project and the process of writing as a process. You know, that this is about creating projects that are much more than just a, okay, we're going to sit down today, color a picture, you know, a worksheet, be done with it, and it's over. These are longer projects that they're invested in, that they've worked on for months at a time, that they have artist statements that they've created, and then we display around the school in a gallery setting, allowing the children then to do gallery walks and to speak on which pieces of each other that they like. And the number of skill sets that it kind of is addressing both with their verbal communication skills, their written communication skills, and that ability to kind of self-express their own interests is incredibly powerful. Next slide.

So another activity, and this is, again, a little more geared for my high school students who are working on their transition goals, but we began doing digital vision boards this year. One of the things that's really great about this is it allows me to one -- it's opposed to just cutting pictures out of a magazine in the collage style of the identity box. The vision boards, I mean, this allows -- we create these on the computer so that way I can assess do they have basic computer skills down independently. Can they open a word document, can they -- do they know how to properly cut and paste and size an image on to a Word document? Can they add borders, can they change fonts? Which seem like simple skills, but, you know, as they move in to high school and they're moving into more advanced writing expectations, to do it in a way that feels very nonthreatening, but yet addresses, okay, you know, what are some real possible career ideas that you're interested in? What are some colleges that you have considered, or the setting in which you might want to do some continued education, whether that's night school or a two-year college or a four-year college, or, you know, where do you see yourself living? Do you want to be able to travel? And then I allow the students to bring this vision board in to the meeting with them. And so when we get to the transition

section, it's not just me, you know, reading off to the parents, you know, a list of objectives that we've coming up with of goals, but it gives them an opportunity to have something guided in front of them where they don't feel nervous, they know what it's going. They have visual representation, and kind of give them -- gives them a platform to help organize their thoughts.

The other thing that I really like with the vision board or the identity box are strategy is a lot of times students, especially with disabilities, might not consider themselves -- might have, you know -- lack having strong fine motor skills and don't consider themselves to be good fine artists, and they'll say, oh, I'm not creative. I'm not an artist. I can't draw. And it really helps take that level of pressure away, where you can begin to say, all right, well, I teach art, and I'm not a really -- a very good drawer or a painter, but I can still think in creative ways and organize my ideas in ways that make sense visually through pictures without having that pressure of well, if I can't perfectly draw, then, you know, I'm not creative. Next slide.

So again here, you can see just a little blurb of some -- these are words of wisdom posters that they had to come up with, using famous quotes that they illustrated, and you can just kind of see below in purple. Those are all their artist statements. Just so you see that again, this is something that we take not only -- and I explain to them with their artwork that they do, that it's something they should feel proud of. You know, it's not a scribble that you do once, but just like with our writing, we do rough drafts. We do, you know, graphic organizers. We edit. We re-edit. And then when our final project is, you know, done, that it should be something that they do feel proud about to hang on the walls, that other people can read, and I think that's been a really powerful thing, especially I also have taught an IB, international baccalaureate course in the past, and I know one of the most positive feedbacks I've gotten as a teacher one time is being stopped by an administrator to compliment me on the IB student artwork that had been displayed in the halls. And I had to correct the administrator and say actually, no, that's the artwork that has been created by my self-contained special education students. But I'll make sure I pass on the credit to them, too.

So again, giving them an opportunity, giving students of any learning style or background an opportunity to feel empowered, and just pride of what they've done, I think can do -- can help them leaps and bounds gain the self-confidence they need later when it comes to time for them to speak, whether it's in a meeting or for a job interview or really preparing them for these next steps in life. Next slide.

Okay. Yeah, so you can see again just -- I love this one. Oscar Wild. Be yourself. Everyone else is taken.

So just a quick glance as to some of the ideas, and really helping them hone in and embrace that idea of, you know, the Dory, just keep swimming, you know, not giving up on yourself. I mean, what might look like a simple cartoon drawing on the one hand, if you get deep into the artist statement, you reveal a much more powerful and in depth meaning that the student gained from it.

Okay. So then there's also spirit animals is an activity that I did just talking about, again, and this is something that is for younger students, or even middle school students that are kind of doing that whole sense of self identity, talking about symbolic qualities that can be associated with different animals, and letting them explore and experiment with different mediums. Here they've used Sharpie, marker, and oil and chalk pastels. And then again, of course, they had to do their artist statement, which is, again, working on their typing skills, their computer skills, and allows them to kind of give another insight into their personality.

Another one -- and again, the coat of arms activity, I think this is a great one. I don't know what it is about tinfoil and sharpie markers, but kids go crazy over it. The coat of arms is a really powerful one for family engagements because whereas the other ones were more about the individual, this one kind of looks more about symbolic colors, shapes, images. We do a history piece with this as well so you can integrate across the curriculum as well. But one of the most powerful experiences I had with the coat of arms activity was actually with a non-verbal student who, in three years of teaching him, I hadn't heard him speak an entire word. And after this activity, he did -- he did write. But I learned from him that he considered himself to be strong, brave, loyal to his family. All through his use of symbolic images and colors, and so it was just such a powerful moment as a teacher and an educator to use and utilize the arts and writing in a way to kind of give a voice and open up a pathway of communication for a child who otherwise often was overlooked, or not given a voice. Next slide.

And then one of the last things is this year I had the opportunity and joy of actually speaking on a panel with a student of mine for the Kennedy Center VSA for an art opening they had. And it was just one of the highlights of my teaching career so far, to then see all these activities, the boy that's seated in the blazer there next to me was on the panel discussion, and to listen to him prepare and talk about how important the arts were for him as a student with disabilities, and then student standing, another student of mine, actually

didn't even know that he was going to be called on. He was called on on the spot, put on the spot, and spoke so eloquently about his experiences with the arts and how it had helped give him confidence in a dance class setting that is inclusion. And so again, any time we can actually, you know, as a theatre major, you know, I was often talked about how to take something from page to stage, and the same is true even more so as, you know, an arts, performing arts and visual arts teacher, you know, to take it from the classroom, but then to real-life scenarios, where our students are equipped with the skills and the motivation they need to get up and to speak eloquently and with pride of the work they've done. And the talent and the gift that they have to offer.

All right. So our experiences as educators, that this is not another add-on. It must be natural, and it can't be forced. We also wanted to really hone in on the idea that this can be used as a modality for expression or as a means of evidence.

Number 3, you are doing more than you realize. Please, we don't want anyone to feel like, you know, that this is stuff is overwhelming. If you really look back and think hard on what you're already incorporating into your classroom, it's already there, I'm sure.

And in all service of self-determination, self-awareness, self-advocacy and self-expression, and sharing our ideas of our practice, but not limiting yours. So I know we are very close to time here, but we have time for questions as well. So I'll turn it over.

>> SARA MITCHELL: Absolutely. This is Sara again. Now, to our webinar participants who are still here, now is the time to either raise your hand or start writing your questions, if you haven't already, into the question box. Just for the moment, we have a couple.

My first is for Eliza. We -- you mentioned during the ID boxes activity that you do modify the presentation component for students who are non-verbal. Could you talk a little bit more about that. What is it that you do?

>> ELIZA DERICK: So, for example in that section, the student, while he was non-verbal, he could write, and so I would allow him to have his written artist statement as a guide that I would photocopy and print out to the other students so they can read it as he would walk around and show it, or I would read it aloud for him. But again, you know, it really depends in the classroom what comfort level the other students are at. If you have multiple, non-verbal students, you know, I have students now with limited vocabulary. I don't have anyone who's completely mute, but again, I do a lot, a lot, a lot of picture symbolism, color symbolism, allowing them to, you know, have

visual pointing queues. But it really, it depends where they are in their written skills. If those are a limitation, then that's, again, trickier. But, you know, it's mostly using pictorially-based communication.

>> SARA MITCHELL: Great. Thank you so much. Our next question comes from Lisa Lawson, and I will let you use your best judgment on who it should go towards.

For a district that are just getting started on this journey of student-led IEPs, is there a particular resource that you recommend to begin introducing the idea to staff, schools and parents?

>> NATÉ DEARDEN: I can let others speak up, too, but just as we mentioned, we really look to Virginia. They have a project called "I'm Determined," and they have a Web site that is full of resources. When we ask them how they got started, they said it was one teacher with two students and his wife at another school with two students. And so what they emphasized to us is start small. I think to Eliza's point at that last slide, kind of think about what you're doing already and how you could build on that, and then again, Virginia shared with us that film examples, as well as student testimonials or examples are the most powerful in sharing and getting others excited about it. So we'd suggest starting small as one or two kids, using those resources, and then using those students and those teachers to spread the message so that you don't bite off more than you can chew, and you can learn also what they learned because different districts and different states have, you know, little things that apply to them or that they do differently and so then you can really make it your own process.

>> SUSAN OETGEN: If you're curious about the videos that Naté mentioned earlier, feel free to get in touch with me, Mo, and Naté, the three of us, probably Eliza, too.

>> SARA MITCHELL: That's great. One thing we can do is we will reach out about those and disseminate them, along with the other materials from this webinar.

Well, you know, since we are a couple minutes past 4:00, we are about ready to end the webinar for today. Thank you all so much for joining us. Now, our webinar participants that are still here, we would love it if you could remain on the webinar for just a couple moments longer so that you could complete a short evaluation survey that will open when you close the window from the webinar. We really appreciate your feedback.

And last but not least, thank you so much for joining us. For questions or comments, please feel free to contact me by phone or E-mail. They're both up on the screen, but my E-mail is SPMitchell@Kennedy-center.org, or you can find me by phone at 202-416-8873.

Thank you all so much for joining us, and I hope you have a great day.
[Webinar concluded].