
UNIT 9 DEVELOPING ABILITIES IN CREATIVE ARTS

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

When we buy a piece of cloth, select a vocation, listen to music or choose a hobby, we normally have a number of choices available to us. However, persons with disabilities are commonly denied the full range of options the society offers. Even though some limits are shared by every human being, persons with disability experience much greater limitation in choosing a vocation or an art form. However, in the context of the visually impaired, art education is increasingly getting the attention of educators. It is now commonly felt that the person with vision loss needs more training in this area, in a way to compensate for his disability.

People have stereotyped attitudes towards persons with visual impairment. One such stereotype is the widespread belief that blind persons have a sixth sense and possess musical abilities. In fact, this is not quite correct. As is the case with sighted individuals, persons with visual impairment also need to *develop* musical skills and other creative arts abilities.

How will this Unit help you?

Information given in this Unit will help you to understand and become familiar with:

- what is meant by 'creative arts';
- the importance of creative arts;
- the role of music as an important creative arts activity for persons with visual impairment;
- the variety of other creative arts activities, such as drawing, painting, clay modelling, language arts, craftwork and mosaic designs, suitable for people with visual impairment;
- the pre-requisite skills that need to be developed in children for the learning of creative arts;
- the role of parents in developing aptitude for creative arts in children and nurturing children's creativity; and
- the value of creative arts in providing vocational opportunities and economic rehabilitation.

9.2 NATURE OF CREATIVE ARTS

We all have heard statements like "She is innovative" and "He does things differently". In each of these sentences, we are referring to someone who is creative. Being creative means 'to create' or 'to bring into being'. In simple terms, it means to produce something new and original by means of innovative thinking. **The various ways in which people can display their creativity is through the creative arts, a term which includes drawing, painting, craftwork, music, language arts such as story telling and dramatization pottery, sculpture, claymodelling, design making.**

'Child art' is often emphasized for developing the creative process in all children, including the disabled. In any child art, **it is the creative process that is more important than the product.** For example, when children paint or draw, they do not do so with the sole aim of producing something. They are interested in experimenting with the art material and, as they do so, some design is formed. This freedom of choosing their art material, using it as they like, makes the activity enjoyable and facilitates creative self-expression. What the child produces is not as important as the fact that the child did produce something on his own.

Shanthi is working as a resource teacher for visually impaired children at the primary level. The resource room has a lot of recreational aids. Shanthi is teaching drawing to low vision children, using crayons. Low

vision children can not only discriminate colours but can use the embossed nature of the crayon marks too for identification purposes. The resource room has many small articles and drawings produced by visually impaired children. When asked how these appeal to adults, Shanthi said, "Most of the children's creations appeal to adults not because they are of very high quality, but because they have been produced by children."

9.3 IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVE ARTS

Practising creative arts help all people—disabled or non-disabled—in many ways. These include the following:

- 1) **Creative arts provide an opportunity for all round development** of children — they foster the cognitive (mental), physical, motor, social, emotional and language development.
- 2) Involvement in the creative arts brings down the frustration caused by the disabling condition. Coping with the impairment requires a lot of mental adjustment. **Creative art activities serve as a therapy** and help people to express their feelings, which they might otherwise hesitate to. In this way, they help in overcoming emotional problems. Training in the creative arts, helps to develop a positive frame of mind.
- 3) **Creative arts enable the visually impaired to participate socially in society.** Social living is an important aspect in the successful living of the individual. In addition to education, orientation and mobility skills, family acceptance and employment, social integration is an important pillar in the life of the visually impaired. Creative arts activities like drama, music and sculpture enable the visually impaired individuals to interact with others and therefore, help to develop their social skills.
- 4) **Creative arts help the visually impaired persons to develop a positive self-image about themselves as well as create a positive image about them in society.** Visually impaired persons have emotions, aspirations, and abilities like all other human beings and, therefore, it is important that they develop self-confidence and self-esteem. Development of a healthy self-image helps them in their efforts for education and employment. Creative arts activities help in cultivating positive feelings and emotions, and give the person a sense of satisfaction and confidence.
- 5) **Creative arts develop aesthetic sense in the individual.** Sighted persons often feel that visually impaired persons cannot enjoy nature due to

the lack of vision. This is not true because nature is not to be enjoyed only through vision, but by experiencing it through other senses.

- 6) Education of the visually impaired child is not complete unless he learns to take care of himself — economically and socially. **Creative arts** can be one of the potential areas, which **can make him economically self-sufficient**. The products created by the visually impaired persons can enable them to earn a livelihood. Greetings cards using finger painting methods, wire bags, plastic flowers and handicraft items, can help in providing some income.

Thus art education should find a permanent place in the school curriculum for visually impaired children as well as at home. Expose the child to a wide variety of creative arts activities and look out for the child's aptitude for a specific creative art, which you may then encourage in particular.

9.4 PRE-REQUISITES FOR ART EDUCATION

Like all branches of education, a number of pre-requisite skills are required for developing interest and abilities in the creative arts among children.

- Firstly, finger manipulation and manual dexterity skills have to be developed in the child. These skills are essential for clay modelling, sculpture and craftwork. For this, fine motor development activities should be introduced right from the preschool years. You have read about these in Unit 6.
- Vocabulary development is essential for the language arts. Activities for the same have been described in Unit 5.
- Sensory training is essential to make use of the various senses optimally. Efficient sensory training can bring fine results, which may be in singing, in playing an instrument, or making models. Refer to Unit 3 for details regarding sensory training.
- Development of concepts such as discrimination, classification, spatial relations, position, and direction is essential for improving the person's artistic ability. Activities to foster these are in Unit 4.

Thus, it is important that activities for development of various skills, abilities, and concepts about which you have read in Units 3, 4, 5 and 6 should be organized for the child by parents, family members and teachers, right from the early years of life.

9.5 TYPES OF CREATIVE ART ACTIVITIES

Having agreed on the importance of creative arts, let us now look in greater detail at some specific activities that are considered appropriate and useful for the visually impaired. While it is true that most of the art activities demand vision, appropriate adaptation in the process would make it possible for the child without vision to take active part in such activities. Even though art activities such as painting and drawing have considerably less scope for a person with total visual loss, persons with some degree of residual vision could be involved in these activities too. Let us take up the individual activities and look at the possibilities.

9.5.1 Music

Music is considered to be perhaps the first among all creative activities for the visually impaired. Musical performances - vocal and instrumental - have been a part and parcel of special school activities ever since their inception.

There is a stereotyped notion that all visually impaired people can sing well. Even though it is not true in all cases, it is evident that many visually impaired people opt for music. Musical ability can be developed in them. There have been great musicians who were blind, right from the time of Surdas to Ravindra Jain in the contemporary period, and they continue to inspire thousands. There is no doubt that music is one of the very important arts, and a viable vocation, for visually impaired persons. Formal training in vocal or instrumental music will help to develop the person's abilities.

Let us now take a look at how children may be oriented to sounds, rhythm and music.

The life of a child is interwoven with sounds. The falling of the rain, the clock ticking, the squeaking of the windows, the blowing of the wind - all these are music to the ears of the child. A mother too tends to put the child to sleep with a lullaby and sing a song to comfort the crying infant. She usually rocks him, claps her hands, clicks her fingers and makes repetitive sounds like "la la... la la la". Children's songs and rhymes are an integral part of growing up for most children. Therefore, the child gets introduced to music in an informal way. Children's natural responsiveness to music and movements has been recognized for long by educationists as well. Hence, in the formal education too, children often learn through music at the pre-school age. It is the most attractive mode of keeping children involved during the initial days of schooling. Children in the age group of 5-10 years create their own tunes and are not aware of, or unduly concerned about, the rules of music.

However, it is noted that very often children lose interest in creating music as they grow older. Many studies on music reveal that the children's musical inventiveness decreases, and practically dries up, as children learn to sing songs, which are presented to them as prepared music by adults.

In the case of the sighted, the sense of vision overpowers all the other senses. They do not attend to details of sound in their day-to-day life. However, the blind person relies on the sense of sound to a very large extent and perceives details of sound because the sense of vision does not distract him. Experiences reveal that the following activities and strategies help to develop the musical ability among visually impaired children. Of course, these activities can be carried out with sighted children as well.

Activities to Orient the Child to Rhythm and Music

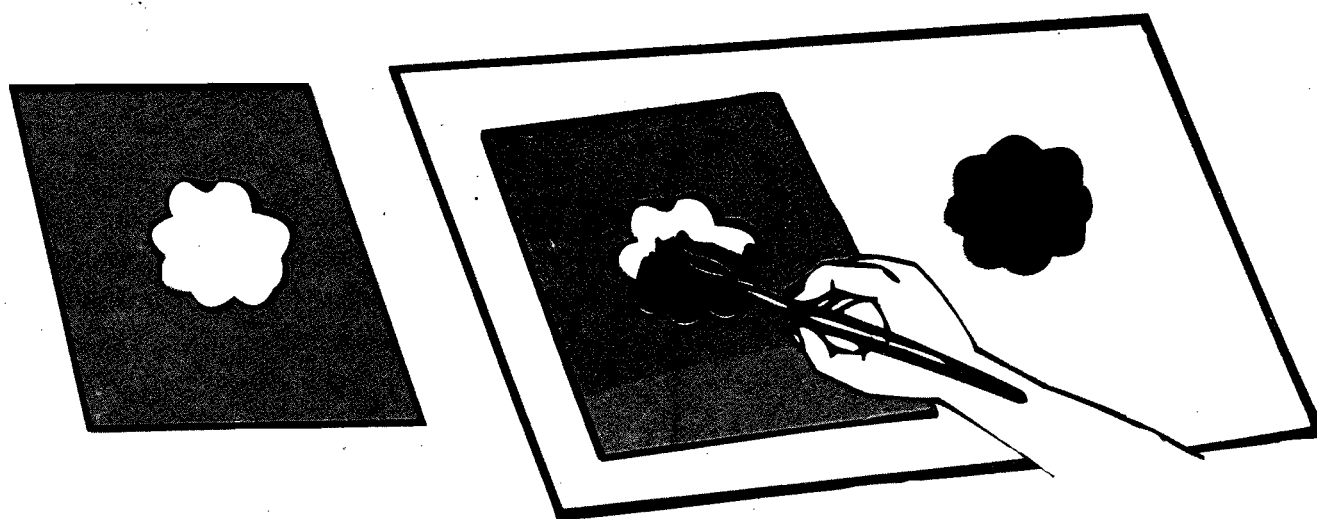
- A good beginning to rhythm activities is the exploration of sounds in the environment. Hence, encourage the child to listen to sounds that have a definite beat, such as the ticking of the clock or dripping of the water. Ask him to produce the rhythm of these sounds by clapping his hands or tapping his feet.
- Ask the child to close his eyes and listen. Let him talk about what all he has heard, and then reproduce the sounds.
- Encourage the child to listen to and reproduce different rhythmic vocal sounds, for instance, laughing ('ha'- 'ha'-'ha' or 'ho'-'ho'-'ho') or chanting to a rhythmic beat.
- Sing various kinds of songs and rhymes to the child and motivate him to join you. The main point here is that the child should enjoy the song. Encourage the child to sing with you as you sing the song, articulating clearly and distinctly.
- Musical instruments can add fun to singing. Provide opportunities to the child to handle them. Start with simple musical instruments like 'damru', 'daaphli', drum, bells, 'ghungroos' and 'dholak' and gradually proceed to more elaborate instruments like harmonium, casio and flute, which need more training.
- Play soft folk or classical tunes when the child is engaged in any kind of indoor activity, as this tends to create an interest in music.
- Movement and music as a combined activity can develop the musical creativity in the children. Moving as per the rhythm of the music, creating movements depending on the feeling the music brings out (for example, different musical tunes may generate the feelings of falling rain, wind blowing, waterfall) and exercising to music helps to develop innovativeness while also helping to develop the coordination among various parts of the body.

Guidelines for Musical Activities

- Music-making has to be emphasized rather than musical reproduction. This means that instead of singing tunes created by others, the person must be encouraged to make his own tunes.
- Letting children listen to various beats and rhythms develops their creativity in setting new tunes. It also helps in auditory discrimination.
- Individual musical performance of a learned piece of music or participation in an orchestra develops a sense of 'creative reproduction' in the individual. Even though this is a reproduction of a planned and prepared music, it generates in the child a feeling of being an amateur performer.

9.5.2 Painting

Neha, a twelve year old girl with low vision, has recently started showing interest in painting. She spends long hours using brush and water paints on old newspapers. At times, she just drops some colour at a point and then blows it with the help of a straw. She wanted to make a birthday card for her mother with a flower on it. But she did not know how to do it. She discussed the problem with her father. He thought about it, took a cardboard and cut out the shape of a flower from it, as shown in the figure on the next page. Now Neha just needs to place the cardboard frame on the paper and paint inside the boundaries of the cut-out portion. She can paint as many flowers as she wants for her mother.



Cardboard cut-outs can help people with visual loss to paint

People with limited vision can learn to paint. Many organizations produce seasonal greeting cards which have been painted by visually impaired persons, and sell them in the open market, which increases the earning

potential of the individual. Even though total perfection cannot be expected, painting is an avenue worth exploring for people with limited vision. Tactile painting can also be tried out. In this form of painting, some gritty materials, such as sand, is mixed with the paint. If you mix different materials in different colours, each colour will have a specific texture, which enables even the blind individual to have a sense of clarity and confidence in painting. Painting activities provide opportunities for a lot of experimentation and exploration and visually impaired children should be encouraged to enjoy the benefits of the same. They would enjoy variations, such as finger painting, thread painting and hand painting, as much as the sighted children.

9.5.3 Drawing

Tactile drawing (drawing by touch) is an interesting activity for the visually impaired. Low vision children can not only discriminate colours but can also use the embossed nature of the crayon marks for identification purposes. The invention of relief papers has made a big breakthrough in the art of drawing for visually impaired persons. The upward impression of the lines on the relief paper helps the individual to feel his drawing at every step. Also, the new Pragna's sketching device, which gives upward impression on a flannel board, is useful in embossed drawing.

9.5.4 Clay Modelling, Pottery and Sculpture

Clay modelling and pottery by enabling the person to produce an object, even if it has been with the help of another, helps the visually impaired person to experience a sense of achievement. Being able to make something, is important for the child, and his efforts should be encouraged, so that the activity may capture his interest.

Clay Modelling

Like other creative arts activities, experimenting with clay and making things enhances the creative abilities of visually impaired children, and therefore, this activity should be encouraged from the preschool years onwards. However, in the beginning what the child makes may not be an 'object', as the adults tend to think of it. It may be a round ball of clay which the child refers to as 'laddoo'. In the beginning, the child will want to make something and show it to those he loves — like his parents and other family members, or a friend. This is natural and can be used as a means of getting the child interested in the activity. Gradually, the child can be taught that by slapping and squeezing the clay in many ways, it can be made into many interesting shapes and forms. This is a slow process, and some children are more skilled at it, as well as more interested, as compared to others.

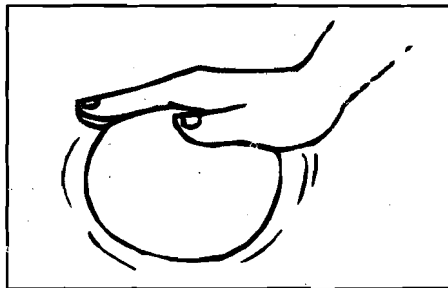
For some children, clay modelling is a form of therapy - making a 'mess' with clay and water, and enjoying the feel of it, helps them to release and express their feelings, which they may otherwise not be able to. It is a good way to let out the pent-up emotions and frustrations. A few children may find working with clay distasteful initially, but eventually most of them like to squeeze it and play with it, and they derive pleasure from handling it. However, if a child shows aversion to the activity, do not force him.

Sometimes, some children may be creative in thinking of new objects and shapes to make with clay and yet to be unable to achieve the desired results due to tremor in the hands (i.e. shaking of the hands), or due to lack of coordination between the hands and fingers. This causes dissatisfaction and frustration. You have to be sensitive in dealing with such situations and help the children understand that they can talk about their ideas while another person can give their ideas a shape.

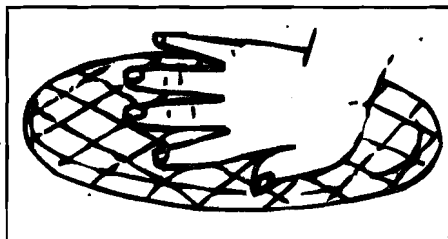
Many children express a great desire to make animal shapes from clay. These are rather difficult for most children, but with help and by choosing suitable animals, much can be done. Even though the child may not be able to complete the models alone, something can be learnt from making legs (four legs - the same thickness and length), head (smaller than the body), position of eyes, ears and nose. Given below is an example which shows how easily animals can be made from clay.

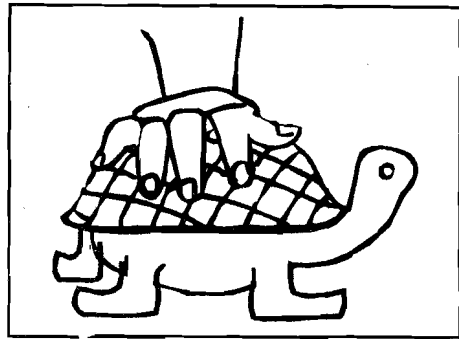
Making a Tortoise

- 1) *Take a handful of clay. With half the quantity, try to form an irregular shaped 'ladoo' or a ball. This 'ladoo' will form the inner body of the tortoise.*



- 2) *From half of the rest of the clay, roll out a small chappati (flat round piece). Use the palm of your hand for making it thinner. This makes the shell for the tortoise.*





3) Place this chappati on the 'ladoo' and press it lightly.

4) Divide the rest of the dough into five parts. Roll out four small thin 'snakes' to make legs and one long and thick 'snake' to make the neck and face of the tortoise. Place and press the legs in the inner dough of the body. Place the neck and bend it a little to form the face. Small beads can be used for eyes.

Making a human form is another interesting idea and children can gain a sense of the proportions and parts of the body by doing so. Clay can also be used for making tactile pictures, and three-dimensional geometric figures.

Pottery

Older children can be introduced to pottery, using the potter's wheel, to make pots and vessels which are subsequently baked and, if desired, painted. Learning the art of pottery has the following advantages.

- It provides the basic knowledge of the different steps involved in producing pots - from the raw clay stage to the completed glazed article.
- It enables the person to know the meaning of various words used in connection with pottery.
- It helps the person to develop a lively interest in creating things out of clay and discuss ways of attempting to overcome problems that arise during the various stages of making an article.

Sculpture

Visually impaired people are successful in sculpture work too. In this area, help of the sighted person is essential so that the latter can check periodically what is being made and the person can be sure of his product. Skills in carving and using chisels are attained by the visually impaired person through practice. In this art, it is always better to start with a small item. Training in clay modelling becomes a pre-requisite for this art.

9.5.5 Craftwork

Craftwork covers a vast area involving many skills. From making small items from paper, cloth, beads and waste materials at home to vocational skills like chair caning — everything comes under the broad umbrella of 'craftwork'. Craft activities encourage the creative instinct, and even the

simplest piece of work completed can give enormous pleasure to the maker. Experiences have shown that the child achieves infinitely more when working in a relaxed atmosphere and, wherever possible, is allowed to choose his own work at each stage of progress. This is true of visually impaired children as well as the sighted children.

To create and maintain an interest in craftwork, the child should be offered opportunities and encouraged to make a wide variety of items from the preschool age itself. Praise the child for whatever he does and makes. Of course, the child would need assistance and encouragement for the requisite skills to flourish.

For effective craftwork, particularly at the vocational level, the visually impaired person has to learn to accomplish as many of the basic motions as possible - such as winding, gripping, pressing, screwing, pushing and pulling - and also be capable of recognizing shapes of different materials and sorting and grading them. Also, it is essential for the person to learn to use the necessary tools. He must understand the safety skills required for using tools. He needs to learn not to be afraid, but to use them with care. The visually impaired person should also learn the practical use of both natural and synthetic materials, for example, cane, wood, leather, nylon and plastic.

9.5.6 Mosaic Designs

Making mosaic designs (tactile pictures) from material considered waste is another interesting art activity for visually impaired persons. This activity is very feasible because it is completely based on the sense of touch. Those people who became blind after some years of birth and, therefore, got some opportunities to develop concepts regarding form and shape using the sense of vision, find the mosaic design art very interesting. Making mosaic designs also helps in developing finger manipulation and manual dexterity. The child can easily be given practice at home in making mosaic designs. Consider the following example:

Making a Mosaic Design

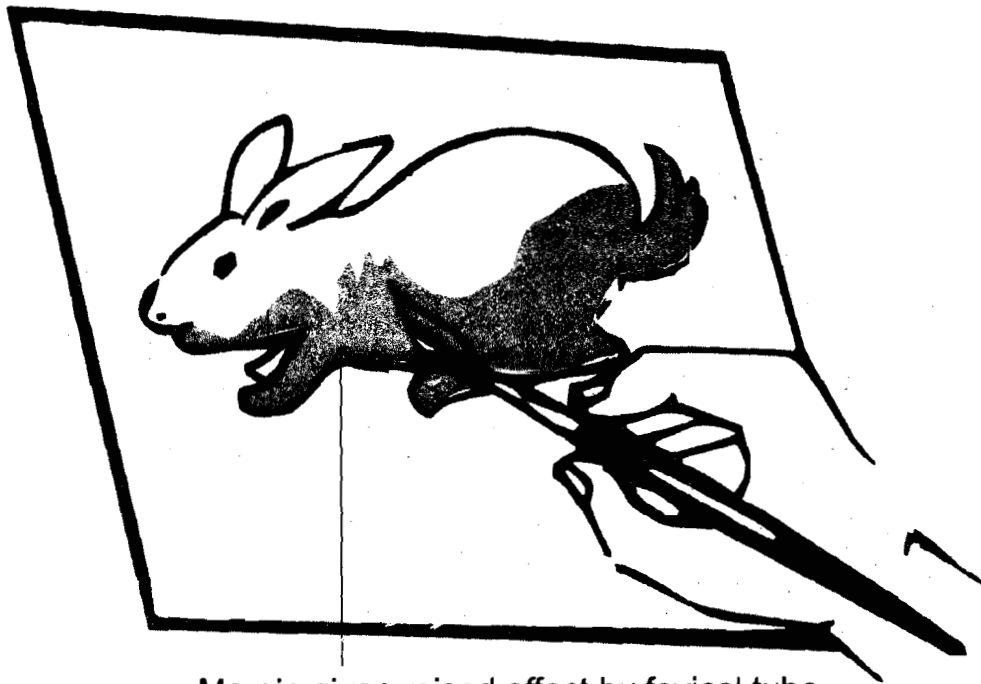
Materials required:

Fevicol tube, thick chart paper, pen/pencil, brush, paints

Steps

- *Draw any shape on the chart paper.*
- *With the help of a fevicol tube, outline the boundaries of the picture and let it dry for 1-2 hours. This makes it a tactile picture.*
- *Assist the child in feeling the outline of the picture, so as to give him an idea about its size and shape.*

- *With the help of a brush, ask the child to paint inside the outline. The brush can also be used to sense the outline of the picture.*
- *You may also help the child spread gum outside the outline and sprinkle coloured sand/crushed chalk on it to create a different background.*



Margin given raised effect by fevicol tube

Making a mosaic design

9.5.7 Language Arts

Script writing, story writing, story telling, dramatization and composing poems require creativity in the language arts. Visually impaired children who listen to radio and television programmes frequently develop creativity in using language in different contexts. Such facilities further strengthen the language skills of these children.

To initiate interest in language arts, expose the child to stories from a very young age. The stories help to develop the child's fantasy and imagination and also help in acquiring information about the real world. By listening to stories and also by narrating them, children learn new words, they practice words they already know and learn to combine them creatively. It is important that the content and language of the stories you choose are appropriate for the age of the child. Modulate your voice during narration. After the story is over, give the child time to express his thoughts and feelings. Encourage the child to narrate a story or say the dialogues and dramatize.

9.6 WHAT YOU CAN DO TO NURTURE CREATIVE ARTS

Parents, family members and teachers can help the visually impaired children in many ways, enhancing their creativity and abilities in the field of creative arts.

9.6.1 Sustain Motivation

In the beginning, the products made by the child may not look very good from the adult point of view. But then we also know that the product by itself is not as important as the process of making it. It is essential to reward the child for whatever he makes. Such motivation and reinforcement will build confidence in the child. Allow the child to try out new things without the fear of failure.

9.6.2 Provide Assistance

There are activities which a visually impaired child can perform independently after practice, such as singing or playing an instrument. However, activities like craftwork, painting and sculpture require the assistance of sighted persons. Proper assistance, when needed, would help the child to assess where he stands and how to proceed further. You can also take help of the siblings (brothers and sisters) and other children to assist the child in creating something new.

9.6.3 Organise Visits to Museums and Art Galleries

Take the child to museums, art galleries, handicraft fairs and other such places. Special permission can be obtained to allow the child to touch and feel the objects so that he gets more vivid learning experiences.

9.6.4 Focus on Abilities

Often the parents' concern is the child's disability rather than his ability and, therefore, they focus more on the difficulties the child is facing rather than his strengths. You need to consciously develop a positive attitude which, over time, would get communicated to the child as well, helping him develop a positive self concept. Focus on recognizing the talent in the child and providing a stimulating environment. The following are some suggestions in this regard.

- Make the child feel creative. Be open to the child's suggestions for doing something different. This attitude will help the child to explore and experiment with new things.
- Be prepared to live with a little bit of disorder. Insisting that the room remains neat, and things kept in order at all times, can interfere with self-expression.

- Give the child enough time to complete what he is doing.
- Encouraging the child to make choices helps him to understand that he is not forced to do the activity.
- Offer support when needed but interfere as little as possible.

9.7 LET US SUM UP

Creative art activities foster the overall development of persons with visual impairment, help them to interact with others and develop a positive image about themselves. There are many art activities suitable for the visually impaired. Music, tactile painting, craft work, clay modelling and language arts are some of activities which people with visual impairment enjoy and accomplish.

Developing interest and ability in the creative arts requires the person to develop a number of pre-requisite skills. These skills can be developed by parents and teachers in many ways. What needs to be remembered is that we need to provide the persons with visual loss with suitable opportunities and materials, guidance, training, assistance and encouragement, sustain their motivation and focus on their abilities rather than the disability.

Once a person develops expertise in any creative arts area, it can become a good vocational option.



Musical performance - A vocation and a therapy too!

**FORM TO OBTAIN FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS
REGARDING THE UNIT**

Name of Parent/Caregiver:

NGO to which parent/caregiver is attached for this package

Name, Age and Sex of the Child:

Type of Disability and Severity:

Dear Parent,

You have now read this entire booklet. We request you to spend 15 minutes in filling up this form which will help us to get your views about this booklet. This will help us to change or modify this booklet, so that the next batch of parents find it even more useful. Please give us your frank feelings about the questions asked. Attach additional sheets, if needed.

Q:-1 Did you find this booklet useful? Please tick the appropriate box.

Useful Useful to some extent Not useful at all

Q:-2. Did you find the language

- easy to understand
- difficult to understand

Please tick the appropriate box.

Q:-3. Which topics in this booklet did you find most useful? List the topics.

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Q:-4. Which topics were not so useful? List those topics.

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Q:-5. Have you found any topic(s) not useful at all? List those topics.

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Q:-6. Did the case studies and examples given in the booklet help you to understand the topic in a better manner? Please tick the appropriate box.

Yes No

a) Did you find the case studies and examples relevant and useful to your situation and your child? Please tick the appropriate box.

Yes

No

If yes, how they were useful?

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If no, why were they not useful?

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b) Give suggestions for further improvement in this regard.

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Q:-7. Did the drawings help you to understand the written matter better? Please tick the appropriate box.

Yes

No

If no, give suggestions for further improvement.

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Q:-8. On which of the topics (that have been discussed in this booklet) do you want practical training? Please specify.

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Q:-9. Give your overall comments about the booklet.

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