



MONTANA
ARTS COUNCIL

Adaptations for Using the Arts in Elementary Classrooms

Some ways of looking at disabilities:

- Disability has always been around.
- It is part of the human condition.
- There is no such thing as normal.
- People with disabilities may accomplish things differently from people without disabilities.
- We all have challenges, problems, and barriers, to overcome.
- We all need support to overcome our challenges, problems and barriers.
- We are all faced with changes and have to adapt.
- We all need some sort of protection and a sense of being cared for and included.

We all have a lot to learn and discover about disabilities.

Where do we start to ensure that all students are included?

1. Talk it over – especially with the child.
2. Always recognize all appropriate efforts.
3. Make sure the learning experiences are meaningful and satisfying. That means identify student interests, prior experiences and needs.
4. Consider the educational priorities of your lesson when developing adaptations.
5. Ask before assuming that someone needs assistance and provide **only** the amount needed for the individuals to express him/herself through the art making.
6. Make sure that children with disabilities get to make the same choices that children without disabilities get to make.

Music

Many children's books are based on songs, or include wonderful opportunities for sound effects. *Over in the Meadow*, *Froggie went a courting'*, *This Old Man*, *Yankee Doodle*, and *Where the Wild Things Are* – great sound effects with voices or instruments.

Rhythm name games with clapping, tapping, nodding, blinking, tongue movement – allows all children, including the non-verbal, to participate.

Use voices as rhythm instruments – clicking, oohing, buzzing, snorting, mmmm, ddddd, – to create rhythms, to create sound effects (listen to Steve Reich’s compositions, <http://www.steverreich.com>).

Create instruments with found objects in the classroom – remember those great cards in the bike spokes – they work in wheelchairs too!

Sing! Children are not a critical audience, and they love to do it. Sing directions, sing simple songs, sing activity – change signals. Make up new verses to familiar songs, or add nonsense words. Since you are responsible for teaching children language, singing is a wonderful way to do it.

Use hand drums, clapping, or tap on body, book, or globe to create attention-getting routines without a lot of talk. You can also use them with children to include sound effects and rhythm in songs and stories and drama.

If holding an instrument is a challenge, attach it to the chair rest, or a leg, or to clothing, a hair ribbon or a hat.

Dance

About touching to give assistance – **always ask**. Remember too, that a wheelchair is an extension of the user. Ask if it’s OK to assist in movement activities by pushing, turning, spinning. Never, ever assume that you can lean on the chair, use it as a personal support, or in other ways involve yourself with the chair without acknowledging or involving the person using the chair.

Movement activities should include body awareness activities – remind all participants to respect personal space.

Use suggestions like:

- show me a way to move a specific body part – leg/arm/chin/finger/elbow, or
- find different ways to move from Point A to Point B – gliding, scooting, rolling, hopping, wiggling.

Everyone does not have to do the same movement so build on individual abilities and develop individual skills. Hopping over something can mean hopping over a line on the floor, or a scarf, or an object, or hopping around it.

Use objects that invite movement – scarf waving, hula hoops, tossing paper airplanes, moving a body part while standing or sitting in a stationary position.

Remember the basic effort actions upon which all movement is based: tap, flick, glide, float, press, wring, punch, slash. How many different ways can these movements be done, and from what positions?

Drama

Mime is a great way to involve all children in learning to tell a story, to create sequence, to use humor, to problem solve. Mime can also help students with a hearing impairment to develop descriptive language.

Skits/plays

Stage directions that are specific will help children with low vision as well as children who need specific information to maintain focus. Giving children an opportunity to create their own dramas helps them learn how to watch a play. They can use puppets or become actors themselves using simple pieces of costuming or props to create characters. Use Velcro on dress-up clothes and costumes to make getting them on and off easier.

The most important thing to remember in any group activity like creative dramatics is that every part is essential to tell the story. There are no small parts! Red Riding Hood needs scary trees to keep her on the path to grandmother's house. She needs small animals scurrying in the forest to warn her that danger is near. This means all children can create the scenes, sound effects, movement, etc.

If a participant has difficulty remembering lines, give them one specific repetitive sound, word or phrase that contributes to the whole. This can be done as a solo part or with a group of children (kids being the wind, for example). Partnering works if both partners feel a sense of belonging and one partner doesn't become "the boss." Children need to respect all participants' abilities and roles in the creative process.

Managing behavior is often a challenge in creative dramatics activities. Be aware children do not mimic or make fun of other children. Vary activities from active to calm, verbal to non-verbal.

Never forget that another person's perception of the world is different from our own.

Understand that world before you try to make the person fit into your own.

Visual Art

All materials should be easily accessed by all participants.

Give all participants the same choices.

Use non-toxic art materials.

Selecting and adapting materials:

- Provide large magnifiers in the art area.

- Supply house painting brushes, foam wedges, roll-on applicators, and squeeze bottles to make painting easier for children with motor and coordination disabilities.
- Modify paint brushes, markers, crayons or pencils by wrapping clay or foam (old foam hair rollers are great!) to make them thicker.
- Add wooden knobs to the lids of containers.
- Add foam pieces to the corners of book pages.
- Cut some paint brush handles down and secure a short dowel across the end to create a “T” shape for easier grasping.
- Stabilize materials by attaching magnetic strips to them and using a cookie sheet as an easel – or tape materials to drawing/painting surfaces.
- Secure materials such as paint jars and small storage containers, to surfaces using suction cups, c-clamps, non-skid matting, Velcro, or sand bags.
- Use stiff lacing instead of shoe string for stringing beads.
- Use Lazy Susans so children can more easily reach objects.
- Add unusual textures to familiar materials such as Velcro dots to blocks or sand to finger-paint.
- Use varieties of paper – shiny, textured, sparkling. And use different sizes and shapes of paper.

What is Arts Access?

Arts access is achieved when people with and without disabilities have the **same** opportunity to experience the arts, whether they are audience members, artists, or patrons.

VSA, the international organization on arts and disability, offers a large selection of publications, guides, and other resources dealing with a wide variety of subject matter in arts, education, and disabilities at <http://www.kennedy-center.org/education/vsa/>.

Please contact the Montana Arts Council for other resources:

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