The enjoyment on Mida’s face is obvious as teacher Pam Nicholas places yarn in the girl’s palm and helps her guide it through a loom. With Pam’s hands over Mida’s, the two work the yarn under and over, across the vertical strings of fiber held taut by the loom’s frame. When they are done, Pam guides Mida’s hands to a bar on the loom. Together, they pull the bar forward to push the row of yarn tight against the end of the fabric they are creating.

Weaving gives Mida, a child with deafblindness, an opportunity to express her creative talents. It is an easily adaptable activity that lets students experiment with a variety of textures and designs, notes Nicholas, a fiber arts educator. For Mida the loom has been lifted so it can accommodate the extension of her arms. Students can weave flat surfaces, like placemats or a scarf, on table top looms or make more decorative items by weaving on cardboard.

Everyone is capable of creative expression; and every child wants, and needs, to exercise his or her own artistic voice. Children may think creatively through words, visual images, movement and touch, or rhythms and melodies. From music to drawing and from weaving to dancing, the possibilities for children to experience the artistic process are endless.

For students with deafblindness and other disabilities, the arts represent an important form of communication. Painting, dancing, writing, acting, and many other creative activities enhance a student’s self-image and give him or her an avenue for expression that transcends cultural and physical boundaries. Not only is creative expression enjoyable, it also connects people to the world and helps them convey the uniqueness of who they are, what they reason and feel, and how they learn about themselves.
The goal of this booklet is to help the reader develop ways to involve students with deafblindness in the creative arts. The background, examples, ideas, and resources contained on the following pages are intended to provide information that can be used and adapted to best suit each student.

A companion video, “Creative Expression: Opportunities for Persons Who are Deafblind,” offers examples of projects successfully adapted for people with deafblindness.

This booklet is divided into four sections. The first section provides an overview of vision and hearing impairments and how they might affect the ways in which a student participates in creative activities. The second section gives some general tips for presenting the creative arts to students with vision and hearing impairments. The next section discusses adaptations teachers have used successfully in the classroom and provides a combination of concepts and concrete examples of strategies to foster creative expression in art, music, dance, and theater. It also addresses ways to promote awareness of creative expression and a more positive image of people with deafblindness. Finally, a list of resources is included.

Getting students with deafblindness involved in the arts requires creativity, flexibility, and problem-solving skills. Teachers in a general education classroom may have never before taught a student with both vision and hearing impairments and may only teach one such student during their teaching career. They will find that traditional projects and activities involving art, music, theater, etc. will likely need modification to suit the needs of a student with deafblindness. Even the best-laid lesson plans may require on-the-spot adaptations.

People with past experience teaching the arts to children with deafblindness say endless opportunities exist to open up a world of creative possibilities for these students.

“Don’t be afraid to try out different sorts of projects. Some will work better than others, but don’t be discouraged. You can find ways to give every student a chance for artistic expression,” says Dave Pascarella, a senior instructor at the Helen Keller National Center for Deafblind Youths and Adults in Sands Point, New York.

Indeed, innovations, whether small or large, that open up avenues for students with deafblindness to participate in creative expression also will enrich the experience of the teacher and other students in a classroom.
Understanding Deafblindness: Helping children reach their full potential

“A person who is deaf-blind has a unique experience of the world. For people who can see and hear, the world extends outward as far as his or her eyes and ears can reach. For the young child who is deaf-blind, the world is initially much narrower. If the child is profoundly deaf and totally blind, his or her experience of the world extends only as far as the fingertips can reach. Such children are effectively alone if no one is touching them. Their concepts of the world depend upon what or whom they have had the opportunity to physically contact.

“If a child who is deaf-blind has some usable vision and/or hearing, as many do, her or his world will be enlarged. Many children called deaf-blind have enough vision to be able to move about in their environments, recognize familiar people, see sign language at close distances, and perhaps read large print. Others have sufficient hearing to recognize familiar sounds, understand some speech, or develop speech themselves. The range of sensory impairments included in the term ‘deaf-blindness’ is great.”

— Barbara Miles, communication specialist/consultant and teacher who has experience with all ages and levels of persons who are deaf-blind, from an essay titled Overview on Deaf-Blindness for DB-LINK, July 2000.

Many people erroneously think a person with deafblindness cannot see or hear at all. On the contrary, very few people with deafblindness have a total loss of vision and hearing.

People with deafblindness represent a diverse group (Edwards, Goehl, and Gordon, 1992). They have different degrees of usable hearing and vision, different ways of communicating, different levels of independence, different technological devices, and, of course, different ways to express their creativity.

If you will be working on artistic projects with a child with deafblindness in a classroom or other setting, you can do several things to prepare to offer the best creative environment for that child. The longer you have to plan projects and become familiar with the child’s abilities the better. However, you may not have enough time or the opportunity, for example, to attend a workshop on vision and hearing impairments or to get to know the student before class begins.
Try to learn as much as possible about a student’s particular vision and hearing impairment from the people who know the student best, including parents, other teachers, and service providers who have worked with the student. Seek out these people, advises Kathryn Raistrick, acting manager of Services to Persons Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, a division of the Illinois Department of Human Services.

“It’s really important to stay in extremely close contact with the itinerant teacher for a student with a vision or hearing impairment,” Raistrick says. “That person gives you an expert to work with and someone to talk with about the student’s abilities.”

Teachers who have worked with students with vision and hearing impairments offer the following tips:

• Remember, a student who has both vision and hearing losses is likely to have difficulties with conceptual development. The student will need to learn about his or her world in a variety of ways including movement, taste, smell and touch. Only after experiencing different activities or objects in these different ways, will the student be able to interpret the activity or object for himself. For example, if the student will be working on a creative project involving flowers, the flowers should be touched, smelled, watered and picked or pulled from the ground. Only then will the student be able to create his or her own concept of “flowers.”

• Find out what communication styles — verbal, manual, gestural, or symbolic — the student prefers.

• Familiarize yourself with the type of communication aids the student uses. High-tech communication aids include such items as computers, Braille writers, or other electronic devices. Low-tech communication aids might include objects, pictures, communication boards, or enlarged print.

• Ask the student what he or she can see and not see or hear and not hear.

• Contact your state deafblind project to see if they can provide information and/or training about the different types of vision and hearing impairments.

Sources put the number of children (ages birth to 22 years) in the United States who have been classified as deafblind at more than 11,000
(Miles, 2000). It helps to have some knowledge of the varying degrees of hearing and/or vision impairments included under the umbrella of deafblindness.

Following is a list of terms and information to help familiarize you with vision and hearing losses that, when combined, may qualify an individual as deafblind (Edwards et al., 1992; VSA arts 1998; Federal Deaf-Blind Census Form 1992; Quist, 1992; Whaley & Wong, 1989).

**Vision**

- **Low vision** applies to all individuals with sight who are unable to read the newspaper at normal viewing distance, even with the aid of eyeglasses or contact lenses.
- **Legally blind** indicates a person has less than 20/200 vision in the better eye (with corrective lenses) or a very limited field of vision (20 degrees at its widest point).
- People who have **light perception only** are able to distinguish light and the absence of light.
- People with **total blindness** are unable to perceive light.
- People with a **cortical visual impairment** (CVI) are able to see but their brain is unable to process the visual information and make sense of what is seen.
- People with a **diagnosed progressive loss** have a visual condition that may fluctuate and or deteriorate over time. For example, retinitis pigmentosa (RP), is an inherited disorder which leads to a gradual loss of peripheral vision.

**Hearing**

(Hearing loss is classified by **the location of the impairment** and by **the degree of loss**.)

- People with a **mild hearing loss** will hear louder conversations better than whispers or lowered conversational tones. They hear vowel sounds clearly, but they may miss consonant sounds.
- People with a **moderate hearing loss** will understand most conversational speech at three to five feet. Beyond that distance, conversation must increase at an intensity to be understood.
Difficulties with understanding speech, and problems with language usage and comprehension may be observed.

- People with a **severe hearing loss** will hear loud voices about one foot from their ear, may identify environmental sounds, and may discriminate vowels and some consonants.

- People with a **profound hearing loss** may hear some loud sounds, but are aware of vibrations more than tonal patterns.

These photos were taken by a budding photographer who happens to be an Indiana student with deafblindness. Using a camera provides him with a creative outlet and encourages him to use his remaining vision.
Creative Expression:  Strategies for students with deafblindness

“To see my daughter smile and hand me a drawing that she has completed, to know that she recognizes and takes pride in her achievements, and to see her happy and active – this means the world to me.”

— Heidi Miller in an article about drawings created by Rebekah, her daughter who is deafblind and suffers from related neurological problems, in the Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness. May-June, 1995.

It is crucial to recognize that children with deafblindness have different levels of ability, says Carolyn Ard, an artist who has taught students with visual and/or hearing impairments through VSA arts of Indiana. Understanding a particular student’s range and capabilities will help determine what sorts of stimulation, explanation, and projects will best suit that individual.

Ard and other teachers and artists who have worked in this area advise getting rid of any preconceived notions of what a project should “look like” or “sound like.”

“You have to think differently about the appreciation of a project and of how you judge a lesson. A student accomplishes something because they did the process. They can take something away from that,” Ard says.

Dave Pascarella, a senior instructor at the Helen Keller National Center for Deafblind Youths and Adults, agrees. “You can’t focus on the end product at all. The important part is the process; how the student got there,” he says.

For instance, he had a student with deafblindness and other severe handicaps who loved to pick things apart. Using this interest as a starting point, he designed an activity he hoped would be meaningful to her. When she came to class, Pascarella would give her a ball of yarn full of knots he’d tied earlier. The young woman’s goal was to unwind the yarn from the ball and unravel the knots.

Early in the semester, the student worked to untangle the yarn for about 10 minutes of each art class period. Eventually, the activity regularly held her attention for the duration of the 45-minute class. Pascarella viewed this
as a major success and an important element in the development of this student’s creative expression.

“There’s not one student, no matter what their disability, who can’t take on some type of art project and do something productive,” Pascarella says.

While one student might be able to improvise a percussion solo, another may express his musical creativity by feeling and enjoying the vibrations of a bass drum. The important thing is for the student to find an avenue for artistic expression, another method of communication. The creative arts also give the student a chance to exercise his or her judgment, organizational skills, sensory perception, memory, and decision-making abilities (Harlan, 1993).

The enjoyment, creation, and interpretation of art is very personal. The process, not necessarily the end result, nurtures a student’s creative instincts and allows him or her to expand individual interests and capabilities.

**General Tips for Presenting the Creative Arts**

While the approach to presenting the creative arts to a student with vision and hearing impairments will differ depending on the child, the project, classroom composition, and other variables, several tips can be applied to most situations. Following is advice from teachers who have worked with students with vision and hearing impairments.

- **Start a project with something the student can touch.**
  Tactile stimulation is extremely important to people with visual and/or hearing impairments. No matter what sort of project you are doing, whether it be learning about a musical instrument or writing a poem about trees, incorporate the sense of touch. For example, in the former case, you might let the student feel the keys on a saxophone. In the latter instance, you could take the student outside to feel the bark or leaves of a tree or the wind blowing.

- **When starting a project, explain where the needed materials are located.**
  Giving the student the opportunity to get familiar with the “tools” lessens his or her anxiety and prepares him or her for the project at hand. For example, you might say, “On your right, you’ll find a bowl of water.” Or, “Directly in front of you is a container of paste.” Let the
student touch the materials he or she will be using and learn their function before the work begins.

• **Give clear, specific directions.**
  A student with vision and hearing impairments may worry about an artistic activity and how he or she is going to perform it. Giving concise directions will help alleviate some of this concern. Outline each step. Remember you can never go too slowly.

• **Keep talking and/or signing.**
  People tend to gesture more than they realize while they are explaining something. Don’t rely solely on gestures when describing projects and activities to a student with deafblindness. The student may or may not be able to see your gestures. However, if a student has a severe hearing impairment and a milder visual impairment, facial expressions, body language, and pantomime are important.

• **Don’t rule out visual aids, but if you use them be sure there is a lot of contrast.**
  Many students who are deafblind have some degree of sight. They may be able to see large shapes and the differences between dark and light, but not necessarily nuances.

• **Be aware of classroom environment.**
  Environmental factors are important and can influence how well a student uses his remaining vision and hearing. Consider such factors as lighting, distance, color, contrast, background noises, and glare. For example, avoid standing in front of a light source or window that might silhouette your face, making it difficult to see you clearly.

• **Prepare the child’s aide or assistant.**
  If the student has an aide or assistant assigned to accompany him or her, spend time explaining the various activities to that person. The more prepared the aide or assistant is, the better he or she will be able to help the student. Write instructions out for the aide or assistant, or even ask him or her to come to your classroom a few minutes early so you can talk one-on-one. Insist the student’s aide or assistant attend your class.

• **Build rapport with the student.**
  People with deafblindness can sense if you are tentative or fearful. Be consistent in your behavior, and don’t back away if you run into
communication roadblocks. Work to build a comfortable relationship with the student.

- **Develop good communication skills.**  
  If a sign language interpreter is involved, speak directly to the person who is deafblind, not the interpreter. Speak clearly and distinctly in a normal tone and at a normal speed. Ask the student to repeat himself or herself if you do not understand. It is important to learn how the student best communicates (sign language, verbally, tactile signing). One art teacher described how he learned to sign such phrases as “Do you want to make . . . ,” so he could better communicate.

- **Let the student know what’s going on around him or her.**  
  It is important the student is informed about others in the area and what they are working on. A student with deafblindness will want to know about their surroundings and who enters and leaves the area.

- **If possible, involve the student in group projects.**  
  Creating a situation that encourages socialization and a forum for sharing creativity is positive for several reasons. It advances the use of the arts as a means of expression for a student with deafblindness, it involves the student in part of the social framework, and it promotes a more positive image of people with deafblindness and disabilities to others.

- **Understand and respect the student’s personal space.**  
  Some students who are deafblind are very sensitive to touch. When trying to get his or her attention, it is important to take care not to startle the student. Talk with the student or those who know him or her best in order to find out the best way to let the student know of your presence and that you want to communicate with him or her. For example, does she like to be tapped on the shoulder? On the back of the hand? Share this information with others in the class.

- **Pick projects that foster independence.**  
  A student with deafblindness may get frustrated if he or she is working on a project that can be done only with constant supervision.
Creative Expression: Adaptations and ideas for students with deafblindness

When developing the lesson plans for her music classes, teacher Lori Carpenter tries to include three distinct activities each period that incorporate movement, vocals, and instruments. Carpenter teaches music for inclusion and special education classes at Riley Elementary School in Terre Haute, Indiana. Her challenge is to adapt classroom activities for all students. Using some creativity and flexibility, she has found that goal easy to meet. “I think kids with disabilities can do pretty much anything the other kids do. Almost any activity can be modified,” Carpenter says.

For example, students in her classes do a lot of dancing. A student who uses a wheelchair may not be able to jump up and down during a dance, “but we can loosen their foot straps, and they can move their legs to the music,” she says. Or, a peer helper can guide the wheelchair if the students are moving around the room in time with a song.

While some students with deafblindness may not be vocal, they can participate in different ways when the class is singing. One of Carpenter’s former students hummed along to the music, while another moved his mouth to the words. Another student liked to keep a beat with her fingers, so Carpenter gave her instruments with different textures, such as a tambourine and a rain stick, to tap along on while the class was singing. “The important thing is they were all able to participate and be part of what the other students were doing,” she says.

Carpenter likes to do a lot of hands-on work with musical instruments, letting students hold them and get familiar with the different shapes. That activity is easily adaptable. Carpenter or a peer might assist a student whose hands are tight by helping them hold a smaller instrument. “I get instruments into everyone’s hands. All students enjoy tactile things,” she says.

Students with vision and hearing impairments and other disabilities also enjoy feeling the vibrations of different instruments. Carpenter keeps that in mind whether her lesson involves playing instruments or simply listening to music. For instance, if she were doing a lesson on string instruments, Carpenter might have students put their hands on the wooden body of a bass while she played a note so they could feel the vibration. Wood is an excellent conductor of vibration. While her classroom floors are concrete, Carpenter has a CD player on a wooden table. When she plays CDs, students can put their hands on the table and feel the vibrations of the music.
Carpenter and other teachers have had great success by centering different creative expression projects around one topic that is discussed in several classes. At Riley, each grade level studied a particular country in social studies. Those studies carried over to Carpenter’s class, where students looked at what types of music came from their particular country. They also made replicas of native instruments and learned dances and songs. In art class the students made different items that represented their country. All the efforts culminated in a year-end program that showcased the different countries studied.

Sharron Pollack, associate professor of art at Saint Louis University, works with students who are preparing to become teachers. Adapting curriculum for students with disabilities is one area she discusses in her classes. “Most important is understanding each child’s capabilities,” she says. “From there, you can come up with all kinds of ideas.”

Pollack suggests first thinking about how to add texture to coloring and painting projects, two common art class activities for elementary school children. Putting a piece of window screen or such items as macaroni or fish gravel underneath paper and having the students draw on the paper with crayon will make raised areas on the paper students can feel. Adding sand or soap to paint is another way to add texture to a project.

“There are all sorts of things you can do to appeal to the senses of smell and touch. There are scented markers. There are fabrics. You can have the students paint using sponges. You can have the class work with modeling clay to create shapes,” she says, adding that molding the clay might be a good exercise for hand dexterity. Rather than having the students with deafblindness make a specific object, if they prefer, let them work the clay with their hands, making impressions in it with their fingers, and/or squeezing it.

Increasing dexterity in all students is a goal of Bill Blankenbaker, a gym teacher at Riley Elementary School. Even
when his class is doing warm-up exercises, students with disabilities participate with the assistance of peer helpers. While students with disabilities may not be able to do the exact activity other children in the class are doing, they can experience similar movements and sensations with some adaptations.

For example, he helps some students dangle from a climbing net on the gym wall. “While they may not be able to climb the net, they can experience what it feels like to hang from it.” He also has students who aren’t able to climb simply grip the climbing rope so they can feel the texture of it.

Blankenbaker’s adaptations to physical activities often involve changing the size and weight of the equipment involved so students can experience activities as fully as possible. For example, students with a vision impairment or other disability might enjoy playing basketball by throwing a beach ball into a barrel as opposed to using a heavier regulation ball and taller hoop.

Other activities he coordinates, such as riding scooters, are designed to let students experience difference types of movement. Usually, students sit or stand on the scooters and push themselves with their feet. But if that is not within a student’s capabilities Blankenbaker also has larger scooters on which students can lay. “We pull them or sometimes they pull us.”

Following are some additional suggestions for projects for creative expression in art, music, dance and movement, and theatre.

**Art**

“I had a student who was blind from birth. He had heard and read a lot about Van Gogh. He wanted to know what the painting “Starry Night” looked like and what all the other paintings he’d read about looked like. We developed an art appreciation program that included visiting an art museum. He was able to feel a recreation of the textures in “Starry Night” by touching a raised line tracing of the painting.”

— Carolyn Ard, artist and teacher in the VSA arts of Indiana program.

A multitude of projects such as painting, drawing, sculpting, etc. are easily adaptable for students with deafblindness. Many teachers favor combining artistic activities such as poetry and literature with art projects.
The student can write something about a particular piece of art he or she has created or use a poem as a basis for a project. Ask the student to make a wire sculpture depicting how a particular poem makes them feel. The student can also do a “soul painting” to express his or her personality to others.

Keeping in mind that the sense of touch is a primary way in which children with deafblindness experience art, try to incorporate ideas that will allow a student to feel a variety of textures and use different materials. Opportunities also exist for students to learn about existing artwork through specially arranged visits to art museums and galleries.

The following ideas are just some of the possibilities to give students with deafblindness a creative outlet. They were compiled from a combination of interviews with artists and teachers including Carolyn Ard, Dave Pascarella and Sharron Pollack, as well as from the “Art and Poetry kit” and other materials available from VSA arts of Indiana. Modify them or use them as sparks to come up with some of your own ideas. Use your imagination and don’t be afraid to try new things!

**Using Texture in Art**

- Put a piece of window screen or other items that will add texture (macaroni, fish gravel, Styrofoam etc.) underneath paper and have the students draw on the paper with crayon. They’ll be able to feel the raised areas.

- Add sand or soap to paint to give it texture.

- Glue yarn onto paper or use wikkie sticks (a sticky pipe cleaner-type material available at craft stores) to outline various shapes. This method can be used to teach a child the shape of a flower or what a square, circle, triangle, or other simple shape looks like. The student can color in between the raised lines.
• Have the student tear off small pieces of masking tape and attach them to a jar or bottle, covering it completely to create a textured surface that can be colored with markers, varnished, or painted.

• A student with some sight will enjoy projects that involve brushing glue onto paper. Have the student pick a word from a magazine. Cut the word out, and glue it onto a piece of paper. Cut different materials, such as flannel or burlap, into shapes and glue them around the word.

• Take a walk outside. Have the student notice what sort of day it is, what types of surfaces he or she is walking on, what objects (trees, buildings) he or she passes and how he or she feels. Have the student paint a picture of what he or she experienced.

**Appeal to the Senses**

• Scented markers can help a student with a visual impairment “experience” a color through the sense of smell. For example, red smells like strawberry.

• Use other materials that have distinctive scents: leaves, wood, grains, glue with spices, scented Kleenex.

• Scratch and sniff stickers are another tool a student might enjoy.

**Tactile Projects**

• Rug hooking is an activity that can be adapted for a student with a visual impairment. A pattern can be written out in Braille and bags of colored yarn also can be labeled in Braille. Some students may want to create their own random pattern.
• Macramé is a good activity for a student who likes to use his or her hands. Start with teaching a simple pattern for a single rope, for example, and work up to projects such as making a planter.

• Other tactile activities that a student with deafblindness might like are tie-dying shirts, weaving, making jewelry, or print making.

**Sculpture and Pottery**

• Have the student use wire to construct lines that describe adjectives (straight, curved) or illustrate an action (sailing ship). Or, have them create abstract art or specific shapes (flowers or butterflies) with the wire.

• Pottery and/or working with clay are good activities because the student might enjoy forming and changing the shape of the clay and working the material with their hands.

• Have the student use wood, metal, or items like seashells to make impressions in modeling clay to create a mold. Or, they can carve directly into the clay. Mix plaster with water and poor into the mold to make a sculpture. Some students may simply enjoy mixing the plaster, or making a sculpture with the leftover plaster.
Art Appreciation

• Glue yarn or apply wikkie sticks to copies of paintings to detail such things as where the land ends and the sky begins. Other materials, such as raised dots or textured paint can be applied to differentiate elements in a painting or drawing. You can make your own or check with the nearest VSA arts affiliate, which may have some samples available.

A Trip to the Art Museum

Some museums have programs designed especially for people with vision and hearing impairments that allow them to experience artwork in a “hands-on” way. The following information is from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Division of Education and Public Programs, and from Carolyn Ard, based on her visit with a class of visually impaired students to the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

• Before bringing students to the museum, visit it on your own to get acquainted with the objects they’ll be viewing.

• Instruct students not to lean on objects in the museum.

• Find out if there are any exhibits visitors are allowed to touch. Sometimes the museum will allow visitors or make special arrangements for students with vision impairments to wear gloves and feel certain pieces.

• If your group includes students who are visually impaired, have sighted students describe certain works of art to them. Have them discuss size, configuration, color, and shape of the art.

• Use metaphors in your description. (A sculpture of a king and queen might be described as “a royal couple standing as erect and tall as two large trees.”)

• Remember that people with hearing or visual impairments may need extra time to view artwork. If a sign language interpreter is needed, make sure the interpreter faces the group of students, not the art object.

• Flashlights work well for pointing out features of works of art. Avoid low-lit galleries.
• The paintings in a contemporary gallery will often have enough bright bold color to be seen by many students. Those with pinhole vision may enjoy something more detailed, such as a European collection.

• Share stories about the artists or the subjects of pieces you are viewing.

• Artwork in glass cases often will give off a lot of glare, which may appear as an object to some students.

**Music**

“My daughter at age 4 loves music through feeling vibrations. One day we came across a floor piano (the kind you step on and it lights up). Boy, she had fun with it.”

— Mother of a child with deafness responding to a listserv about music for people with hearing impairments.

The sense most often associated with music is hearing. However, the sense of touch plays a prominent role. A piano or bongo drum, for example, can provide a rich vibro-tactile response for a student with deafblindness. A student with deafblindness may be able to read, feel, appreciate, and understand music without being able to see a sheet of music or hear the notes of a song.

Evelyn Glennie, an internationally famous percussionist who began losing her hearing at age eight, says she can take off her shoes and feel an orchestra or she can feel the vibration of a stick hitting a certain percussion instrument. Ludwig Van Beethoven, the famous German-born composer born in 1770, created the 9th Symphony, one of his most beautiful, after he had lost his hearing.

As with all the activities addressed in this booklet, students with deafblindness will have different levels of ability depending on the type of impairment they have. A student with some hearing may be able to pick out melodies and harmonies played by an orchestra, while a student with no hearing may only feel the vibrations from the instruments. Many people with hearing impairments can discriminate bass tones better than treble tones. An awareness of these abilities will help you develop activities that best suit a particular student.
**Feeling the Music**

Some facilities have vibrating floors, chairs, or platforms that are microphone sensitive and allow a person to feel the sound waves. While you may not have access to this type of equipment, such things as an electric keyboard, a microphone, CD player, a floor piano, etc. will allow a student to feel the vibration of music in his or her body. Have the student take his or her shoes off to feel the vibrations on the floor or have them touch different instruments or equipment to experience the physical sensation.

This sort of activity can be tied in with:

- lessons about different types of music, such as jazz, rock, modern, classical, rap, or country;
- lessons about composers;
- or, lessons about how music expresses different types of emotions, seasons, cultures, or other messages.

**Learning about Instruments**

A student with deafblindness may enjoy learning about a variety of musical instruments and may express an interest in learning to play a specific instrument. Allow the student to explore different types of instruments by touching them and listening to or feeling their sound.

A good exercise to introduce music to a student with deafblindness is to have the child use common objects as an instrument or make an instrument out of everyday items. Let the child explore each instrument and experiment with different ways of using it to create sound or sensation. Following is a list of improvised and constructed instruments (Wright, 1994).

**Improvised Instruments**

- magazines
- doors
- doorknobs
- keys
- cork on bottle
- vacuum cleaner
- drawers
- pots and pans
- switches
- spoons
- popcorn popper
- vegetable grate
- bottles
- can openers
- typewriter
- telephone
- coffee pot
**Constructed Instruments**

- paper roll rattles
- can rattle
- bottle cap rattle
- sand blocks
- tin can drum
- egg carton tambourine
- light bulb maracas
- glass and tin can bells
- pop bottle xylophone
- ping pong paddle tambourine

**Musical Games**

- Have a student tap out a rhythm on the floor or on another person. The rest of the group joins in. The person starting the game suddenly stops. The last to stop is the next to start a rhythm.

- To work on rhythm, try an activity where “You must pass this shoe (spoon, stick, etc.) from me to you.” Have the children stand in a line or circle and pass the item to the student to their left on each beat of the rhythm.

**Singing/Writing Lyrics**

- If the student uses sign language, they may enjoy singing songs by signing them.

- The student may enjoy writing lyrics to express the feelings they experience when they hear or feel a particular melody. They can put these lyrics to a rhythm or melody created by a real or improvised instrument.

**Other Means of Expression**

- Have the child compose the lyrics for a jingle for their favorite food or an item they use everyday.

- Have the child imitate different sounds they hear, such as nature sounds.

**Dance and Movement**

“I also love the sense of rhythm. I love dancing. It gives me a feeling of freedom. I just found out I succeeded in making the cheerleading team at school. I also take ballet at a dance studio with a whole class. I have an
Dance and movement are great ways to involve a child with deafblindness in recreational groups with other children. They are good exercise, and they allow the child to express emotion, release tension, and communicate through body movement (Dymoke, 1998).

Besides teaching a student with deafblindness math and music fundamentals, dance and movement also help an individual to develop fine and gross motor skills. They are particularly effective tools in mobility training because dance and movement contribute to self-awareness, body localization, and spatial orientation (Wright, 1994).

The following guidelines provide a framework for presenting dance and movement activities to a child with deafblindness (Wright, 1994).

- Children with deafblindness will not learn at the same rate as children without this disability.
- The aspects of music, i.e. rhythm, and dance should be familiar. If not, give the child the necessary experience.
- Duration of exposure to rhythm, dance, and instruments should be in keeping with the child’s attention span.
- Rhythm and movement activities must progress gradually from the simple to the complex.
- The feedback, any vibrations caused by movement on surfaces and any residual sight or hearing, must be stimulating and rewarding.
- The place where the activities are carried out should be very familiar to the child. Start out with a small area and progressively move into
a larger one. Ropes, boards, boxes, etc can mark off areas. Allow the child to explore this space. Gradually extend the boundaries.

**Rhythmic Movement**

Two types of rhythmic movement, **fundamental** and **interpretive**, can be incorporated into activities for the student (Wright, 1994).

**Fundamental movement** combines gross motor skills and fine motor skills. The gross motor skills include walking, crawling, creeping, running, jumping, hopping, skipping, galloping, climbing, skating, swimming, etc. Fine motor movements, which involve different parts of the body, are bending, turning, striking, pushing, pulling, lifting, clapping, drooping, waving, sweeping, brushing, pointing, rubbing, patting, kicking, wriggling toes, and others.

Make sure the student experiences many of the above movements. Teach those the child does not know. Once the movements are familiar, establish different patterns of arrangement or body movement for the child to experience (Wright, 1994). You might try:

- Setting up a pattern of alternating movements.
- Setting up a maze or obstacle course.
- Having the student wear different types of footwear and experience how movement changes depending on what they are wearing. (Footwear could include tap shoes, heavy house slippers, wooden clogs, boots, hard-soled shoes, soft-soled shoes, etc.)
- Having the student wear different types of clothing and observe its effect on movement. (Clothing could include hats, gloves, capes, robes, vests, etc.)

**Interpretive movement** allows the student to act out characters or objects in different ways (Wright, 1994). He or she can act things out strongly, heavily, lightly, softly, slowly, quickly, jerkily, smoothly, quietly, noisily, happily, sadly, gradually, suddenly, regularly, and irregularly. The student can move in large, small, tall, or short ways, and can be active, passive, tense, relaxed, forceful, or forceless.

Among the things a child can imitate are:
Spatial Concepts

Dance and movement are helpful in teaching such spatial concepts as direction, level, size, shape, and position (Wright, 1994). The following activities help develop this area.

- Have the student pair with a sighted partner and sit back-to-back. While one person moves an arm, a leg, etc., the other person feels or “reads” what the other is doing and mimics it.

- Have the student move in different directions. (Up, down, forward, backward, sideways, right, left, over, under, on top of, underneath, behind, in front of, between, in, and out).

- Have the student interpret through movement different levels (low, medium, and high) and sizes (small, medium, large, little, big, tall, short).

- Have the student imagine he or she is in the center of a box, circle, etc., or on the side, top, or bottom. Ask them to move accordingly.

- Have the students work in groups to form the following shapes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animals</th>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
<th>Objects</th>
<th>Plants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cat</td>
<td>fire</td>
<td>happy</td>
<td>trains</td>
<td>bushes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rabbit</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>sad</td>
<td>trucks</td>
<td>flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bear</td>
<td>air</td>
<td>joyous</td>
<td>buses</td>
<td>grass</td>
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<tr>
<td>tiger</td>
<td>earth</td>
<td>fear</td>
<td>cars</td>
<td>cacti</td>
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<td>crab</td>
<td>forest</td>
<td>anger</td>
<td>vacuum cleaner</td>
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<td>lobster</td>
<td>wind</td>
<td>loneliness</td>
<td>blender</td>
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<td>mouse</td>
<td>mist</td>
<td>excitement</td>
<td>tugboats</td>
<td>vegetables</td>
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<td>turtle</td>
<td>lightening</td>
<td>surprise</td>
<td>snowplows</td>
<td>sagebrush</td>
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<tr>
<td>bird</td>
<td>thunder</td>
<td>quiet</td>
<td>balls</td>
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<tr>
<td>worm</td>
<td>ocean</td>
<td>loud</td>
<td>“slinky” tops</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>salamander</td>
<td>rain</td>
<td></td>
<td>clock</td>
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<tr>
<td>snail</td>
<td>fog</td>
<td></td>
<td>jack in the box</td>
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<tr>
<td>fish</td>
<td>snow</td>
<td></td>
<td>washing machine</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>horse</td>
<td>sunshine</td>
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<td>popcorn popper</td>
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<td>cow</td>
<td>ice</td>
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<td>can opener</td>
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<td>duck</td>
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<td>record player</td>
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<tr>
<td>chicken</td>
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<td>dog</td>
<td>river</td>
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<tr>
<td>kangaroo</td>
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<tr>
<td>elephant</td>
<td>mud</td>
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<td>frog</td>
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<tr>
<td>snake</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Insects

- beetles
- ants
- bugs
- grasshopper
- caterpillar
- butterfly

Emotions

- happy
- sad
- joyous
- fear
- anger
- loneliness
- excitement
- surprise
- quiet
- loud

Objects

- trains
- trucks
- buses
- cars
- vacuum cleaner
- blender
- tugboats
- snowplows
- balls
- spinning tops
- “slinky” toys
- clock
- jack in the box
- washing machine
- popcorn popper
- can opener
- record player
- telephone

Plants

- bushes
- flowers
- grass
- cacti
- ivy
- weeds
- vegetables
- sagebrush
Circle – all the students face center and improvise in unison movement. Designate a leader who decides which movements everyone in the circle will make. For example, to expand the circle, the leader would take a step backwards. The other students would follow, everyone trying to move together. Circles also can contract, revolve, sink, rise, etc.

Concentric circles – Face center. The outer circle makes movements that are in spatial contrast to those of the center.

Line – One behind the other, following the leader.

Side-by-Side Line – All face the same direction. Line may remain straight, curved, stationary, moveable, etc. Act in unison.
In addition to the listed exercises, childhood dances can be taught as long as the participants can memorize sequences and respond to simple commands. Some of these dances are “Looby Loo,” “Hokie Pokie,” “Did You Ever See A Lassie,” “Mulberry Bush,” “Ten Little Indians,” and many more.

**Advanced Dance Techniques**

Some students with deafblindness may want to learn more sophisticated, specific dances. At this level, the dancer will not necessarily “hear” by feeling vibrations through the floor because their feet will not actually touch the floor continually if they are jumping or leaping. This is true for the members of Gallaudet Dance Company at Gallaudet University, a Washington D.C. college for people with hearing impairments (Gallaudet).

The troupe practices long hours so members can develop an inner sense of timing for a specific dance. Dancers with some hearing may eventually pick up cues from the music, but they primarily learn a dance from counting all the movements in a dance step (Gallaudet).

**Theatre**

"Because I am deafblind, my enormous enjoyment of theatre tends to shock and confuse many people. They cannot fathom how I could possibly enjoy it because of the way I see. If you can imagine what it is like to drive through a blizzard, where visibility is extremely difficult and sometimes impossible, then you have a sense of how I see. I look through a snowstorm all the time. But with a good interpreter sitting at close range, proper lighting, and seating close to the stage, the excitement and fun of music and dance become accessible to me. And like many other deafblind people, I can feel – and sometimes hear – the deeper musical tones, which fill my body with a sense of loveliness."


Theater combines communication, relationships, and entertainment for students with deafblindness. The opportunities to combine theatre projects with other creative expression activities are many. For instance, students can construct a puppet show stage out of a box and decorate it; make puppets; and write a script. The student may want to watch or listen to a film by a playwright they are studying.
Enjoyment of theater extends to experiencing drama, comedy, musicals, and improvisation. It also involves letting students experience themselves through original works or performances that let them connect to the rest of the world.

Following are some ideas from teachers and theater groups on how students with deafblindness can access the dramatic arts.

• A student can share a poem he or she has written describing themselves. They may want to act out the poem by themselves or use other classmates as actors.

• The Tony Award-winning National Theater of the Deaf (NTD) conducts the following activity at workshops designed to show the importance of sensory memory. Put the students in two circular groups and have them put their hands on the shoulders on the person in front of them. Give them about 5 seconds to feel that person’s shoulders, neck, and head. Have the students close their eyes and locate that same person using only their sense of touch (National Theater of the Deaf).

• Another NTD activity is to let students perform a non-spoken scene. Separate them into groups and give them a fairy tale, such as *Little Miss Muffet*. Each group is asked to show the well-known story in a different style. For example, some of those styles could be *Little Miss Muffet* as a ballet, with a sumo wrestler as the main character, or as a western. This activity helps the participants to think visually and use physical motions to express their story clearly without using words.

• Incorporate dance and movement into role-playing activities in which the students can act out characters from a favorite book or play or act out a scenario they have developed.

• Miming also incorporates movement. Have students mime different activities, animals, characters, etc. and have the others guess what they are doing.

**A Trip to the Theatre**

“With specially trained interpreters, close-up seating, and an opportunity to experience sets, costumes, and props through touch, people with deafblindness can experience the ‘magic of the theatre.’”

— The Deaf-Blind Theatre Access Project
Some theaters will accommodate groups whose members have visual and/or hearing impairments so they will get the most out of their visit. While most theaters may not have a formal program, they may be willing to work with you to accommodate special needs. Following are some guidelines from the Deaf-Blind Theatre Access Project to think about when arranging a trip to the theater for deafblind children.

- A person serving as a liaison with a particular production can work with the costume and props departments and actors to develop a pre-show tour.

- Schedule pre-show activities to introduce students to the plot and characters and to give them a sensory awareness of set designs, costumes, props, etc. During the pre-show tour, students can walk around the stage, touching costumes, props, sets, furniture, and even actors. Extra lighting at this time is beneficial.

- If available, a model of the set helps students visualize the full stage.

- Allow one-and-one-half to two hours for the pre-show tour so it can be completed before the rest of the audience arrives.

- Get audio and video recordings of the performance so interpreters can preview the show. The interpreters may want to have a rehearsal in the actual auditorium and/or attend a dress rehearsal. Often, they will want to run through the performance several times for practice.

- Tactile and close-vision interpreting are both physically and mentally tiring, so it is best to have two interpreters for each student with deafblindness.

- Depending on the student’s visual needs, the interpreters may sit beside or across from patrons.

- Make sure there are Braille and large-print playbills available.

**Promoting Awareness**

Displaying artwork created by students with deafblindness gives them a forum to express themselves and their unique characteristics. Having students perform a drama or dance, present an art show, or stage a concert is as important as the creative process itself. The creative arts are a form of communication, and it’s important to share the talents of your students.
Each piece of artwork contains the sensory impressions, memories, and personal preferences of an individual (Harlan, 1993). The creative expression of each person will relay things about them that other people may not have known and will find interesting. Displaying the work not only validates the artist, it creates a positive image of people with deafblindness.

Sharing work within the classroom is important. While the students are working on projects, ask open-ended questions such as, “Is there anything you would like to tell me about your work?” Harlan suggests. Make sure you have students sign and date all artwork, and create a portfolio of their projects.

Many opportunities exist to showcase creative expression projects. You can display artwork in your school hallways, in museums, galleries, corporate offices, or some other formal setting. You can create a scrapbook of pieces that can be shared with families, students, and others. You can videotape a dance routine for future viewing. With a little imagination, the possibilities are endless.

These are examples from a story written by a student with deafblindness. This future author works with his brother on his stories and the illustrations.
References


Resources

American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB)
814 Thayer Avenue, Suite 302
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Phone: (800) 735-2258
TTY: (301) 588-6545
Fax: (301) 588-8705
www.tr.wou.edu/dblink/aadb.htm

Boston Museum of Fine Arts
Division of Education and Public Programs
Avenue of the Arts
465 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115-5523
Phone: (617) 369-3300
Fax: (617) 369-3165
www.mfa.org

The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis
Teacher Resource Link
3000 North Meridian Street
Indianapolis, IN 46208-4716
(317) 334-4001
www.ChildrensMuseum.org

DB-LINK: National Information Clearinghouse On
Children Who Are Deaf-Blind
Teaching Research
Western Oregon University
345 North Monmouth Avenue
Monmouth, OR 97361
Phone: (800) 438-9376
TTY: (800) 854-7013
Fax: (503) 838-8150
www.tr.wou.edu/dblink

The Deaf-Blind Theatre Access Project
Northeastern University Interpreter Education Program
Phone: (617) 373-2463
Fax: (617) 373-3065
TTY: (617) 373-4302
www.dac.neu.edu/nuiep
Creative Expression: Opportunities for Persons who are Deafblind

Gallaudet University
National Information Center on Deafness
800 Florida Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 651-5052
TTY: (202) 651-5051
www.gallaudet.edu

Helen Keller National Center
For Deaf-Blind Youths And Adults (HKNC)
111 Middle Neck Road
Sands Point, NY 11050-1299
(516)944-8900
Fax: (516) 944-7302
TTY: (516) 944-8637
www.helenkeller.org/national

Indianapolis Museum of Art
1200 West 38th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46208
Phone: (317) 923-1331
www.ima-art.org/

Kentucky Center for the Arts
501 West Main St.
Louisville, KY 40202-2989
(502) 584-7777
Kentucky Center Accessibility Hotline:
(502) 562-0111 (v)
(502) 562-0140 (TTD)

National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB)
111 Middle Neck Road
Sands Point, NY 11050
(800) 255-0411 x275
www.cpd.usu.edu/nfadb

National Institute on Art and Disabilities
551 23rd Street
Richmond, CA
Phone: (415) 620-0290
www.niadart.org
Creative Expression: Opportunities for Persons who are
Opportunities for Persons Who are Deafblind

Nancy Pieters Mayfield
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Preface

Among the ways we can express ourselves creatively are painting, drawing, pottery, sculpture, textiles, jewelry, collages, murals, symbols, illustrations, cartoons, and photos.

Among the ways we can express ourselves creatively are writing lyrics, studying music appreciation, making instruments, listening to nature sounds, imitating rhythmic patterns, studying musicians, making up jingles, listening to and learning about music from different cultures, playing musical games, and participating in music therapy.

Among the ways we can express ourselves creatively are different sorts of dance (ballet, ballroom, modern, jazz, tap) and different types of movement (exercise, imitating objects, partnering with others).

Among the ways we can express ourselves creatively are story-telling, acting, attending theater, mime, improvisation, comedy, film, puppet shows, films, and videos.

As you can see, “creative expression” can take many different forms. This book discusses many of these forms and provides suggestions on how to assist students who are deafblind in expressing their creativity through various mediums. Creative Expression: Opportunities for Persons who are Deafblind is intended for anyone interested in promoting access to the arts and creative expression in students who are deafblind and who have multiple disabilities. This includes consumers, family members, friends, professionals and other community members.

Indiana Deafblind Services Project
Blumberg Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Special Education
School of Education, Room 502
Indiana State University
Terre Haute, IN 47809
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