

Exceptional Children Develop Through Art Expression

In Evans School, exceptional boys and girls associate with typical children, yet have the skilled teachers and special facilities needed to meet their special requirements. Art experiences play an important part in helping them make a creative adjustment to life.

CHILDREN show in their art expressions their ability to create. When their use of symbols develops to the point where meaningful forms can be recognized, there is a definite communication between child and observer. There is an added stimulation and challenge to both the teacher and the learner. Much of this atmosphere is felt in a situation like Evans School.

Evans school has in attendance some 450 children. Of this number, 160 are exceptional children, and 290 are typical children of the neighborhood. The exceptional children are brought to the school by bus from all parts of the city. They represent all socio-economic levels. The exceptional children include the deaf, hard-of-hearing, partially sighted, blind, and speech defective children. Ages range from three years to fourteen years.

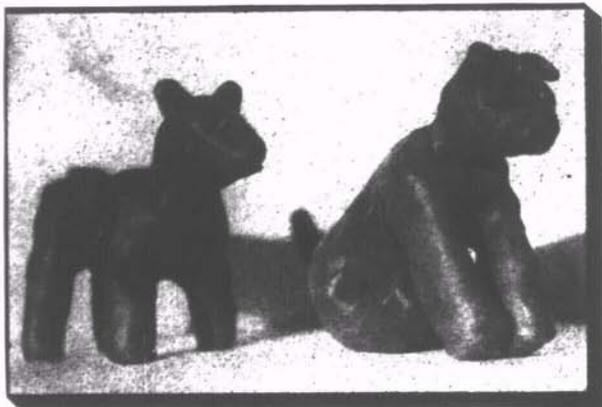
A majority of exceptional children are assigned to rooms with the typical children of their grade levels in academic achievement and are identified with that group. Part of their time is spent with teachers trained to give special instruction, individually or in small groups, in speech, language, lip

reading; and with equipment such as large print books, typewriters, braille writers, braille books, hearing aid equipment, and the like.

The art studio room is planned with a definite purpose of giving the children art experiences in drawing, painting, modeling, paper cutting, paper construction, wire construction, weaving, sewing, carving, printing and many other craft activities.

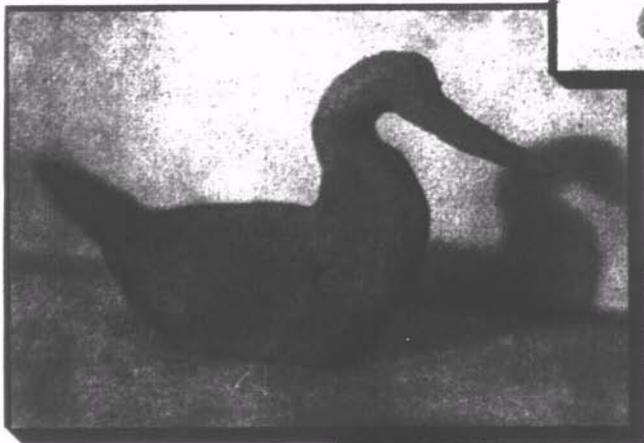
All of the children in the school come to the art studio room once a week. This is supplementary to the art experiences they have in their own rooms. The art studio room offers an opportunity for an integrated program where the exceptional children and the typical children may participate in experiences together. This program is just as valuable for the typical children as for the exceptional children. They are learning early in their lives to understand each other and to communicate with each other. They learn to appreciate each other's capabilities and accomplishments. They share ideas, tools and materials, and help each other as they work.

One of the greatest challenges for



Left, clay models by a deaf child and a hearing child, age 9 years.

Right, elephant made by partially-sighted child, age 8 years.



Left, work of typical child, age 9 years.

Right, art work by Billy, legally blind.



the teacher is the opportunity to have the typical children and the exceptional children working together in a classroom. The teacher must remember that first of all they are children. Their likenesses far outnumber their differences. The teacher's greatest concern is in presenting a lesson so that the stimulation and understanding will reach all the children and so that there will be enough variety in the presentation to allow for individual differences, so the slow or immature child may meet with success and the more gifted child may be challenged to satisfactory expression.

Billy, age twelve, with so little vision he is considered legally blind, spends most of his art time modeling with clay. He favors horses. His clay modeling is in fine form and very detailed. His concepts of horses show in his expressions. He has a horse of his own and an observer can readily appreciate his feeling expressed in his modeling.

Tim, age eight, blind from birth, attempts any art media and meets with considerable success. His clay models are very recognizable. One of his favorite subjects is his pet rabbit. He likes to cut and paste, do paper sculpture, paint, work with wire, and weave.

Kindergarten blind children enjoy modeling with clay. They build forms with clay, pipe cleaners, large wooden beads, and wire. They also like to cut and paste. Experiences to develop a feeling for space are very important to these children. Many such opportunities are offered.

All of the children enjoyed the experience of mask making. The blind children came forth with very gratifying results. They expressed such pleas-

ure in wearing the masks. Even the preschool deaf children made masks to wear. Their finished paper sculpture masks were surprisingly good in form and expression. To the typical children it was a most exciting experience. There were masks of all colors and shapes, and with many kinds of decorations.

Here is a child who is very timid and not vocal because she cannot communicate with words as the typical children do. She is deaf. She does not have the vocabulary and language skills that hearing children have. She loses herself in her art work and communicates ideas and experiences in her drawing and painting. One can read more from her drawings than words could express. By looking at her drawings, you learn of her experiences at home, in the classroom and on the playground. It is her way of communicating with others.

A slow learning boy had few skills in an academic way and did not fit into the group of boys his age in the school. He had, however, developed a skill modeling with clay. Because he liked animals and had worked with clay repeatedly he became very skilled in his expression. He made beautiful animals and was instrumental in setting the standard in a sixth grade art class. His work was so superior to that of the other boys his age, it challenged all of them to meet his skill. Within a short time the clay modeling by the other class members improved tremendously and this boy was accepted into the group. He was invited to enter the games on the playground with the other boys his age by which he had been excluded before.

Here is another child who has a progressive vision loss. He could see very well when he entered school, but in three years at school he is now almost totally blind. As he was losing his ability to see clearly and had to depend more and more on his tactual sense for expression, he became impatient, unhappy, frustrated, and gave up easily. With guidance and encouragement in using materials and tools, but with more opportunities where texture and tactual experiences were emphasized, he gradually slipped into the manner of working in which he could use this means of manipulation. He now rarely shows impatient discouragement. His art expression shows steady improvement and he has a happier disposition. He takes his place with confidence in a group of typical children.

Creative Adjustment

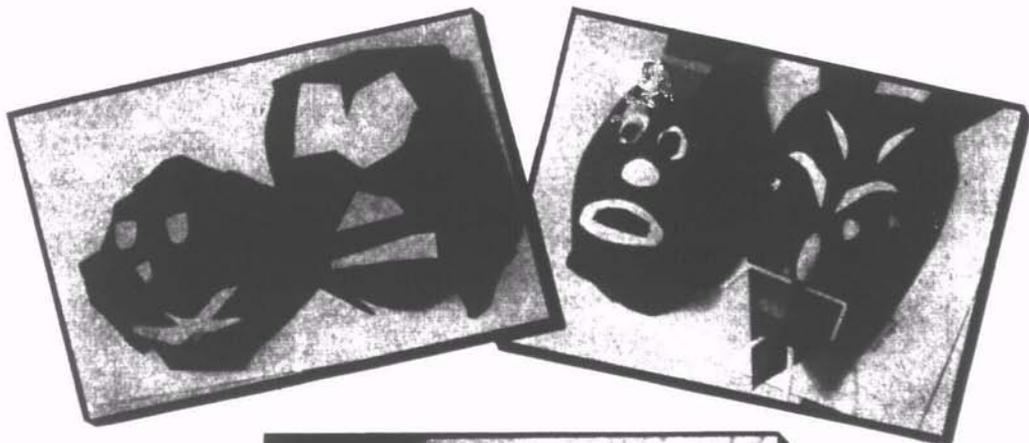
To illustrate with a very unusual case, but one that shows growth in problem solving, there is the instance of Gary. This boy had gone to kindergarten and first grade. During the summer he met with an accident and lost three fingers on his right hand, leaving the thumb and little finger. He began second grade with this handicap. To watch him training himself to use his left hand when the natural impulse was to reach with the right, was dramatic indeed. He had to start from the very beginning to learn to manipulate his tools and handle materials in left hand fashion. He was awkward and accomplishment was slow and irregular.

Martha M. Roderick is elementary art teacher, Evans School, Denver Public Schools, Denver, Colorado.

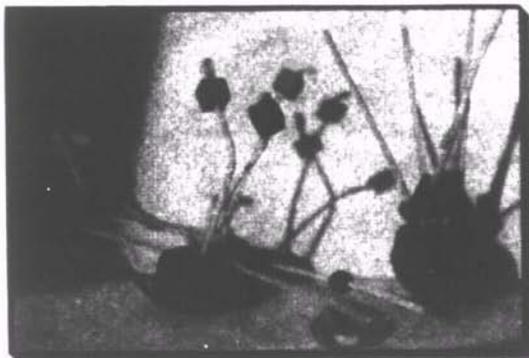
Whenever possible he shifted tasks for the right hand. Encouragement and praise were given as he worked at drawing, painting, cutting, pasting and modeling. He gradually found he could use his right hand again in many ways, but had changed over to the major use of the left hand. Within the year he had developed an ability to use his tools skillfully and creatively, with confidence, security, and with remarkable results.

Then there is the problem of the emotional child in a typical group. Emotions may show in any group. Here was one child who painted with vigor and covered his painting with black paint and said, "See what I did!" "Yes, I see. Let's put it away. Now do you feel better?" He gasped, took a deep breath and said, "Yes, why yes." The tenseness left his whole body and he stood almost stunned. He needed someone with understanding to share that experience. He expected an entirely different response from the teacher. She then followed with this remark, "Now go back and paint again." He walked away with a smile and paint he did. A very fine painting was the result.

There is always evidence of children's giving encouragement to classmates. The blind children know the location of the paper files where colored papers are kept in folders which are labeled with color words in braille as well as in print. The seeing children are spellbound when a blind child finds the braille labels and reads off the colors; or you might overhear this remark from a blind child, "Would you help me find a piece of red paper?" The blind children often ask for a



Above, paper masks by blind boys, age 8 years. Center, art creations by blind children, age 6 years.



Above, masks by typical children, ages 9 and 10 years.

specific color, probably because of reading about color and hearing about it in conversation. Sometimes you might hear a child clapping hands to direct a blind child if he is confused in his travel about the room. You may notice a child talking or just moving lips while he uses single words and phrases to communicate with a deaf child who is lip reading. These are just a few of the evidences of communication in this integrated group of children. Sometimes a visitor, in the room for a class period, may not be able to discover which are the exceptional children among the typical children. From each group, with its wide range of skills

and abilities, there are fruitful expressions of creativity.

Then there is the typical, well-adjusted child who is eager for new situations, new experiences, and opportunities to express his ideas. George was greatly excited about string drawings. After accomplishing some very surprising results in the art room, George took the idea home to show the family. His father and mother, too, became absorbed in this experience and spent considerable time in repeated tries with string. George brought this remark to school, "Gee, my mother and father would like to be going to school now. They never did anything like this when

they went to school. They think string drawing is lots of fun." Many stories could be told of the typical children who excel in painting, or drawing, or modeling, or wax carving, or the like, and spend time out of school exploring further with art materials.

As these exceptional children and typical children work side by side, absorbed in like experiences, sharing ideas, criticisms, and events, they establish a warm friendship, an understanding, and an appreciation for each other. The teacher stimulates the imagination and helps to build ideas for all of them. They need guidance and encouragement so they will grow and develop as they meet problems.

As teachers work with children they need to develop in them a sense of orderliness in the manner in which they work. They need to teach the use and care of tools and materials. Developing a sense of orderliness in children helps them to form better work habits. It helps them to develop the ability to organize their thinking in experimentation and problem solving. Creativity involves critical thinking and evaluative thinking.

What tools and materials should the children be given? What opportunities shall they have? These choices are determined by the needs of the class. Children must first learn to use the tools which are necessary to develop control and coordination. They need repeated opportunities presented to them in order for them to learn to manipulate tools and materials in a skillful way. When they have developed a skill so that they work with confidence, they begin to express ideas. A teacher must then be ready to stimu-

late the imagination and a desire to develop further interest and ideas. Repeated experiences are necessary for children to develop a skill to express themselves well. The experiences need to be planned so that each new experience has something new added to build ideas and provide a challenge.

By observing a class the teacher can determine the needs of the group as to the ability to manipulate tools, the degree of control and coordination the children show, the apparent emotional status of the group, and the apparent acceptance of responsibility the children take. Art activities need to be planned around these needs. They should be made a part of the regular program planned with purposeful intent to develop the skills needed by the children. The art experiences need to be meaningful and so directed that they lead from one lesson into another with more challenge and more provocative thinking. This requires that the teacher should have a constant awareness of the progress of the class.

One fact which must not be overlooked is the stimulation and challenge which meet the teacher at all times in a position of this nature. As the teacher sees new relationships and new possibilities in stimulating, challenging and encouraging children, he shows creativity in experimentation and exploration to make all of these opportunities purposeful and fruitful for children. A teacher must not be defeated by the problems, many and varied, which he must face each day. The satisfaction felt in meeting this challenge of such diversified and stimulating groups is so gratifying that the extra effort is not a conscious factor.

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