



# Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Programs

[www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu) | 512-454-8631 | 1100 W. 45<sup>th</sup> St. | Austin, TX 78756

---

Visual Arts for the Visually Impaired  
Infusing Art Experiences into Early Literacy  
November 8th, 2017  
3-4pm

Presented by

Scott Baltisberger, TSBVI VI Education Consultant

[baltisbergers@tsbvi.edu](mailto:baltisbergers@tsbvi.edu)

Developed for Texas School for the Blind & Visually  
Impaired Outreach Programs

## Outreach Programs Events Update:

- For upcoming webinars: <http://www.tsbvi.edu/2015-10-17-20-13-33/webinar-listings>
- For upcoming workshops and conferences: <http://www.tsbvi.edu/2015-10-17-20-13-33/outreach-workshops-conferences>
- 

## Housekeeping

- Download handouts and sign-in roster
- Send sign-in roster to [sobeckb@tsbvi.edu](mailto:sobeckb@tsbvi.edu) or fax to 512-206-9320
- Make sure you registered and complete evaluation within 60 days including code for ACVREP/SBEC credit
- View captions in a separate window at <https://tcc.1capapp.com/event/tsbvi/embed>
- The code will be announced during the presentation

## Adobe Connect Webinar Tour

- For tips about screen navigation go to [http://www.connectusers.com/tutorials/2008/11/meeting\\_accessibility/](http://www.connectusers.com/tutorials/2008/11/meeting_accessibility/)
- Location of pods
- Power Point content included in your handout
- Poll participation – enter response in chat if you cannot access the poll

Link to enter room: <http://tsbvi.adobeconnect.com/visual-arts/>

# Visual Arts for the Visually Impaired

## Infusing Art Experiences into Early Literacy

### Finding Time to Teach Art

- TVI's have an enormous number of responsibilities. The scope and sequence of the ECC is quite broad and extensive and this makes it challenging to find time to address even those skills that are considered to be essential such as math, language arts and science.
- Since art is typically not subject to standardized testing, it is frequently perceived as inessential and ancillary to core courses or merely and is treated as an enrichment. For this reason, it is often pushed to the periphery of what a TVI sees as priorities for instruction.
- Two questions frequently raised in regards to the TVI's role in art instruction include "Isn't art the responsibility of the art teacher?" and "When can I possibly find time to teach art?" Let's address each of these questions in turn:
- Isn't art the responsibility of the art teacher?
  - True, it is not the role of the TVI to teach content. Just as you would not teach the ins and outs of trigonometry or medieval literature, you are not required to teach the subtleties of two-point perspective or contour drawing art.
  - However, it is the job of the TVI to teach access. The TVI is required to provide the student with tools and skills that will enable them to participate in activities of the general education curriculum. Just as the TVI should ensure that a student has skills with the Nemeth code in order to access instruction in trigonometry class or skills with low vision devices to read read materials in medieval literature class, he or she should also ensure that the student has a basic understanding of skills and concepts that will allow the student to participate in art activities in a meaningful way.
  - When we, as teachers, make the decision for a student regarding for which subjects they will have access, we are denying them their rights for self-determination. Students should have opportunities to make their own choices.
- When can I possibly find time to teach art?
  - The answer for to this is actually quite simple: Infuse art activities into teaching other content. One does not need to spend entire class periods exploring art skills in isolation.
  - Research increasingly points to the interdependent nature of learning, that skills and concepts acquired in one area lead to enhanced learning across all areas. In fact, studies specifically examining the role of arts instruction have found enhanced performance in academic areas for students whose program includes significant exposure to the arts.

- It should also be noted that, as in math and literacy, skills and concepts in art are best acquired through early exposure and consistent, ongoing opportunity for practice. If one wants to ensure maximum growth in literacy skills, the child should be doing them a lot!
- Early literacy instruction is a wonderful and effective environment for infusing art. There are a couple of reasons for this: First, literacy instruction is pretty much incessant (or it should be) throughout the early grades. In addition, early literacy instruction for sighted children is itself heavily dependent on activities of drawing, coloring, tracing, cutting, coloring, etc. The VI child will simply be following the path of instruction as laid down by the general education teacher.
- Let's look at how this plays out with students who use braille as well as those who are considered low vision...

## **Problems with Early Braille and Pre-Braille Activities**

- TVI's may provide their students with opportunities for tactile exploration and concept development at the preschool level but often these experiences are not directly and explicitly linked to early braille instruction. There can be a type of "dead zone" between these two facets of early learning. This is because when the time comes to begin braille instruction, a TVI may drop everything that has come previously and begin to teach braille as an isolated skill.
- There may be a tendency to over-reliance on braille reading programs such as "Mangold", "FUNdamentals" and "Patterns", which are highly teacher-centered in content and focus on discrete skills such as letter identification and tracking. However, it has been demonstrated that children are more engaged and experience greater success when their own interests and activities drive learning.
- This is not to say that reading programs should be abandoned but it does indicate that a child's learning will be enhanced if you can include fun, meaningful, interactive, child-centered activities as well.
- Keep in mind that the process of learning to derive meaning from abstract symbols is dependent on an interplay in the development of cognitive, physical and social-emotional skills. For early learners, the symbols used must have content that is meaningful and easily accessible. Due to its size and complexity, Braille, in isolation, is not always meaningful or easily accessible for many 2-5 year olds. On one hand, they may not have sufficient fine motor skills to isolate and explore the braille cell and on the other, the cognitive demands of letter identification, sound-letter correspondence, word-decoding and composing a sentence pose an overwhelming task.

## Another Factor: Skills and Concepts Essential to Effective Braille Literacy

- Generalization of a new skill requires frequent and sustained practice.
- An enormous amount of practice is needed in order that a child becomes an effective braille reader and writer. Practice should involve physical development in hand and finger strength, finger isolation and finger coordination and also learning the concepts of spatial relationships and symbolic representation.
- Practice will occur more frequently and the skills will be more strongly incorporated if activities are meaningful, student-driven and fun.
- Using braille skills and concepts to engage in art activities will increase the opportunities to work on these skills and concepts. The child may not become so bored of working on the same types of purely literary activities.

## Scribbling

- To understand how and why to incorporate art during the early years, it is worthwhile to examine the idea of “scribbling.”
- Scribbling is defined in the dictionary in less-than-admirable terms such as “to cover with careless or worthless writings or drawings” or “a note or other writing that has little or no meaning”. However, there is a great deal of research indicating that scribbling is an important milestone in the development of print literacy among sighted children.
- In fact, sighted children begin to make random marks on paper at a very early age (12 - 18 months). These early drawings are pre-symbolic, there is no intention that the figures created have any meaning apart from the simple sensory-motor experience of their creation. At this point, a child is simply learning the cause and effect of manipulating the materials. He or she is beginning to develop an awareness of his or her own agency in the creative process.
- Over time, the child begins to develop an awareness of the possibilities for symbolic meaning in the images. He or she notes that the images of other people are endowed with meaning and so begins to describe the meaning of their own. At this stage the scribbles are symbolic but pre-schematic, there is no set, recurring repertoire of images intentionally-created to represent specific things.
- Finally, the child does begin to represent specific things with specific images. This is when the typical “stick-figure” and “yellow sun-circle” drawings appear. The child now has a sophisticated understanding of the concept of symbolic representation and this will add him or her in comprehending literacy.

## Teaching Tactile Scribbling to a Young Student

- An enormous amount of a child's early learning occurs incidentally. That is, a child takes in information through observation and imitation rather than through explicit teaching. As we have seen, this is true for in the learning of expressive art techniques such as scribbling and drawing.
- Students with blindness or severe visual impairment may experience great challenges in accessing incidental learning, including scribbling and drawing. For this reason, these skills will need to be taught explicitly.
- The adult should model scribbling and drawing with the braille and/or raised line drawing board. Allow the child to observe by shadowing the adult's movements with his or her own hands. Engage in co-active drawing and scribbling, allowing the student to take more of the lead as ability is demonstrated. The adult should model looking at graphics using his or her hands. When a child wants to show you a drawing that he or she has created, "look" at it by examining it tactually rather than by sight alone. Modelling tactile l;jl;jll;l;k;;lj
- Drawings that the adult creates and models for the child should not be overly complex. Simple images can be created through single cells or combinations of cells. The child should not be expected to recreate adult drawings. Rather, these adult's work serves as inspiration for the child's own imagination. You might want to have a look at the webinar "[Drawing with the Perkins Braille](#)" for additional info on this topic.
- Promote the idea that the images are symbols that represent real things, that they don't necessarily need to look like what they represent.
- Encourage family members (parents and siblings) to get involved as well.

## Perkins Braille

- While a tactile drawing pad has many benefits, one should not forget to employ the Perkins Braille for drawing and scribbling as well.
  - The Braille is very familiar to the student. (Or it should become very familiar!)
  - A child can combine drawing and writing on the same sheet of paper at same time with same tool. This is analogous to the sighted student's pencil or crayon.
  - Once a drawing is completed, the child can color directly on the paper using standard crayons. Most blind children LOVE to color!
  - Creating drawings with a braille reinforces the same skills the child uses for reading and writing text.

## Low Vision Students

- A student with low vision may also have difficulties accessing incidental learning and this may be overlooked since this child is identified as “visual learner”. This student may appear to have access but actually be missing important information so that learning is incomplete.
- Direct instruction and modeling in scribbling and drawing will be helpful for this student.
- Accommodations that increase contrast, such as 20/20 pens or other felt-tip markers can help. Crayons with a deeper tone, such as oil pastels, make colors more accessible.
- A student who is sensitive to glare, such as one with albinism, might benefit from use of muted colors for paper rather than the ubiquitous white sheets typically used in classrooms. Various colors may provide better contrast as well. Heavier, card stock paper might hold up better when used with markers.
- A typical classroom Number 2 pencil often does not provide enough contrast. Pencils with a “soft lead” make a darker, thicker line and can still be erased, like a regular pencil. Look for those that are labeled 6B or 8B.
- Model looking at scribbles and drawings through use of low vision equipment. This reduces feelings of “differentness” that children sometimes feel in regard to their devices.

## Linking Activities to Experiences

- Due to difficulties with incidental learning, it is important that a child with visual impairment have direct, active, hands-on experiences to ensure that the he or she develops real comprehension. Without these experiences, there is danger that the child will simply parrot the terminology or actions presented to them without true understanding of what they mean.
- For that reason, early art activities should be paired with real-life explorations of the environment. Draw pictures or objects or activities that the child has actually experienced first hand. Engage the child in a lesson of exploration/discovery and follow up with a drawing session that reinforces the concepts and vocabulary from the lesson.
- This approach mimics the approach of Experience Books. In fact, early drawing activities can be a great way to enhance and expand upon the creation of an experience book. Incorporating drawings with the objects or pictures helps to build the connection between symbol and meaning. More information about experience books can be found at [this link](#).
- The certified orientation and mobility specialist could also incorporate simple drawing techniques into creating maps and diagrams related to routes that a student is learning. Alternatively, the TVI can collaborate with the COMS to identify concepts and images that a student might encounter during O&M lessons that could be reinforced by infusing them into an art activity.
- Young children with visual impairments frequently use a tangible calendar system that employs objects or parts of objects as symbols. Tracing or copying the symbol objects

will allow for a transition from the objects to a more abstract system such as pictures. Keep in mind that tracing, like all the other activities suggested here, is not a one-time only event. Art skills should be practiced frequently and repeatedly so that the student has plenty of time to internalize the information and begin to employ the skills independently.

- Allow yourself time just to hang out with your student to drawing and scribbling together and talk about whatever arises. This is NOT “free time”! Young children learn best when they are allowed to direct their own learning and explore concepts and connections in ways that accommodate their individual progress and learning style. In addition, this type of activity allows for emotional bonding and trust between the child and adult, which enhances the child’s enthusiasm readiness to learn.
- When directing the child’s attention to concepts, focus on simple, basic ideas in the beginning and graduate to the more complex as he or she demonstrates mastery and understanding. Some simple, early concepts that can be explored in art include:
  - Comparisons: Big, small, long, short
  - Parts of the page: top, bottom, left, right, center, corner, up, down, landscape, portrait
  - Simple lines: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, smooth, broken, straight, undulating
  - Simple shapes: square, rectangle, triangle, circle
  - Patterns

## **Integrating Drawing into Classroom Activities**

- Frequently, classroom teachers at the early elementary level will make significant use of handouts and center-based activities for teaching and reinforcing concepts. A great many of these worksheets incorporate art skills such as coloring, drawing and tracing. By teaching your VI student the skills to complete these worksheets, you can address both art and literacy skills. Partner with the classroom teacher to determine the following:
  - What drawing skills are being used in the classroom?
  - What types of art is being incorporated into assignments and worksheets?
  - What kinds of art activities are used in classroom centers?
- In addition to learning art and literacy skills and concepts, the student will benefit from being more fully included in typical learning activities of the classroom. That is, the VI student will be doing what the other students are doing and will be able to benefit from peer interactions and peer learning. They will also be more connected socially with peers in that they will have shared experiences and topics.

## **Notes on Adapting Elementary Worksheets**

- Do not be overly concerned with pictorial representation, either in adapting the worksheet or in the manner in which the student draws his or her responses. The focus at the early stages of learning should be on symbolic representation. A single full-cell or box can be used to represent whatever the intended image, whether it is an apple or a bulldog. Labeling the image (or having the child label the image) can be helpful in reinforcing the concept.

- Follow the format of the print worksheet insofar as including all information such as titles, instructions, name and date, page numbers, separation lines, etc. All of these provide opportunities for the child to experience and work with formatting concepts.
- Keep in mind that tactile art or low vision art may require more space for adequate representation; it can be hard to squeeze a lot of detail in to a small area. You may need to expand a worksheet to more than one page. This is a good chance to work on page numbering systems.

## Summary

- The TVI is not responsible for teaching the entire content and skills of art classes.
- It is the responsibility of the TVI to provide the student with access to the full range of the general education curriculum. This includes art.
- Basic art skills and concepts can be taught by incorporating them into early literacy activities.
- With basic skills and activities in place, the VI student will be able to participate in art activities of the general education program. The general education teacher will be able to incorporate the VI student into the lessons and teach more advanced content.

## Some Resources

- [Beginning with Braille](#) by Anna Swenson - Promoting Early Literacy: First Experiences with Reading and Writing Braille
  - Has some nice ideas about incorporating art into literacy and adapting art for children who are blind.
- List of Materials:
  - Oil pastel crayons - from art supply stores
  - Triangular crayons – won't roll off the table. Available at Amazon.
  - Soft lead pencils (HB, 6B, 8B) – from art supply stores
  - [20/20 pens](#) (for low vision students). Can also use Sharpie-style pens.
  - Tactile drawing pads – order online.
    - [APH Draftsman](#)
    - [inTact Sketchpad](#)
    - [Sensational Blackboard](#)
    - [Sewel Raised Line Drawing Kit](#)
- Links to articles on scribbling and braille scribbling
  - [Early Writing and Scribbling](#) by J.J. Beaty
  - [Scribbling with Braille: A 4-Year-Old Begins to Write His Own Stories](#)
  - [The Importance of Drawing and Scribbling](#) by Mobeen Uddin
  - [The Essential Role of Scribbling in the Imaginative and Cognitive Development of Young Children](#) by Elizabeth Coates and Andrew Coates
  - Other webinars in this series can be found at [this link](#).
    - Visual Arts and the Expanded Core Curriculum
    - Tools and Techniques
    - Drawing with the Perkins Braille

## Contact Info/Call for Sharing

- As is the case for our students, educators can learn a great deal of their craft through sharing ideas with one another. One of the most powerful modes for sharing is by presenting examples of real student work. Videos, photos and narratives of one's teaching experiences are all wonderful tools. However, we do not have a significant repository of these kinds of artifacts that relate to art activities with students who are blind or with visual impairments.
- If you have a student who is successfully engaged in art activities, please consider sharing photos, videos or your story. It would do much to help increase participation in the arts for all students. Feel free to contact me:

Scott Baltisberger  
TSBVI Outreach Department  
1100 West 45th Street  
Austin, Texas 78756  
[baltisbergers@tsbvi.edu](mailto:baltisbergers@tsbvi.edu)  
512-517-6096