"The visual arts are a means whereby man attempts to give forms to his ideas and feelings and to gain personal satisfaction through individual accomplishments" (NAFA Task Force; 1972).

Anyone involved in the production of art is not only using his emotions, but also his mind. His work is a reflection of his individual thoughts and feelings in regard to his own past experiences. Art can also have a positive effect on people in other ways: it can help in the control and awareness of self, build a knowledge of things in the environment, encourage communication and contact with other people, and above all else, it can bring personal enjoyment.

"Both when he produces works of art and when he contemplates them, man uses the arts to help him understand himself and the world around him. One of the traditional and unique functions of the arts has been to emphasize individual interpretation and expression" (NAFA Task Force; 1972).

Art education can be the creative and expressive use of art in the classroom. Only artistic expression varies with each individual and how successful that individual is at expressing himself varies according to a number of factors. Among these are personality, the statement he wishes to make, the problems he wishes to solve, the tools and materials he employs, and the skill he possesses (Gaitskell and Gaitskell; 1953).

With our society becoming more and more complicated, especially where visual aspects are concerned, in order for its citizens to function independently and successfully they must be capable of some visual discretion, which an art program can teach them. It is not only the
normal students in the schools who need this, but also those termed
"slow learners" or "mentally retarded".

Viktor Lowenfeld was one of the first to see the importance of art
experiences for the handicapped, and interest has grown from there. Where
they are concerned, art is not only a means of artistic expression, but
can be a way for individuals to reveal their problem areas to a therapist
or teacher. Art can also be used to help treat personality disorders by
providing activities in which a child can succeed at his own speed, often
with materials he has chosen himself.

Art education should not be confused with art therapy. Art therapy
is "designed to remediate specific weaknesses and does not focus on the
strengths of the child like art education does"(Frith; 1983). But the
field of art education for special populations is still emerging, and too
often what is offered in a special education class is only a "watered
down reduction of the product-oriented processes worked out for normal
classrooms, earlier watered down from professional studio methods"(NACE
Task Force; 1972).

In the past, art education for the retarded has been seen as
important in regard to the capacity of people at all levels to enjoy,
appreciate, and to learn from the successful experiences that art can
offer. Research by the National Committee of Arts for the Handicapped
has emphasized the value of instruction in the arts for special education
students, and since the passage of Public Law 94-142, that means art
programs will be reaching most special students.

"With the passage of PL 94-142 in 1975, it is required
that handicapped youngsters from infancy through age twenty-
one receive a free appropriate education and an equal educa-
tional opportunity. Because of this law, classes have been set
up in public schools for the severely mentally handicapped.
Some children attend these classes in the public schools.
Whereas others because of health, poor adaptive behavior, or other reasons, may be in day treatment centers or institutions... Based on surveys of the American Association of Mental Deficiency (the major organization of professionals in the field), it is determined that about 3% of the population can be considered to have an IQ that falls within the range of mental retardation" (Ublin and de Chiara; 1984).

The integration of the arts into the special education program can have many benefits, among them reinforcement of lacking perceptual, motor, and academic skills, and enhancement of low self-esteem.

Specifically, art can provide the handicapped child with the following skills: a means of communication, a way to express emotions and thoughts, improved observation and awareness, sensory stimulation, and motor skills. Art can also be helpful in building decision-making abilities.

"The most significant advantage of a structured art education program for the mildly retarded is social, emotional, and intellectual development" (Frith; 1983).

Slow learners are those students who score considerably lower than average on intelligence tests, and who progress in school at a pace much slower than that of their fellow students. The less able the slow learners, the less inclined they are to relate themselves to their environment. In other words, the ability to identify self with the world seems to vary with intelligence.

With this in mind, the severely retarded are considered a separate group and not capable of achieving complete self-care or social and vocational skills. Their physical functioning is extremely underdeveloped. Many have physical or sensory impairments and are not normal in regard to physical characteristics. They may reach a maximum mental age of six to eight years. Mildly and moderately retarded children learn at a rate one-half to three-fourths that of normal children. There is an average of a four to six year difference between their mental and
The sequence of their development may be completely normal, but the age level for reaching the various stages of development does not match that of the average normal child.

"Many types of mental retardation can occur without any physical disability and it is understandable that human nature has been slower in showing the same sympathy towards this category as it extends to those who are physically handicapped. This is probably because the effects cannot easily be assessed in obvious terms like a deformed arm or leg, and since the tragic implications of such a handicap are not easily understood, a physically able-bodied human being who can make but inadequate or abnormal responses to ordinary situations does not necessarily evoke the same sentiment" (Lindsay; 1972).

Mental retardation indicates nothing more than a difference between mental and physical maturity. It may be necessary to fine the difference between those whose mental retardation is due to low intelligence and others who function at a slower pace because of some emotional disturbance. Mental retardation, as stated earlier, can be accompanied by physical characteristics such as "abnormal coordination, limited language, weakened physical stamina, and slower motor function. Self-concept for these children develop slowly in terms of both physical body image and awareness of identity" (NAEA Task Force; 1972).

A lack of parental love and understanding could have the effect of handicapping a child both emotionally and intellectually so that he is unable to reach his full potential. The special child is particularly sensitive to anything which he considers might be lowering to his status. This will be expressed quite plainly because the retarded child is less inhibited than his normal counterpart. This means that even small incidences in his daily life can cause both his behavior and his achievement to be so changeable that study progress seems at times to be impossible, though his attention span tends to increase with both his chronological and mental ages.
"What is the minimum level of intelligence of a child below which it would be impractical to try to develop artistic expression? And what deviations from the normal modes of expression might one expect to find in the output of mentally retarded children, and how much deviation could one allow for the output to remain within the definition of art?" (Gaitskell and Gaitskell; 1953).

A study in the 1950's (Gaitskell and Gaitskell; 1953) found that children with IQ's lower than 40 appear to derive little or no benefit from art activities. Those above 40 improved with more practice, while some just kept producing repetitive symbols. Those in the mid-50's used related symbols to express ideas connected with their life experiences.

"The slow learner, like a normal child, begins his artistic career by manipulating art materials, rather than by drawing or modelling recognizable objects. He is sometimes slower to play with the materials given to him, and may not explore their possibilities as fully as he might...once he has begun scribbling he is often reluctant to branch out into the use of symbols. If given a second type of material, he frequently prefers to manipulate the original medium, in the use of which he feels more secure" (Gaitskell and Gaitskell; 1953).

Where the normal child of five years may arrive at the use of symbols within three weeks to six months of being introduced to materials, the slow learner may take a year or more. Once they reach the symbol stage, they may take even more time before moving on. Their tendency to repeat a discovery interferes with their creation of new symbols and also slows their development of the symbols already discovered.

Because of his chronological age, the mentally retarded child often possesses greater physical coordination than his normal mental equal. This will aid him in mastering drawing skills and may lead him to repeat a newly developed symbol. This repetition takes little thought and gives the work of the mentally retarded its characteristic rhythmic quality.

The forms used by slow learners to extend the meaning of their
symbols have some strange characteristics:

1. distortion is pronounced
2. conventionalized notation as in cartoons
3. X-rays
4. series pictures

Another characteristic of the mentally retarded child's work is the lack of visual unity in their compositions. "The rhythms they adopt often become monotonous; centers of interest are lost, or lacking, in almost half of the work they produce; and they fail to establish a reasonable balance in almost two-thirds of their work" (Gaitskell and Gaitskell, 1953). Often the several objects shown in the work have little or no logical connection. Occasionally they may attempt to show future actions in their illustrations. The titles may illustrate a general inability to organize thought.

The mentally retarded child tends to differ from his normal physical counterpart in that he shows less interest in portraiture, still life, landscape, and in non-objective design. Very few slow learners use linear perspective, like normal children, slow learners choose their subject matter from their own experiences, although they show some peculiarities in their selection and statement of ideas. These themes are often closely connected with the trivial everyday events of personal life.

Special children usually have the potential for learning, but are segregated within the normal school environment because of their disabilities. The slow learner is but one of many types of handicapped children that the art teacher is likely to come across in a normal teaching situation. The current tendency is to move those children out of specialized
schools and into the more "normal environment" of the regular school (Gaitskell, Hurwitz, and Day; 1982).

Special allowances will have to be made for lessons with these children. The mentally retarded learn in a different way; their reality is built around a 3-D reality.

"The following are behavioral characteristics generally associated with the school-age mentally retarded child:

1. Learns at a slower rate than his normal peers.
2. There is little carry over from one learning situation to another. Concepts and skills must be taught anew in each task.
3. Has difficulties drawing generalizations from a series of specific and related learning experiences.
4. Learns better with concrete, rather than abstract materials.
5. Learns better when tasks are broken down into small increments that are presented systematically and sequentially and that progress from the simple and more complex.
6. Demonstrates an inflexibility and a resistance to change and new learning situations.
7. Needs reinforcement in learning through repetition with slight variation.
8. Has a short attention span and frustrates easily when tasks are too complex or instructions are not understood.
10. Is limited both in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior" (Wahl and de Chiara; 1984).

"It would seem that an art curriculum directed towards developing the responses to tactile experiences, with a clearer definition of movement, direction, rhythm and spatial relationships, could help to supplement other areas of learning" (Lindsay; 1972).

"Art activities are based on and nurtured by sensory information, so that the stimulation of the visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory senses will give the child a sharpened ability with which to approach communication and expression in various media" (Gaitskell, Hurwitz, and Day; 1982).
There is a widespread emphasis in special education on drill in certain kinds of perception. Art education agrees with the basic importance of children's development in perception, but not in isolation from individual thinking/feeling processes. Slow learners should use their intellect and their emotions in order that the product of their hands reflect their personalities. Art involves a person's individual reactions to his experiences in life. "Visual conceptions and motor skills are developed through experience as well as through physical and mental growth. Experience, therefore, should be the prime consideration in teaching a child whose mental... growth is hampered" (NABE Task Force, 1972).

Children with poor coordination benefit greatly from activities that provide tactile exploration. Their world is enlarged through increased motor and sensory development. Those not ready to combine the use of tools when using media may become frustrated, and discard the tools to revert back to hand manipulation. Finger paint and any plastic media are all appropriate to use in this instance. Color perception, size and shape discrimination, and relationships such as over and under, in and out, light and dark, around and through, and numerous others can be integrated into the total art program. These are concepts that are acquired as children mature, though the retarded child will not develop them unless they are consciously taught.

To determine the nature and level of art activities that are to be included in an art program for retarded children, it is necessary to identify the artistic development level of the child. This can be done by comparing his skills with those of normal children in areas such as his representation of the human figure in drawing and modelling, and his skills with art materials and tools.
Although mentally retarded children learn more slowly than normal children, they are still potential learners, and should be treated as such.

"To insure adequate and appropriate educational programming, it is necessary to individualize instruction to meet each child's strengths, weaknesses, best style of learning and interests. Key to teaching these children is realistic knowledge and acceptance of their present level of functioning (intellectual and adaptive behavior) and to build learning experiences from this point" (Uihin and de Chiara; 1984).

In general, art programming for slow learners means using the skills and experiences the child already possesses, but not pushing the child beyond his capacities. Once the child has learned a skill, it must be used and built upon in order to be retained. This is more easily accomplished when tasks are broken down into simple components.

For the retarded child adaptation may mean separating art activities into several small operations that are taught one step at a time and completed before the child goes on to the next step. It's also necessary to develop trust between the student and the teacher. For this, it is necessary for the teacher to obtain patience and respect for the individual. Accepting the children as they are and guiding them to progress at their own rate will enable the children to explore their world with confidence. This will be further enhanced by an awareness of each individual child's learning style. Whatever the adaptation, it begins with the individual's needs, abilities, and interests. "Successful and appropriate art programming for the retarded child is dependent upon the teacher/therapist's sensitivity, flexibility, patience, and respect for the abilities of the child" (Uihin and de Chiara; 1984).

The primary difference in teaching the retarded is their rate of learning new concepts and their need for extreme individualized attention.
"The retarded child needs a much greater suggestive power than the normal child to become stimulated... Because the retarded child has fewer possibilities of expression, creative activity will also have the effect of releasing emotional tensions" (Lowenfeld; 1957).

When necessary, it is the teacher's responsibility to arrange an experience appropriate for expression, for each child to realize that he has something to say, and to rouse him to the point at which he is eager to say it" (Gaitskell and Gaitskell; 1953). It is most likely to be easier for the child to express himself in his art work than in written or oral areas."In the production of art, there are no regimented patterns of wrong or right, as in spelling. While producing art, each child has an opportunity to succeed" (Dalke; 1984).

Art work is not to be confused with busy work, where the hands are involved but the mind is not. Actual "art work" involves control of the materials, tools, ideas, and feelings necessary for expression. Because they remain for relatively long periods of time in each stage of artistic development, slow learners have little difficulty in developing adequate manual skills to successfully express themselves in art.

"To teach slow learners, a teacher must:
1. be patient.
2. be able to stimulate so they improve mentally, but not hurry them beyond their abilities.
3. treat every slow learner as a human being."

(Gaitskell, Hurwitz, and Day; 1982).

Topics for activities that have the most universal appeal are those related to incidents which occur around the home. They can be easily expanded through classroom discussions. More specifically, themes best suited for retarded children are related to the self, family, friends, pets, home, school, neighborhood, holidays, hobbies, and special interests.
The same basic art supplies can be used for slow children as normal students. Many materials associated with art programs for normal children were tested with slow learners, and with a few modifications, all were successful. They include crayons, paint, chalk, modelling materials, building materials, sewing materials, weaving materials, and ceramic materials (Gaitskell, Burwitz, and Day; 1982). Some suggested activities are drawing and painting, collage, printmaking, modelling, weaving, stitchery, applique, mosaics, and jewelry making. The most highly recommended group activity for slow learners is puppetry, due to the chance for the child to work both as an individual and in a group.

The field of art education is faced with a profound challenge as teachers attempt to meet the needs of special students, who can benefit greatly from an art program. Through art education:

"the child learns that he no longer functions as an isolated human being, and through the acquisition of social skills such as cooperation and sharing, he sees that he can absorb responsibility and contribute to a cooperative group effort. Activities that emphasize socialization as a primary objective include all group activities and individual projects with a common goal..." (NASA Task Force; 1972).

Art activities allow the creator, whether normal or handicapped, to make personal statements. Expression in art comes more easily to the special child than verbal expression.

"Without the contact with art, the child cannot have an art of his own" (Schwartz; 1974).
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