The common term “blind” may refer to anything from total lack of visual response, to legal blindness using a legal definition, or even “functional blindness”, an educational term denoting reliance on a tactual reading medium, and frequently cane assisted travel.

There are several misunderstandings about the development and education of blind children. The development of blind children generally differs from that of children with normal vision; in fact, blindness can impact all areas of early development, in particular feeding, language, motor and social skills. Unlike the popular notion that blind children have better hearing and tactual skills, many blind children have some degree of central auditory dysfunction and are tactual aversive.

Children who have a serious visual loss with some useful vision may require similar educational intervention as blind children. Visual impairment has a dual definition—medical and functional. For children with a “serious visual loss after correction” the loss may impact development with varying degrees of severity.

People often assume that when children see poorly, art is not an appropriate activity. However VI children love art, moreover, children with visual impairment deserve the opportunity to experience all the miraculous “palate” of life, and that includes art! Later art appreciation and the interest in art history, come from doing art—from moving, touching doing with a variety of media, forms and techniques.

Why is Art Especially Important for the Young VI Child?

The world of today is a world of technology and the interface of technology is increasingly more iconic and graphic—and where does the knowledge of this interface begin—in art activities learning about 2 and 3 dimensional representation!
Adaptations for Blind Children

The full range of art activity is available to the severely visually limited child with a little creativity. The suggestions on these pages are just a beginning. The principle is to enhance the sensory content and make the spatial constraints tactually available.

Art is particularly important for the blind child because, in early childhood, it provides the introduction to the two dimensional page and multidimensional surface. The page will be essential for later tactual reading. The multidimensional surface transitions the child from the sequential experience of touch to the whole of representation in space.

Art reinforces the notion that the hands are an essential tool for exploring the world.

**Sculpture**

Make play dough with spices or extracts to increase the sensory interest

Make oatmeal play dough

Mix sesame seeds or flax seeds into play dough

Staple, tape or glue “found” objects/recyclables like boxes, canisters, container tops, small bottles, straws, plastic utensils, to build a sculpture

Use double-sided tape on a canister or towel roll so the child can stick other objects to it

Use wire or pipe cleaners to make a sculpture

**Collage**

Use double-sided tape so the child has spots to find for attaching material or texture

Use a sheet of contact paper, sticky side up

Use black or colored glue

Use sticky backed commercial collage materials

Coat a cardboard with a light coat of glue
Adaptations for Low Vision Children

For the low vision child, art is a reinforcement of visual efficiency training, strategies for interpreting often poorly seen representation, and the coordination of vision, fine motor, cognition, and creativity. For the child with a serious visual loss, art reinforces scanning, tracking, fixing, focusing and shifting gaze. It reinforces using the complete field, close and distant. Art is about abstraction and representation. It is about parts of the page and following directions in sequence.

Art activities can be adapted by providing a surface with more resistance, reinforced outlines and visual cues for placement and adapted materials such as chunky markers, paint or crayon sticks with a grip, fingertip paint brushes, roller or dot paints, and day glow colors on a black background. Using a lightbox or glow board can further enhance the visual features. Children can also “draw” using a set of colored flashlights or light sticks, to highlight the composition.

Painting

Make paint thicker by adding cornstarch or glue

Place paint inside a sealed zipper bag if the child doesn’t want to get messy

Outline the edges of the paper with a puff pen, Wiki Stix or yarn glued on

Paint on a textured surface—sand paper, corrugated paper, velour paper

Use special raised line paper so that painted lines dry raised

Paint with puff pen or glitter marker

Put paint colors on the fingers of a rubber glove

Drawing

Draw on a textured surface—sand paper, corrugated paper, velour paper

Use sidewalk chalk

Use a commercial glow board or water board

Draw on tissue paper on a light box

Draw on heavy duty foil or Styrofoam with a thin stick or fork

Use a raised line drawing kit
Further information:
http://www.aph.org/ Materials and equipment
http://www.afb.org/ Materials and information

VI Visions
http://www.nbp.org/ Braille materials
http://www.tsbvi.edu/ Texas state services and materials
http://www.hadley.edu/ Free courses for students, courses for families and professionals
http://www.nationaldb.org/ Deaf-blind information
http://ohiodeafblind.org/resources/products.cfm  Materials and information
http://www.blindchildrenscenter.org/ Materials for parents
http://www.perkins.org/ Materials and information

VI Art Activities Teach....

Page skills, top, bottom, sides

Scanning, fixing, shifting gaze, focusing

Fine motor skills such as wrist rotation, pincer, holding doing hand coordination, cutting

Texture and material

Space and time

Sequence

Representation

Abstraction