

ROUGHLY EDITED FILE

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

November 19, 2013

Working with Students Who Have Visual Impairments

3:00 p.m. (ET)

REMOTE CART PROVIDED BY **ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION SERVICES**

800-335-0911

INFO@ACSCAPTIONS.COM

* * * * *

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

* * * * *

Lisa : Hello, everyone and welcome to understanding differences, an exploration of prevalent identifications for the teaching arts working with students who are blind or low vision. I'm Lisa Damico, your moderator and organizer. This series addresses topics related to arts, disability and education. If you would like to view live stream captioning of this webinar you can follow the link on the slide and in the chat box of the control panel located on the right side of your screen. Before we get started, let's take a moment that everyone is ready and familiar with the go-to webinar control panel that is on the right side of your screen. If you need to leave the webinar early, you can exit out TV program by clicking on the X in the upper right corner. Make sure you selected telephone or mic and speakers to correlate how you are connected to the webinar. You have the ability to submit questions located at the bottom of the control panel. If you would rather say the question you can click on the raise your hand button and I will unmute your microphone. Your questions will come to me and at the end of the presentation, I will relay them to our presenters. I also want to emphasize that following the presentation, I will send out a follow-up e-mail with a link of the recording of today's presentation, the copy of the power points and any handouts the presenters want to share, plus a copy of the transcript. This means you don't have to worry about taking notes during the presentation. I want to make you let you know about next month's webinar that is scheduled for Tuesday, December 10 from 3:00-4:00 Washington, D.C. time. This is understanding prevalent for the teaching arts will focus on working on students who are deaf or hard of hearing. We have a stain glass artist and a retired art director from the Rhode Island school for the deaf who will be joining us. I encourage you to register for that now. I will now turn it over to our presenters today. We have Dr. Stuart Wittenstein who is the superintendent for the California School for the Blind who will get us started today. Then Minda Tayam who is the art teacher for the California School for the Blind who will share her knowledge with us. I will turn it over to you.

Dr. Wittenstein: Thanks, Lisa. I'm Dr. Stuart Wittenstein the superintendent for the California School for the Blind in Fremont, in the Bay area of San Francisco. I want to tell you about the students who will be featured in the presentation and

some of the terminology you will hear. C.S.B. is a state special school that serves the entire state for the department of education. The students who are referred to us have severe vision loss. Some are totally blind. Students who have some vision but not enough to use as their primary sensory modality, are said to be blind or functionally blind. Most of our students have an additional disability or learning need and that is true of more than 50% of the school-age population of children who are visually impaired. I became interested in art because I was interested in expanding their tactile abilities for Braille reading and the exploration of tactile graphics, such as maps and diagrams. I became convinced that the art program is not only important to introduce tactile skills to children but also to ready them for instruction in the expanded core curriculum, also known as the E.C.C. for students who are blind and visually impaired. The E.C.C. is designed to go beyond the standard core curriculum to introduce students who have visual impairments to other skills they may have missed due to their vision loss. We want to introduce you to the unique educational needs of children who are blind and visually impaired and how art education can play a key role in helping children learn about themselves and the world around them. There are incidental learning experiences by sighted students that have to be systematically and sequentially taught to the visually impaired student. The core curriculum for visually impaired students is not the same. It is much larger and more complex. The work was essential in forming the curriculum. Of course, life is full of incidental learning experiences: people working or commuting to work, photographs, paintings, television shows, things that are so common and taken for granted are not always available to the child who is blind. Most of the things sighted children learn come to them through their vision. The idea that a child might not have access to all of this information may seem tragic. People who've never met a child with a visual impairment may imagine that child in only one dimension. They may see that child as a person who is only reacting to loss but not as someone who is learning about a world full of sounds, tastes, textures and forms that are perceived in different ways. This is where the E.C.C. is a critical tool to learn about the world. Topics of the E.C.C. include skills such as concept development, communication skills, Braille reading, and listening / social

interaction skills, recreation/leisure skills, daily living skills, orientation and mobility, career education, assisted technology, self-determination, and for students with low vision, visual efficiency skills. Although Art education is not specifically cited in the E.C.C., it is evident that art education can be the means by which these curricular areas can be assessed and addressed. We hope to point these out for you during this presentation. There are different issues regarding students who are blind or have low vision. If the goal is to give them information about line, form, balance, and perspective, there is much good research available about how to present such information in tactile formats, and how to teach children who are blind to gather information with accuracy and efficiency. Among the resources available are *Art History through Touch and Sound*, from *Art Education for the Blind and APH*, and *Drawing and the Blind* published by Yale University Press. When the goal is to also provide aesthetic experiences that most children access visually, the challenges are more complex. Children who are blind or visually impaired have a wide range of sensory abilities. Their vision is so impaired it interferes with their access to environmental information. The art curriculum provides many opportunities for such development. The question arises: what is the aesthetic environment for someone who has no vision or has vision that is severely impaired? Judith Rubin, an art therapist, coined the term "tactile aesthetic" to describe a qualitatively, not quantitatively different aesthetic for those with visually impairments. In her studies in the mid '70s, Rubin presented three different sculptures done by children who were blind, had low vision, or were sighted to judges from each of these three groups. Her hypothesis that the judges would prefer the art by someone like himself or herself and reject the art by those unlike themselves proved to be accurate. The judges who were blind preferred the art from the artists who were blind, the judges with low vision preferred the art by artists with low vision, and the sighted judges preferred the art of the sighted artists. This informs us about the environment that these children learn in as well as their preference of art. The work of art may not look right to the sighted viewer but might feel right to the tactile artist and viewer. With these concepts in

mind, I turn us over to the art teacher for the California School for the Blind, Minda Tayam.

Minda: Thank you for your introduction. I'm here to talk about how we do art with students who have visual impairment. The first slide shows a young boy, Oliver, painting bright colors on a large sheet of white paper. He is concentrating and fully engaged in the process of painting. I chose this image because it illustrates the principle goal of the art program--for children to actively participate and enjoy their creative process. I see my role as an art teacher as a facilitator of this engagement.

Lisa: What you want to do is click on the bottom of the screen at the power point presentation and click on the screen again. There you go.

Minda: Thank you. A little technical issue... The next slide shows a quote; at the heart of the program is the belief that "every human being is endowed with a creative spirit." This is a quote by Viktor Lowenfeld who explored the therapeutic aspects of creativity with children who are blind. Below the quote is an image of Faith, a student who is blind. She is holding a cup of paint in one hand and a brush in the other, painting on a large sheet of paper on the wall in the painting room. Faith has a lovely smile on her face as she is enjoying the sensory experience of moving her arm freely, applying brush strokes to paper. I recently read an e-mail from a mother whose child is deaf/blind, and she described how excited and happy her daughter was to bring home and share the collage she made in art that day. So, for children who have visual impairment, the joyful experience of making and sharing art may be overlooked if not purposely introduced. It may be surprising to learn that our students can benefit from participating in hands-on art experiences. The benefits include: enhancement of language and communication skills as students are often motivated to share their work with others; support for concept development-- handling physical materials promotes understanding of spatial concepts, cause and effect, motion and balance; promotion of fine motor and tactile discrimination skills. Children who are blind need to learn to explore with their hands to get accurate information from the world around them. Developing fine motor

skills also supports Braille literacy. Alternative ways for communicating feelings and ideas; art offers students alternative forms of expression, and this can be especially important for students who are English language learners or for those who might not be so verbal. Through art experiences, students develop discipline as they attend to the sequence of steps often involved in completing a project. Students become aware of recreational choices. For example, my student, Anna discovered that she enjoyed building sculptures out of cardboard and painting them with acrylic paint. She asked her family to help her get the supplies to continue making sculptures as a hobby at home. Students practice self-determination. Self-determination is a key component of the expanded core curriculum. Art offers students opportunities for making choices in the creative process. Students develop self-esteem and confidence as they become more adept at using tools and materials independently. Art also helps children release tension and enjoy themselves. Students often comment how art helps to alleviate stress. The next slide shows Kevin, who has low vision, seated at the table holding up his ceramic vase for a better look as he brushes his piece with glaze. The CSB art program offers young people who have visual impairments a safe place to do art. It honors the individual art-making process. For example, one student who is blind would choose the same activity whenever she came to class. She always made a point of asking for paper and crayons. "Nothing messy", she would say. I checked with her now and then about trying new materials. Clay? Collage? Painting? Nothing messy. She would continue to draw marks on paper, but close to the end of the school year she announced one day that she wanted to make a collage and even use glue; thus expanding her range of tactile experiences. Oftentimes, students have their own timing and when they are ready for experiences they will let you know. A nonjudgmental approach allows for creative exploration and development of skills. The art program encourages independent decision making. This slide shows Travis, a tall young man standing in the painting room with a large sheet of blank paper on the wall behind him. He is gazing thoughtfully at a table full of paint containers as he considers which colors to choose for his painting. The art program invites exploration of a variety of media. Some of the choices our students have are ceramics,

painting, collage, drawing, print making, and sculpture. The art program promotes enjoyment and confidence through creative expression. Often students speak quite candidly about their work. This slide shows Joshua seated at a table wearing dark glasses. He's bending over his collage with a bottle of glue and pressing materials on a board to make his collage. Above the photo is a quote by Joshua: "Making things can help open your mind and maybe even cheer you up." For the most success, art activities need to be individualized. It is useful to consider the following. What does the student enjoy? What materials is the student comfortable with? If the student has low vision are glare and contrast sensitivity an issue? Are there other disabilities? What does the student need to fully participate? If possible, consulting with teachers and other I.E.P. team members can be very helpful. Sometimes the students themselves will let you know what they prefer. Regarding contrast, this slide shows a photo of Amy, who let me know that she prefers working on a dark colored surface for high contrast. On the table before her, she's glued brightly colored foam pieces on her collage. Also considering contrast, the collage itself is placed on an orange cafeteria tray and she placed a bottle of glue at the top of the tray. The next slide shows (oops, sorry) the next slide shows Athena painting a large Jack-O-lantern on a sheet of paper on the wall in the painting room. The large white sheet of paper against the dark blue background helps her to see her work. She told me the dark background helps her to find where to put her brush. Considering appropriate seating is also important. To reduce glare, Michelle prefers working with her back towards the windows. There is a picture of Michelle seated at the table with the windows behind her and she is shaping clay with her hands. Classroom environment, safety, and accessibility. This slide has three images. The first shows how tables are placed in the classroom with lots of space around them to allow for mobility. It is essential to orient students to the classroom environment, so I usually give a guided tour, using human guide technique when a student is new to the classroom. Human guide technique involves inviting the student to place a hand on your arm with you walking slightly ahead. As we walk, I give a detailed description of the placement of furniture, where the equipment and materials can be found so they are easily accessible. The next image shows Chris, a

student who is blind, using the back of his hand to trail along the shelf where the art materials are located. The last image shows a close-up of a few of the containers. Scissors, markers, and paper are labeled in large print and Braille so students can access materials as independently as possible. The next slide shows the clay table and the painting room. The clay table has tools and containers and individual boards that define each student's work area. The painting room is a separate little room adjacent to the art room. Pictured is the paint table in the center of the room and large sheets of paper pinned to the wall for painting. The next slide shows the area where students work on collages, drawings, and sculptures. The table is set with individual cafeteria trays that serve as place mats or place settings. This table is beside the shelves that have the labeled tools and art materials for easy accessibility. In another part of the room is a sand table with a bucket, shovel, and an assortment of toys. For some students who have visual impairment, it may take a while to warm up to using conventional art materials. Imagine how you might feel if you had no vision and someone places your hands in something wet or sticky. It is important to prepare students for tactile experiences before guiding their exploration of a material. It is helpful to allow a lot of time for exploration and to provide clear description to accompany actions. The sand table offers a soothing experience for some of our students who are tactile sensitive. I've observed that playing in the sand can be a transition, a stepping stone to other tactile experiences. Adaptations. Pictured are two examples of adaptations. One is a close-up of the table in the painting room. The table has holes cut out to hold cups of paint. Each cup is labeled identifying colors in large print and Braille. The table also has 3D wooden shapes that correspond to each color. Students know they can find a paint cup beside each shape. Next to this picture is a photo of a plastic tray that has wells that hold paint cups in place and keeps them from tipping. This can be found at art supply or school supply stores. Consistent workspace organization is essential. There are two images on this slide; the first one shows the paint table again. When I orient children to the painting room, I let them know that the colors are labeled and arranged in a particular order that is consistent. The students become familiar with the paint table and they learn that the

colors are always in the same place. The next image shows how the work area is organized to make a collage. There is an orange cafeteria tray with raised edges. Containers of collage materials are placed on the right side of the tray and the bottle of glue is at the top of the tray. To the left is a smaller tray with a damp wash cloth for students to use if they need to wipe their fingers. Collage making is a popular activity. This slide shows a photo of Amy again smiling happily as she works on a collage. Her work area is organized so she can access materials easily. Here's a collection of collage materials, often recycled items of different shapes and textures. Popsicle sticks, feathers, puzzle pieces, buttons and fabric appeal to our students. Some of the resources for these materials are art supply stores and a local frame shop sometimes donates scrap matte board. What I found useful is a place near where I live in Oakland called the Creative Reuse Depot. They have all kinds of great recycled items. Shown here are three examples of collages made with items such as recycled thread spools, buttons, Popsicle sticks and cardboard packaging material. Sticky-board collage. Sticky-board collage is one way of making a collage without using glue. This slide has two images. One shows the materials for making a sticky-board collage. Use clear contact paper and tape it to a poster board. It provides a tactile experience that is not messy. Also, the adhesive paper makes a sticky sound that students seem to like. In the other image, Abby is pressing materials on her collage with her fingers. The next slide shows three photos. In the first photo, Tommy who is deaf/blind is making a collage using tactile grid paper from American Printing House for the Blind. He's touching the raised dots and using the grid as reference to place his foam stickers. The finished collage shows how Tommy has purposely lined up the stickers to create a design. In another example, Paula used a tactile grid as a guide to apply colors for her painting. She had specific ideas about where she wanted to paint flowers and leaves. Her finished painting here has red, pink, orange, and dark green colors that she intentionally arranged on this paper. Collages are composed in a variety of ways. Often collages reveal the individual preferences of the students. Angelique made a collage with artificial flowers and bits of smooth colored glass. Elvia chose brightly colored strips of paper which she twisted and folded.

Amy used bits of mosaic pieces for her collage. Pictured in the next slide are two student-made sculptures that many of the children seem to enjoy. The first is a ceramic sculpture with a smooth, undulating, metallic surface. The other sculpture is constructed with a variety of wooden pieces. Children have commented how they like exploring the surfaces of these sculptures. For persons who have visual impairment, creating and appreciating art is a multisensory experience. It could involve weight, texture, and even temperature. The next slides show Jot, a young lady wearing an apron and seated at the table. She is building a sculpture using glue and strips of colored paper. Jot commented that doing art was more fun than doing math. Yet, while she was working on this sculpture, which took many weeks to complete, she would keep track of the number of strips she used each time and asked me to record the number. When it was completed and displayed in the art show, she challenged students to guess how many strips of paper it took to make the sculpture--doing math without planning to do math! Styrofoam, cardboard, and paper strips are some of the materials offered to making sculptures. Styrofoam sculpture pieces were painted with acrylic paint. The next slide shows the Jot's finished paper strip sculpture standing majestically on a pedestal at the school art show. In the background, there are other artworks on display. By the way, it took 145 pieces of paper to make this sculpture! The next few slides feature more student-made sculptures. Here's one made of wood scraps in a variety of shapes and sizes. Plaster strip sculpture of hands. To make these sculptures the students wore gloves and they dipped the plaster infused strips in water and wrapped them around their hands. There is also a paper mache mask of a seal, with Wikki Stix for whiskers and pipe cleaners for hair. The student brought in a pair of old sun glasses to put on his mask. He was so proud of his sculpture and named it Lucille. Wikki Stix is another material students enjoy working with. The student here, Stuart, is shown manipulating the brightly colored strips of wax, forming the shape of a rollercoaster, which Stewart loves to ride whenever he gets the chance. In the next slide, Stuart is shown again at the clay table, completely absorbed in the process of shaping a bowl out of clay. Working with clay is a favorite activity for many of our students. As he points out, "Clay is especially fun; I can change and control

what I do with it. It's a great let out!" A photo of the clay table, again, shows the place mat sized boards where the students work. These help to define the individual work areas. There's also a collection of tools on the table. Common place objects, such as rolling pins, a garlic press, a mallet for tenderizing meat, a tracing wheel all produce different textures in the clay. Pictured also on this slide is Elena, who is using a garlic press to make shredded cheese for her clay pizza. Here are examples of finished textured ceramic pieces. The pieces have been glazed, revealing the textured surfaces that the students enjoy touching. The next slide shows Julissa using a plastic model of a zebra as reference for a clay sculpture. She is holding the clay piece next to the little toy, the little plastic toy and comparing as she works on her clay project.

Modeling and guidance. It is worth mentioning again the importance of allowing students time to systematically explore objects. If the student only touches one part of something, his understanding could be inaccurate or incomplete. Showing students how to use their hands to get information is essential for developing concepts. When demonstrating how to work with art materials, I will often use hand under hand guidance. I check with the student first and have them place their hand on top of mine so I can show them how to touch and handle the materials. The photo shows a young man, Yosief, glazing his ceramic sculpture. As he paints with one hand, his other hand touches his sculpture, guiding his work. As an alternative to clay, I sometimes make my own clay dough but a favorite material that the students like is Model Magic, which is made by Crayola. It is shown here. It comes in different colors: blue, red, yellow, and white. Students who dislike handling clay enjoy using Model Magic instead. It is dry, soft and very pliable. You can stretch and even bounce it. Here's a picture of Chris happily rolling the material in his hands. Many of our students also enjoy drawing with crayons, pastels, colored pencils, and scented markers. Shown here is Amanda drawing with crayons. Here's an example of a drawing made with scented markers. Scented markers are a favorite choice. Some adaptations I use are drawing on textured wall paper or paper that is taped over a plastic screen. Pictured here is the Draftsman Drawing Board from American Printing House for the Blind. The drawing board comes with a stylus for creating instant raised line drawings.

It consists of a frame that holds in place a sheet of plastic film. The picture shows Jot again, drawing with the stylus and feeling the raised lines with her fingers. The next slide shows her completed drawing, which I taped on a piece of construction paper for support. She told me it's a picture of a person with big eyes for junk food and she pointed out the pizza, doughnuts, nachos, and soda. Jot has a really good sense of humor! On this slide, is an example of drawing on a Styrofoam sheet. We use a regular pencil to make the drawing, and then roll some ink on top of the Styrofoam sheet, and press on paper for the print. The next photo shows the collection of drawing tools: scented markers, puffy paint, and quick-draw paper, which is another product from the American Printing House for the Blind. Painting can be especially engaging for some of our students. I've heard them often remark that it helps to relieve stress. There are three images on this slide. The first shows two friends- Travis and Jonathon, standing and painting side by side in the painting room. Painting together is often a relaxing way to socialize. The next image shows one of Travis' painting of a smiling multi-colored wolf, which I think is a wonderful painting. The other picture is of Paula painting at an easel. Oftentimes, our students express specific ideas and narratives through their work. The painting in this slide is by Rebecca, who made this comment: "I can't see, but I paint what I think and what I feel. It calms me." Her painting shows bold brush strokes of orange, turquoise and black. C.S.B. celebrates the students' work with the annual spring art show, an opportunity for all to enjoy the art pieces made during the year. Pictured in the photo is Marissa at the art show. She is smiling and resting a hand proudly on her ceramic sculpture of a giraffe. Above the picture is a quote by Michelle, "Making art makes me feel good and I'm happy when my friends think my work is good too." The next slide shows more artwork on display. These are ceramic pieces on display at the art show. So, dialogue, inspiration, and humor... Students share ideas and spark each other's imagination. Two pictures; one shows a pink bakery box with frosted doughnuts nestled inside. The other shows a small collection of ceramic pieces with French toast sticks in the middle. One of our students, Robert, had built a clay model of the Stonehenge. Unfortunately, the pieces came apart and when he saw them, I thought he would be really disappointed. Instead he

was looking at them and said, "You know, these look like French toast sticks." So he decided to make a little cup of syrup to go with them and arranged the finished pieces on a plate. Our students have a lot of fun sharing their work and talking about what they make. Children participate in local and national art exhibits, such as the Helen Keller Art Show and the American Printing House for the Blind's Insights Art Competition. Often our students win awards. Pictured here are two landscape paintings that were chosen for exhibit. Thank you for listening to my presentation. I will now close with a poem by a former student, Khalilah. This is her poem: "Even if I've had the worst day, coming to art frees my mind like a breath of fresh air after somewhere hot." (This is shown above a painting of a mother and baby bird in a tree). I have on the screen my contact information. If you wish to e-mail me, my address is on the screen and my telephone number. Thank you very much.

Lisa: Thank you. We've had questions that have come in during your presentation so I'm going to take back control of the slide show. We'll do some question/answer time. If you have specific questions you would like to ask Minda click on the raise your hand button or type them in and I will let you ask them to her directly. Here's our any question slide. So one of the questions that came in, Minda, where do you get the display piece for the collage materials?

Minda: The display pieces - the matte boards?

Lisa: I think and she may not be on the call anywhere. Actually, I think she is. I think this is the one where you had all of the plastic containers with the different -

Minda: That is a wonderful piece. Unfortunately, I don't know where that came from because I inherited it from the previous art teacher. But it is a wonderful piece of equipment and I could try to find out for you. I could ask the former teacher where she purchased that.

Lisa: Great. We had another raw materials question. The table with the paint colors, did you design it and can you tell me how to make it in an easy way. Thank you so much for the way you explained the slides.

Minda: Thank you. The special table was actually a project by an art student at the local art college. This was his project for school. What he did was, he had like a flat piece of wood and he measured it so it could fit exactly on the table in the painting room. He cut out the holes and also attached the different shaped-wooden pieces so they matched each hole for the painting table. That was a special project and I know it is something that is not easily available. I think that is how he did it.

Lisa: Great, thank you. Minda, how do you teach colors to young children who are blind?

Minda: Often I will use analogies and try to relate it to things they know. If I talk about - if I talk about warm colors like red or yellow, I will say, it is like how the sun feels on your skin on a hot day. So I try to compare colors to tactile things, like blue or green is like wet grass, try to make those kinds of comparisons to help them understand. But for some students, they are really interested in knowing what the colors are in the world. If they want to know about the sky and the landscape around them, I will use those analogies and I will tell them that, you know, this is what people refer to when talking about these colors in the world around them. I hope that answers your question.

Lisa: I think that does, thank you. Does anyone else have questions that they had in mind that they would like to ask Minda? It is now a good time to type those out.

Dr. Wittenstein: While we're waiting, Minda talked about the American printing house for the blind quite a bit. They have an online catalog and a print catalog of different materials and they are federally funded so the cost of these materials do not come through the local budget. They are usually administered by the teachers of the visual impaired or the central person in the department of education. So you can ask these folks to order materials for you from the American Printing House without touching your local funds, which is a very nice way to go about getting good materials.

Lisa: That is a great resource to share with our listeners. I think we don't have any more questions. I think Minda answered all of your questions. For the participants I ask you to stay on

the webinar. There is a survey that is going to pop up and your answers to these surveys are really help to me. I'm going to say goodbye with that and have you fill out the survey.

Dr. Wittenstein: Thank you for having us.

Lisa: I hope you join us again.