

REALTIME FILE

JFK Center

Making Art Accessible for Students Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

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>> Sometimes I would show a piece of art and I would describe it. I will talk about it in a little bit. Using a website like beyond site provided a really good audio description of a painting we were talking about.

Even if you don't have the access to the Internet or they don't have the artwork you are specifically looking at, taking time to record that audio description of it is really helpful and that way you don't have to remember it. [Indiscernible] Representations of Artworks.

We have a great art museum called the Jocelyn Art Museum. They have 3-D prints of some of their artworks. For example, they have a resin print and it is helpful for the participants to look at and feel and gives some grounding of what the image looks like. However, there are down sides.

The participants have stated in the past, you know, there is -- it is still really busy and hard to differentiate between some of the information going on such as the house and the sky. There's not enough differentiation between what the roof feels like in a cloud. That may be in part, due to a printer in part to the printer or to Monet's painting style. We use them, but we try not to. We try and supplement it with additional materials as well.

Flexibility and differentiation. Some of our students come into these classes with different skill sets. As I mentioned earlier, some students do not have any art background. They were asked not to come to an art class or any other circumstances using a PDF in his right hand and his left hand is a sculpture he's working on a PVA plastic.

This gentlemen here is Blind/Deaf, and he went to the Helen Keller School for Art and he has some background understanding what the elements and principles of art are.

When the rest of the class using basic building forms like a cube or pyramid, this particular gentlemen started in building something really complex. We had a discussion when there was work time and he explained what it was that he wanted to do. I rolled with it, and that's okay.

With these workshops, not knowing each week where everybody was starting from, you know, so I created a basic lesson plan we can follow, and if there were deviations, I was okay with that.

The image on the right, a white dragon, propped up on four legs, wings extending, about three to four inches away from its body almost like it is taking off. This was created by the same gentlemen, it really tried to capture the movement of his dragon by pushing the 3-D pen each week. This was his project by the end of class. It was quite impressive and I still struggle to make something like that with a 3-D pen and he has the control for it, which is quite impressive.

Descriptive language. It is really important to use rich language to make sure that you are using lots of powerful, vivid descriptors. We want to avoid vague descriptors such as it is over there. When I'm out supervising student teachers, I have a student come up to ask the teacher, where is the colored pencils. The student teacher says, they are over there. That's not okay. We want to make sure we're using as rich of a description as possible being as clear as we can.

This is not just go for the blind and low vision, but for all of our students. This is another common one. Do this. Go like this. Then we do this. What -- if I'm not being told what to do specifically, I will have no idea what's going on and this takes practice. I struggle with this at times myself and I have to think through it, I have to write things down, so making myself aware. I will talk about this a little bit later.

Also, encouraging the students to let me know what I'm not being descriptive. When I'm not being as clear as I should be. It is a little humbling to open yourself up. To be called out on that by the students, but that's okay. Because for me, it is really important that the students get the information because if I'm not clear, I am not getting to the students. Make sure it is a rich description.

Listening to the artist, students maybe have been with their disability all of their life or not. It is they have their own strategies and it is important to validate their experiences.

For example, I have one student coming to our workshops every year and the projects we do are basic. Very simple weaving, plain weave, back and forth. This particular person had a textile background and learned to sew at a very early age and lost her sight when she was older. A plain weave weaving is something she can do easily. Being able to recognize that, have the conversation, and being able to adapt the lesson and not just say, well, this is what we're going to do. You are going to do it as well. So allowing her to fake control and differentiate just a little bit.

Another example, I have a student that her way of filling up a water cup is taking her index finger and putting it on the inside of the cup and what the water faucet is turned on, and puts the cup underneath and the water touches the tip of her index finger and knows it is full and shuts it off.

Occasionally you may have a paraprofessional or volunteer who is going to try and correct that. We've seen this in some of our workshops and we have to be aware that there's nothing particularly -- nothing wrong with how the student is filling up their water cup. It is a different way that some of us may not have been used to filling up water cups.

Rather than trying to correct that and give them a strategy they are not comfortable with, sit out and talk to the students and say tell me how you do that or the process behind that? It is not a negative. This is something that's positive because I

have another tool that I can maybe offer to another student that's trying to develop a skill, and microbiology this is the right one for them as well.

So making sure you take the student experiences, you are listening to them, validating them and seeing them for a positive. This image right here, we have a woman on the right who's sitting down and she's working on a cardboard loom. Her left hand is on the loom and telling the words. On your left-hand side another woman standing up with her hand on top and underneath the woman's hand. I took this photo and it is -- it was an interesting moment capturing this because a couple of things were happening.

One, the artist who was sitting down had an idea of, well, what she wanted to do for her artwork. The woman that was standing up was trying to take it away from her and "fix it" because she had more experience weaving. This did not sit particularly well with the student for good reason.

As soon as it is taken away and a paraprofessional, volunteer, teacher, with whoever it may be that's supposed to be helping, it becomes their project and that's what we want to avoid. That ownership as an artist is taken away.

So this student, she was trying to explain what she wanted to do, but the teacher was not listening and it would really frustrate her. Making fewer those experiences, stories, those questions are being heard and we would do what we can to make sure that we help them fulfill the vision that they want.

What this did for us as instructors we need more training in the classroom that will be there as volunteers and they should not take away their works. I thought we had gone through that previous, but we need' little bit more to drive the point home further. Always, always, always listen.

Feedback. This is probably the most difficult but rewarding piece of advice I can give. It can be brutally honest, and not in a negative way, but you realize where you need more work and how you -- the areas that you need to improve.

One of the things I did, I asked the students for input along the way. I asked them if I didn't say something clearly, I mentioned it back in the descriptive language speech. If I didn't explain something clearly or you don't understand what you need because I didn't give enough details or whatever, please is ask the question right away. You know, it is -- we became pretty close in there, a close knit group. It was not uncommon for people to just, you know, say I need you to explain that a little bits more thoroughly. Generally, I think if one person didn't understand it, a few others didn't as well. I would go back and try to explain the process using different words or provide more detail using more vivid language.

We debriefed after each activity, whether it was a pointing, 3-D pens. What did they like about the project? What worked? What didn't? Did the demonstrations that I

provided, were they successful or not? All of these fed back into what we are going to do next time.

It fed in how can I improve the lessons? What different projects they wanted to do. Maybe what I won't do that again. For example, one of the things the participants, they liked the outcome, but not the process, creating sculptures out of flora foam. It was easy to cut with a simple, plastic butter knife, but in the process of it, we came to realize it became really dusty really quick and it got everywhere. So we decided that was not a good fit for our particular group, and that's one we kept the idea of a sculpture, but we moved on to a different material.

So now I'm going to talk about sample activities we have included in my classes. And these are approximate perspective. We've done clay, 3-D pen drawing, stone carving, weaving and painting.

I'm not going to talk about stone carving today, but I will tell you what. That is a lot of fun. We carved alabaster. We had alabaster quarry alabaster.

A possible perspective designed by Ann Cunningham out of the Colorado Center for the Blind. Four parts to it. One-point perspective, foreground, middle ground, background size, imaging, and detail.

I will go through these because it is probably one effort most difficult activities I have ever taught to the Blind/Low vision, but probably one of the most rewarding. I apologize the next two slides don't have photos because my volunteers were engaged in helping to do this activity, so hopefully, I can be descriptive here and you can use your imagination.

My two volunteers each had yardsticks standing opposite of each other in a long narrow hallway. My student was blind and low vision. The volunteers would be about five feet away from them. Almost at a 45 degree angle.

The volunteers, I would have them tap on the floor with their yardstick and then I would ask the student who was blind/low vision and point. They should have their arms almost to a 45 degree angle imitating where the volunteers were. We did this by having the volunteers go down ten feet, 20 feet and if you have the room, 40 feet.

What happened was the arms of the students who are blind visually impaired, start to come together, just like doing a drawing activity. The vanishing points on the horizon, the building points that been done in art classes for a number of years.

It indicates to them that what our eyes, minds, try do as stuff moves further and further away from us. Stuff starts to appear to come to a central point.

This -- one of the things that has stuck out to me over the last few years, one student, he did this activity and he was just blown away because he has been -- was blind from birth and he assumed, you know, he had no reason to think otherwise, and he assumed that let's say a car is right next to us, it will be the same size no matter how

far away it is from us. He assumed that is what sighted people saw. Your truck will be the same size, whether it is right next to you or 100 feet in front of you. That was a pretty new epiphany and total opened his mind to how it worked for other people as well.

Another activity, foreground, middle ground, background. Pretty straightforward, but we tried to illustrate how this might look into terms of a picture frame.

What we did is we cut out a cardboard frame with an opening of 8 1/2 inches by 11 inches. I will show a picture of that in a little bit. The 8 1/2" X 11" is almost the same drawing paper the students were using and made transfer to paper much easier.

I used my volunteers again with three widths of ribbon. First was really thin and I had my first volunteer step on that, the end of the ribbon, five feet away from the picture frame, and the ribbon goes through the frame. And I would let it hang there until I finished setting everything up.

My second volunteer would be the middle ground person and we used the medium width ribbon. They would stand on that and they were about ten feet away.

The third volunteer would be the widest ribbon at 20 feet away from the picture frame.

I would have the blind or low vision students reach through the frame and we would pull the ribbons pretty tight and they would be able to feel the trajectory of the students.

It was almost straight out on the floor. The next you see is the middle ground and it had a slight dip in it, but they were able to understand that you could see with it being in the middle, you could see what was mostly there. We explained how the ribbons, foreground, middle ground, and background worked in relation to a picture.

The one that was surprising for the students is how much was actually missing was the foreground ground. When things are in the foreground and they are close to us, we miss the details. For example, if someone is standing five feet away from me, I don't see the full body, but the mid torso up to the head unless I move my head up and down. They were able to see the droop the ribbon made all of the way down to the foot.

They realized they didn't need to draw everything when creating a picture. This would come into play just a little bit later. This activity is called the diminution of size. One of the Blind/Low vision students had her arms at a 45 degree angle and I had them raise their cane up. They locked them both and both at a 45 degree angle.

I went to the tip of their feet and I was holding their cane slightly on my forehead and walk back as slightly as I could and walk forward. They could start feeling their arm going up higher.

What was happening here? We start talking about it. As I got closer to them and their cane went up in the air, it feels like you are getting taller and farther away, it seems you are getting smaller.

I said am I actually decreasing in size the farther away I moved? No. It is hard to understand the perspective portion. As stuff moves away from us, it feels like it is getting smaller even though it actually isn't.

We repeated this process and this is a great activity regardless of ability to help students understand that perspective. It can be a tough concept to grasp regardless of your sight. Here you see we have students practicing that again. Every student wanted to an opportunity to see that.

This one is detail. I have all participants close their eyes. I had some students with vision. I put an object on their table and they closed their eyes. This was a plastic seated chair with a metal frame and I then I would have the participants translate the chair with a foam pool noodle. Describe what they felt. What material is it made out of? What sound does it make? What is the texture? There were very few details students picks up with the pool noodle.

We used yardsticks and picked up more information. It sounds hollow and hard. Then I had them trace over the object with their finger and they started pulling up the details oh, this is cold, it has a slight curve to it. This part is hard.

We had the discussion, like, okay. This, we can translate into the foreground, middle ground, and background as well because when we used the pool noodle we were able to pick out some ideas like the rough shape of something, but we don't get the detail. That might be a tree. We see there are trees in the distance, but we don't get to see that there are leaves on it. When using the yardstick that would be the middle ground and we pick up more details, but things are still fuzzy and when we get to the foreground adding those details.

We started putting this to use, using rubber boards used by Ann Cunningham and traditional black boards. Students doing drawing with overlapping of images and forms. The images are just solid plastic or foam objects taped on to map boards so they doesn't slide away. They are placed on a plastic map board for those -- students would reach out and they began drawing what it is they saw or felt.

You see some of the objects there, drawings on the table. Here's another one, a student's first attempt to drawing overlapping objects. The picture frame I was telling you about a little bit earlier, this is how we used it when drawing a still life and the students would pick a few objects and they would set their frame up next to it and orient their paper in the same direction and reach through the frame to figure out where an object started. Like the water bottle on the left-hand side, start pretty close to the top, maybe about 7 1/2 inches on the left-hand side. They were able to trace the contour of the bottle and figure out where it touches the bottom of their paper.

Also, they realized that half of the bottom outside of the frame of the window, they would not have to draw the left-hand side of that bottle. They would only need to draw the middle to the right side and then they can work on overlapping and position of other objects. Again, this is an activity that can easily be transferred beyond our blind/low vision students.

Painting was a really big one that the students wanted to learn independent the past, we used puffy paint, Wiki sticks. Well, there's a typo there. I apologize for that. Hot glue. Using thick application of acrylic paint. It is really great, but the dark side to that one is students didn't always have the patience to let it dry first. So that's something we needed to work on.

We did incorporate some hair dryers and heat guns to try and speed that up just a little bit. You could add texture mediums, which we did as well. You can add sand to ground dust. I just worked with somebody who was working with painting that was bronze, used alabaster and use that had as well.

Liquid medium, mixed with gel has different textures to it. Some are fibrous, some black lava, stucco. There are pretty good ones out there. You can paint with crayon, take a hot -- a heat gun, I'm sorry, and melt some crayons and paint that way. There are a lot of different opportunities there.

This one is called blind/deaf monkey and you can see it is a little bit easier to see on the red shirt, that there was some texture inside there. The student used fibrous texture for the monkey's face and then some sand for the texture of the black sun of glasses on the monkey's face as well as the hearing aids in the monkey's ear.

Clay was a pretty intuitive one to incorporate. We encouraged student to take it in different directions, mask, coral and slab building. Here we have four participants rolling out slabs of clay. Building it up working with scoring and slipping.

This woman right here, she wanted to try something slightly different. She wanted to tag the idea a coil and slab and combine them together. But she didn't want to make a vessel. She ended up making a beautiful butterfly incorporating those techniques without creating a large vessel container that a lot of the other students chose to do.

One of the last activities we did and one of the final activities we talk about before ending today. Using a 3-D pen. I love this tool and it is something that we have used for the last two years. It really doesn't show any signs of students losing interest in it.

It is really cool. It is affordable and doesn't burn the user. Prior to using the 3-D pen in the classes, I bought a variety of the 3-D pens, tried them out and tried to figure out, okay. How will I use this so it doesn't burn the students because I was getting burned quite regularly?

I found there one and you can pick this one up from Amazon, Target, something along those lines and it comes out really cool. So the participants are able to have their fingers right by the novel and feel the plastic coming out without burning themselves and they are able to construct the dragon I showed earlier in the presentation was created using this 3-D pen.

There are up sides to it. It doesn't burn. It is relatively inexpensive. The downside is there's no temperature control, so if plastic gets clogged into there, it is more difficult to come outlet and I didn't have it to the point I wasn't able to use it anymore because it breaks practice speed. Usually it is constant, either an off and on. Some of the students you could tell wanted to move a little bit faster and others a little bit slower, but these particular ones there was no way to control that.

Eventually students started figuring out whether they pushed the off button and shut their line off, their plastic off and then begin a new line, but again, the learning curve was pretty steep and we did go through a little bit of plastic.

This is something we're working on. How can we provide strategies along those lines? Some of that is dependent on how fast the student is do it as well.

With that, I think we can move into questions good there are any. If you do have you want to address specifically.

Meme me at I Johnson.

>> Thank you so much. We've reached the question and answer portion of your webinar. If you haven't already, now is the time to ask a question or raise your hand. Please remember to enter your question into the Q and A box, not the chat panel.

First question. In these workshops or K through 12 work, have you had any experience with peer sports and inclusion settings? If so, what were the challenges and successes?

>> Good question. Could you repeat that one more time? It cut out.

>> In these workshops or in your K through 12 work, have you had any experience with peer sports or conclusion settings and if so, what were some of the challenges and successes?

>> We're trying to do with these workshops, we're trying to develop curriculum that will eventually we can write-up and disseminate to the different schools, so we tested out in some of the school districts around here and trying to bring it into some of the school districts.

What we have found is, even in one of the schools here that have they are inclusive, and the paraprofessionals have a tendency to want to do the project for the student, so we have to have discussions on making sure the student is doing the work. When a student comes home with artwork that's, for lack of a better term, perfect like

the teachers, the parents realize that their child did not do that and we want the child to be the artist, so having the conversation was the art educator and making sure we're not offending the art educator or paraprofessional, they are there in the supporting roles for maybe assist or holding something down so something didn't move, but not doing the project for them.

We're -- that's one of the areas we're working on, making sure that our local school districts, when they say they are inclusive, they really mean it, not just they are there, but somebody else is doing the work for them.

>> Great, thank you. Next question. Do you have any suggestions on how to adjust color and understanding color for students who are blind from birth?

>> Oh, this is a good source of frustration, and this is one -- this is a really difficult topic to address. There's not one right way or wrong way because everybody sees something slightly different. When we have students that have various degrees of low vision, they are able to pull out some of the major colors, but when they start getting bled together, differentiation between some of the tertiary colors, then it becomes more of a sticking point.

We have discussed color, in terms of paint, and I try to provide a description such as, you know, if we're using a dark blue, you know, I will start out with, okay. This is a blue color, but it feels like the night. So it has a darker feel to it. It feels a little bit more chilly. I try to attach some emotions to some of the color to try to get them to feel it that way.

I have seen other people try to approach is by adding a texture to color, so if you want to use blue, then the blue will be smooth. A red might be a little rougher.

The hard part is trying to get, especially if they have not seen their entire life, to get them to understand what blue is -- if they have never seen it before.

It is a little bit easier to describe an animal for example, because you can touch something that's furry and have an idea what furry is as it relates to an animal. Blue is an abstract concept. This is something we're working on and hoping we can address over the next few years.

>> Do you have any tips for working with students who are blind and also have a concurrent intellectual or developmental disability?

>> Yeah. We had several students that have been in our workshops with intellectual disabilities as well as blind/low vision and some of those instances, some of the parents would say that they had a volunteer that would stay with them, but what we did, we worked -- we recognized there were intellectual disabilities, but still taught it as they were the artist and we still had the same expectations for the project.

We broke things down just a little bit further. So maybe my directions would rather than giving two, three step directions, I would break things up a little bit more. I

would also provide copies of my notes, my demonstrations to the person that was working with them so that way if a step was missed or if a student wanted to work at a slower pace, we could do that and those materials would be right there. Providing more time, allowing the student to come back in.

Whether it was a different afternoon or a weekend and we would continue working on the piece as well. So more time and providing copies of demonstrations. If they have a paraprofessional volunteer with them.

>> I have one attendee with hand raised. Jeremy. Just a moment. Allison will be able to voice her own question.

>> So do you have any tips or suggestions for teaching flash exploring creative movement for students who are blind?

>> I'm good to talk now?

>> Yep.

>> Creative movement, yeah. Again, I would set out very similar to the beginning when we talked about the environment. Being very descriptive about what the environment looks like, so you can indicate if there are any tripping hazards in the way. That's a good place to start.

As for the reminder of the creative movement, we have not done much in the way of creative movement. We don't have the facilities here to accommodate that. That's a good question because I don't know anybody particularly working on that.

I will look something up. If you want to e-mail me, I will try and find you some additional information related to that, okay?

>> Great, thanks, Jeremy.

>> Allison, you can e-mail me as well and our network and we'll see if we anybody working in that world.

>> It says I am thinking about the example works utilized in my art class, do you have any suggestions for artists to highlight?

>> This is the problem. It is -- there's not much for light [Indiscernible] out there. Generally, what happen it is sighted persons come into contract with a blind or low vision person and that inspires them to create some sort of work. I believe it is Andrew Meyer, out of California and he met a gentlemen and his wife and this gentlemen had never seen his self portrait before. This artist created a portrait using different lengths of screws to make an extremely large, facial tactile painting.

Generally, that's what happens. The error is not that I can recall, a prominent blind artist out there that's getting -- oh, yes. You are right. The England one. You're right. He's -- you're right.

Diane just --

>> It sounds like you are referencing Diane's article. I will send it to the whole group.

>> There's not a whole lot of artists out there, unfortunately. This is something that needs to change and not for -- the positive. Making sure the students who are blind as you recognize they can be part of this profession. And there's work that can be done. Unfortunately, it is not as encouraged as it could be. In the case of my wife, for example, she was told she was not allowed to apply because it is a visual field because you don't need it.

Thankfully, you don't hear a whole lot of that and it is not going on, but we want to make sure again, we're getting people in this field, yeah.

>> Wonderful. Thank you so much, Jeremy for taking the time, and thank you all of you for joining this afternoon.

This concludes today's webinar. I would like you as the participants to please keep your window open and it will generate the feedback.

If you have questions I can be reached at jgabriel@kennedy-center.org, or by phone 202) 416-8861.

[End]