

Older Individuals who are Blind – Technical Assistance Center

# ***The Process of Art Part 1:***

***Learning to Teach Art Techniques and Creative Thinking to  
Adults Who are Blind/Visually Impaired***



**Developed by:**

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of Braille Institute of America

# About the Authors

**Simone Montemurno, MFA** is an artist and educator based in Los Angeles with a background in Art History and Photography, earning a BFA at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, and an MFA from California Institute of the Arts. Montemurno's artwork takes the form of paintings, photographic books and recorded sound works. She is a Creative Arts Instructor at Braille Institute of America.

**Noah Haytin, MFA** is a mixed-media artist and credentialed art educator based in Los Angeles who has taught a wide array of arts courses in various institutes of public education including high school, community college, and continuing education for special needs adults. Noah's work as an artist and educator has encompassed carrying out exhibitions, grants, and residencies internationally, including a Fulbright-Hays grant in Morocco. He is currently a Creative Arts Instructor at Braille Institute of America.

**Lynn Dubinsky, MFA** is Regional Director of Braille Institute, Los Angeles where she oversees educational programs for visually impaired and blind adults. Lynn is a former college educator having taught literature and creative writing in Boston. She is also a poet and was awarded an Academy of American Poets Prize and is a recipient of the annual Ina Coolbrith Memorial Poetry Prize.



# About the Braille Institute

**Braille Institute** is a non-profit organization whose mission is to positively transform the lives of those with vision loss. We offer a broad range of free programs, classes and services serving thousands of students of all ages, helping to demonstrate that vision rehabilitation is a beginning, not an end.



# Course Definitions:

Within this lesson we will refer to you, who is taking this course (whether you are a Rehabilitation Professional, an OT, a VRT or any other consumer) as “**the learner.**”

We will refer to the blind or visually impaired person with whom you are working and planning to implement these Creative Arts tools as “**the participant.**”



# Course Goals:

This course will clarify how Creative Arts can effectively:

1. Reinforce daily living skills.
2. Develop a participant's tactile awareness and spatial awareness.
3. Expand a participant's descriptive vocabulary.
4. Contribute to the participant's sense of confidence.
5. Enhance participants' ability to articulate, express and advocate for themselves.



# Learner Objectives:

Learners will gain the following knowledge, skills and abilities in this course:

1. Define basic terms used in describing art to be used when describing art to participants
2. Describe how art can reinforce skills essential to living effectively with vision loss.
3. Explain what art is and is not as well as how people who are blind or visually impaired can enjoy art.



# Course Objectives:

Upon completing this course, the learner will be able to:

1. Contribute to the participant's sense of confidence.
2. Encourage a participant to learn or return to an artistic pursuit that they find meaningful
3. Reinforce a participant's daily living skills.
4. Reinforce a participant's tactile and spatial awareness.
5. Expand a participant's descriptive vocabulary.
6. Enhance a participants' ability to advocate for themselves.



# A note on Confidence...

Confidence is one of the many intrinsic values of continued art making practice in even the most novice of learners. Although a bit of courage is needed for one to take the risk in humility to even start creating art, the potential benefit of confidence grows exponentially as the participants' creative practice continues. Building confidence is one of the most important challenges anyone, young or old, with or without physical sight, can take on by trying something new and risking perceived “failure”. Committing efforts to a creative endeavor will support the participant to build confidence through risk taking and understand ‘the process’ as a valuable experience in itself—more valuable than the finished product. There are no “mistakes” but only opportunities to learn from.





# Words of Encouragement:

As you, the learner, continue this course it is important to view its content through the lens of your interactions with the participant. You are initiating a path to the participant appreciating, healing and flourishing via new exposure the Creative Arts. While you are likely to have an innate interpersonal sensitivity to your participant, we would like to note two points of entry you are facilitating a discussion about artmaking with the participant. These are suggestions as to how you can set a positive and encouraging tone in this new process they are about to begin.



# The Value of a Shared Experience:

Shared experiences create a synergy between participants that promotes a harmonious and mutual understanding of a given practice; the case for artmaking is no exception to this phenomenon. Positive feedback and constructive criticism can only hold positive potential for stronger future artwork because the participant will achieve real understanding of the mindset requisite to continue to build skills via risk taking in their artistic pursuits; if the learner remains open minded to the experience of making art, the transferable skills will become more apparent and confidence can build. The shared creative experience between a learner and an instructor (or between multiple learners in a given classroom) is one that can powerfully propel the art making process forward to the point where confidence, best practices, and transferable 21st century skills are built up.



# Uncovering Creativity:

It is highly likely that the participant has had some sort of meaningful or impactful experience with creativity though they may not value it as such. Consider asking these questions of your participants:

1. What is your experience with art and other forms of creative expression?
2. Do you have any childhood experiences with art that come to mind?
3. Are there any friends or family members that you consider creative and, perhaps, admire them for it?
4. Do you have any hobbies?
5. How did you learn your hobby and come to enjoy it?
6. What brings you a sense of enjoyment?



# Get Inspired!

The New York Times



Opinion

## She Went Blind. Then She Danced.

“We’re alive! As long as we’re alive, we have to keep moving.”



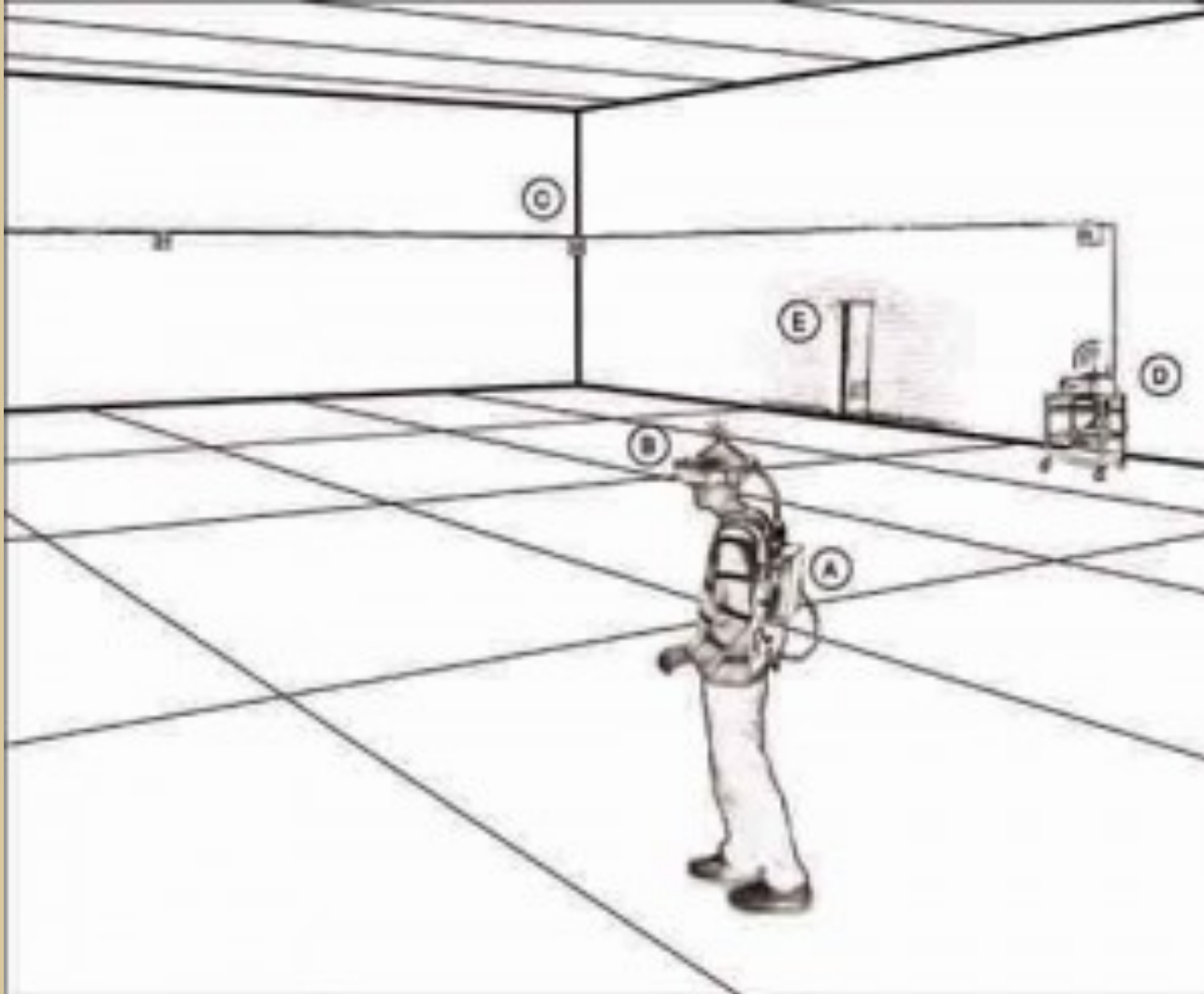
**Before we get our hands dirty with the subject of art itself, it is important to identify the specific rehabilitative effects of the creative experience.**



# **What can the study of Creative Arts accomplish?**

1. Stimulate creative thinking and hone problem-solving skills. These abilities are transferable and reinforce the mode of thinking that can be applied to many new challenges a person who is visually impaired may encounter.
2. Art-making inherently develops tactile sensitivity and engenders a greater knowledge of material objects.
3. Art-making processes promote improved thought organization and concentration, as well as skills in planning and time and task management.
4. Sensory skills are persistently developed in the creative arts process.
5. Art-making improves how to communicate about manual dexterity abilities.





## Spatial Perception







# Tactile Perception







## **Verbal Cues**





## Auditory





**Gross Dexterity:**



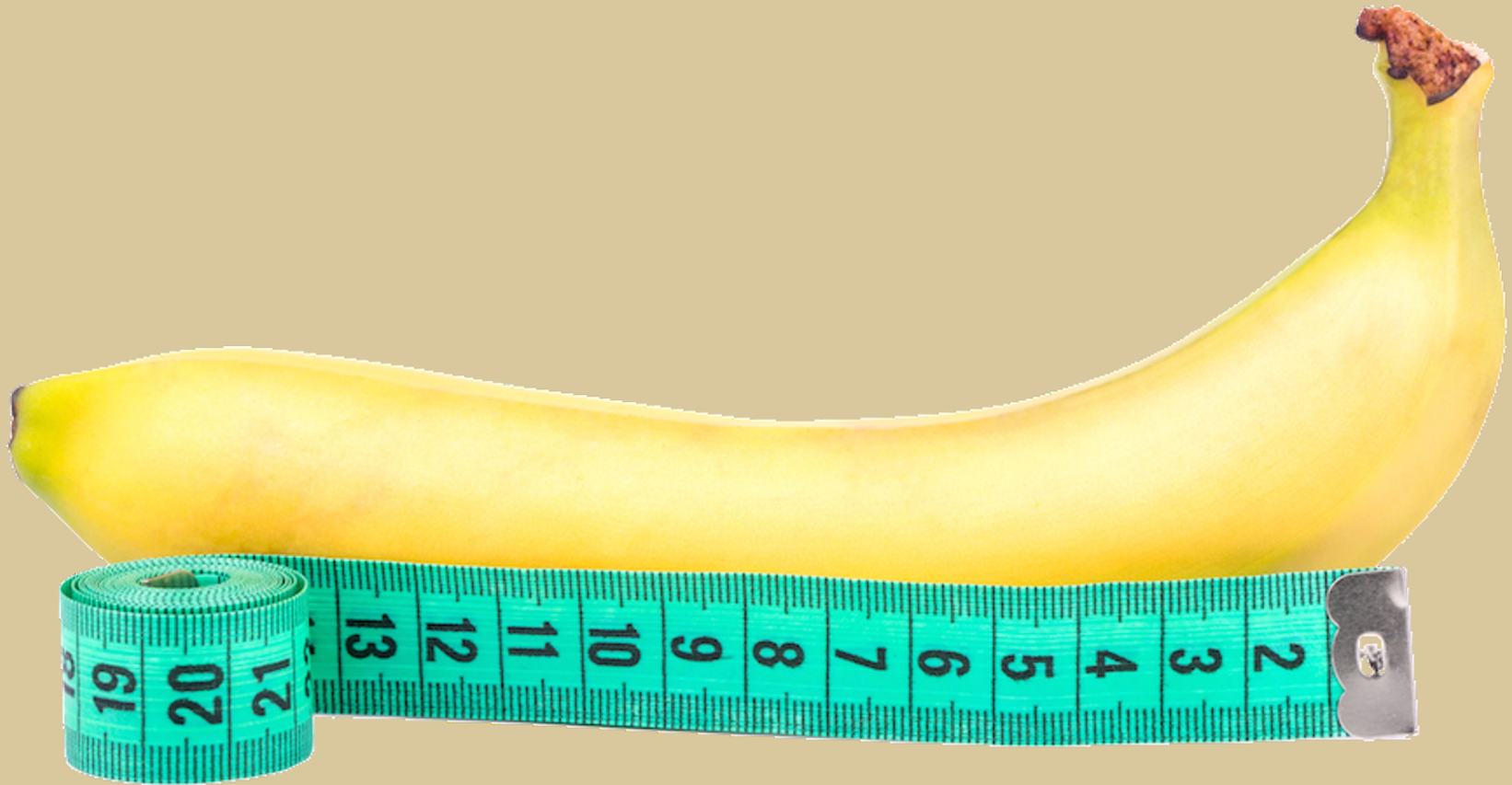




**Fine Dexterity**



# Linear Measurement





# Mind/Hand Coordination:





# Organizing Materials/Tools:

**BEFORE**



**AFTER**



# Problem Solving Ability:

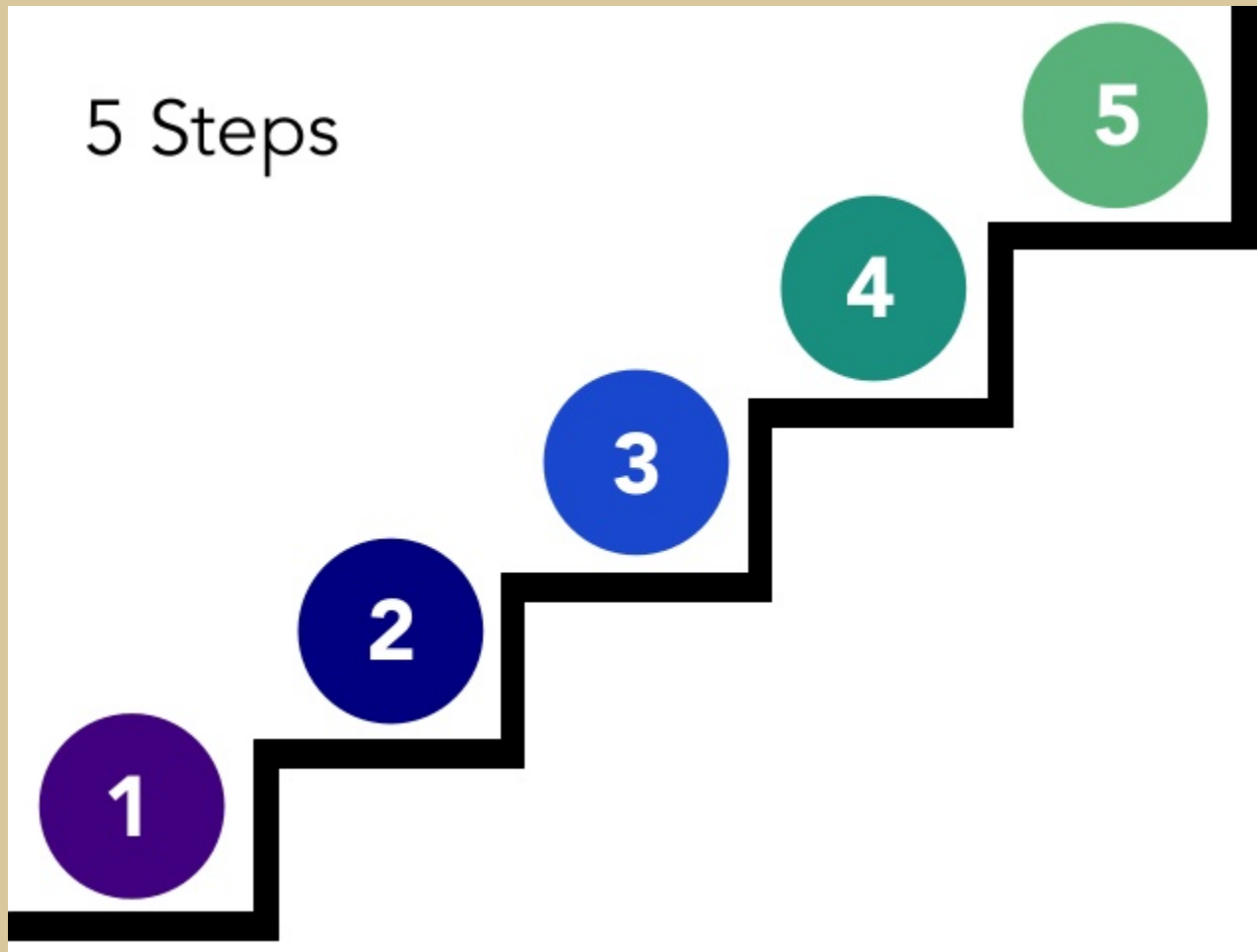




# Concentration



# Sequential Planning:



# Memory:



# Stamina



LOGIC



CREATIVE

## **Creative Thinking**



# What valuable rehabilitative and therapeutic areas do Creative Arts impact?

## Cognitive:

1. New skill acquisition.
2. Memory enhancement.
3. Organization of space to create a functioning workspace, self-organization.
4. Reinforcement of daily living skills.
5. Realizing the vision retained in the "mind's eye" for creative expression. Most people can "see" within the mind's eye, regardless of varying levels of vision.

## Neural Plasticity:

1. Offering a change in mode of thinking and judgment as per Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and re-framing ideas of progress, success, failure, and learning.
2. Problem solving, willingness to experiment in problem solving and test out creative solutions.
3. Encourage evaluative thinking about process rather than product. Offer meditative activities and give opportunity for presence in the moment.
4. Art-making activities provide a situation for mindfulness and can be meditative, easing stress and anxiety.





# Emotional Benefits of Creative Arts:

1. By providing social time, creative activities encourage the lasting learning effects of peer-to-peer support – in both one-on-one settings and larger class settings.
2. There is a shared experience with its emotional bonding and sense of camaraderie.
3. Through an enjoyable activity with literally tangible results, potentially alleviates struggles with depression.
4. Builds confidence and encourages independence.
5. Offers a sense of purpose and a goal to achieve in the sense of pride and joy in completing a project that provides tangible evidence of their individual efforts.
6. Fights stigma of the limitations of blindness or low vision.



# Physical Benefits of Creative Arts:

1. Improves tactile sensory awareness for object identification and greater spatial awareness.
2. Enhances mind-body awareness and intentional action.
3. Develops awareness of ergonomics and best overall body position to help ease a task.
4. Increases manual dexterity, hand strengthening.

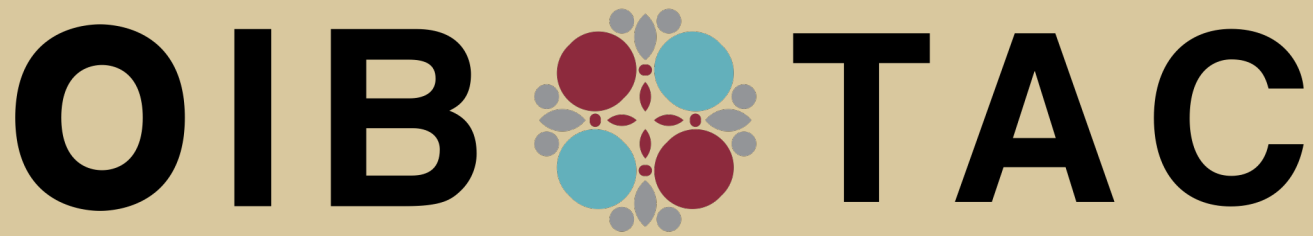




# Funding Statement

*This resource was developed by the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision (NRTC) at Mississippi State University's OIB-TAC project to provide training and technical assistance to designated state agencies and others servicing older individuals who are blind or visually impaired. This is funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) under the U.S. Department of Education, grant #H177Z150003.*





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**For more information, please contact:**

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