



# *Working with* EXCEPTIONAL Learners in the Arts

Presentation by:  
Amanda Newman-Godfrey  
Teachers College Columbia University



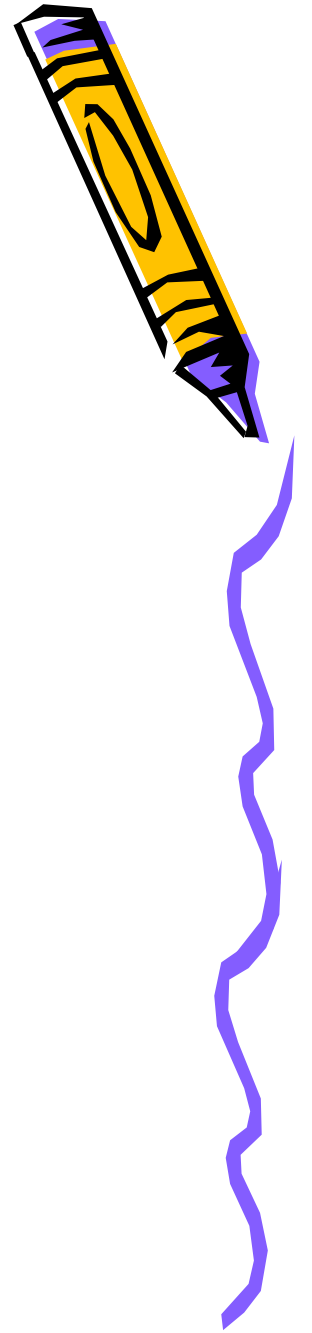
Draw it...

**Sing it...**

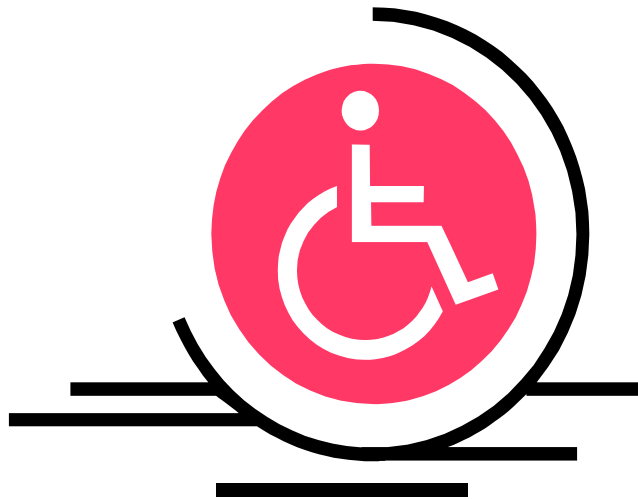
Write it...

**Say it...**

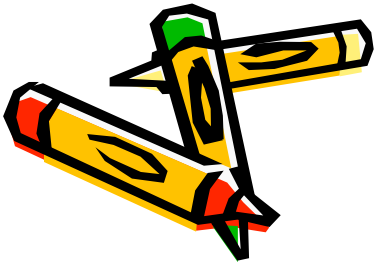
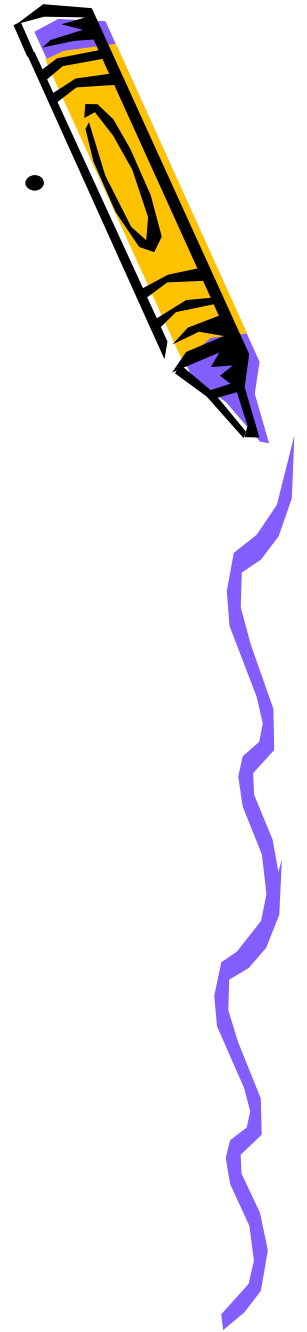
Act it/Do it!



# Our Image of Disabilities...



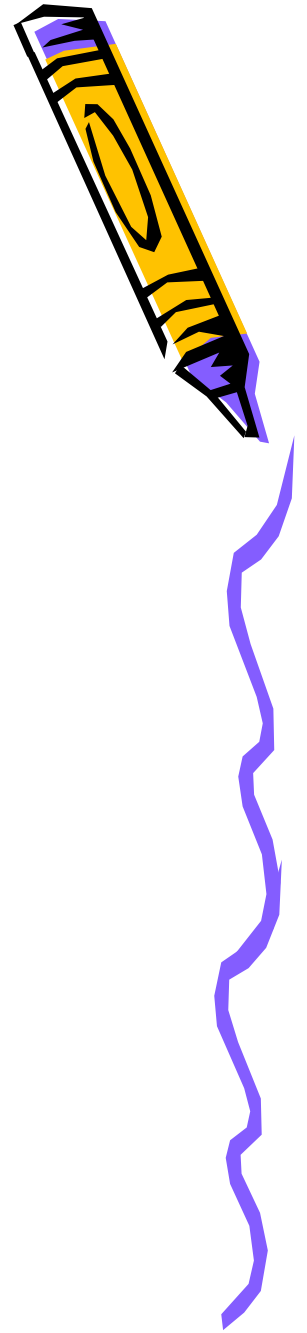
- Are in general socially and/or culturally conditioned.
- Negative attitudes and assumptions, often based on a lack of knowledge, can easily shape the way we behave towards differently-abled people.
- It may be necessary for you to re-evaluate your assumptions about differently-abled people before you can adapt lessons.



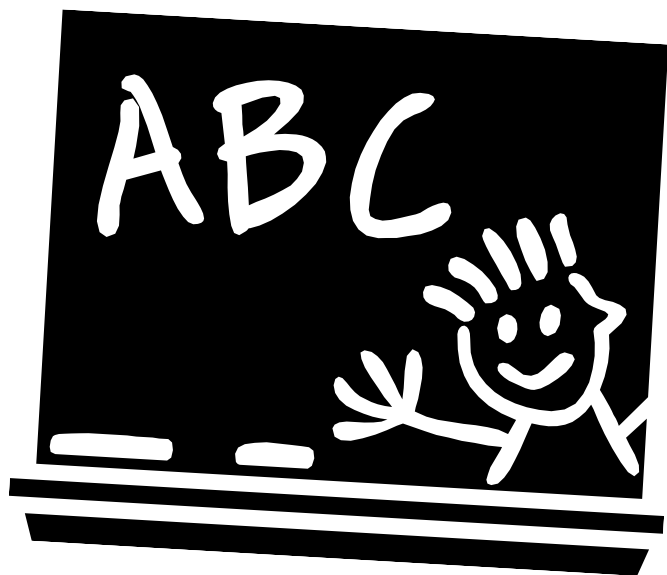
*Words To Live*

*and Teach By:*

Adjustments made for  
differently-abled students  
can often benefit all  
students!



# What to Do with Exceptional Learners in the Arts?



- Arts teachers are not always prepared to work with special education students... special education professionals speak in letters
- We must gather more information about special education and review some of the terms and acronyms



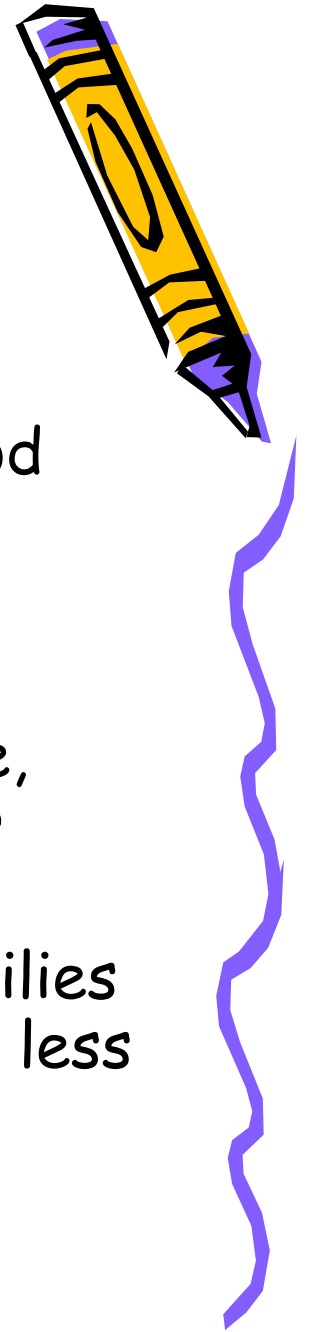
# Adapted Arts Education vs. Arts Therapy

- Although art therapy and art education can look very similar on the surface, they differ mostly in their goals.
- Art education seeks to teach people how to make art and to be creative.
- Art therapy encourages people to create art that is emotionally expressive, regardless of their formal art training.
- The two fields should not be looked at as opposites, but as two different methods to encourage people to engage with the creative process and art making.



# Why Does Inclusive Teaching Matter?

- Inclusive teaching is more likely to be good teaching.
- More differently-abled people are being mainstreamed into traditional classrooms.
- The law requires us all not to discriminate, and to provide equality of opportunity for disabled students.
- Differently-abled students and their families are increasingly aware of their rights and less prepared to accept inadequate provision.



# Inclusive Teaching Means:

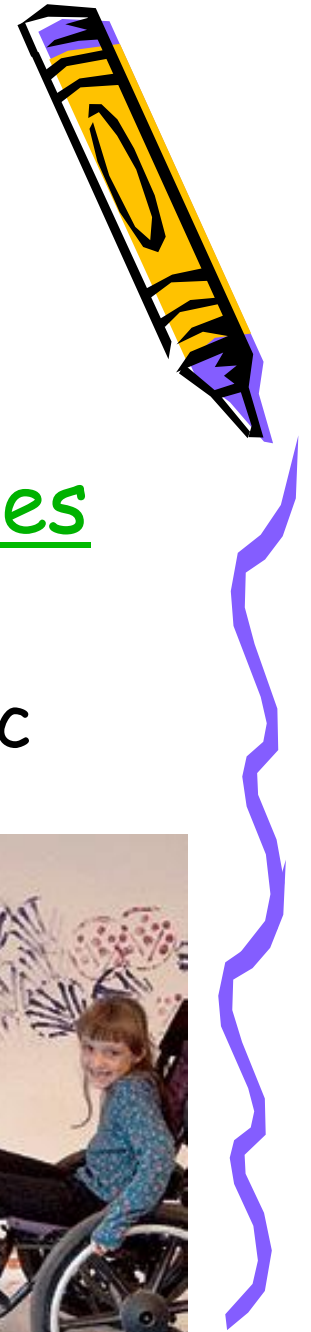
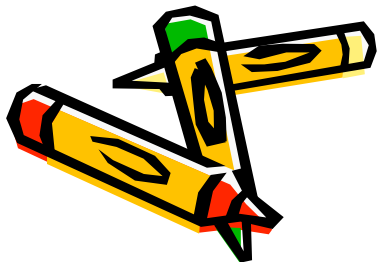
- Recognizing
- Accommodating
- Meeting
  - The learning needs and styles of **all** students.



# Inclusive Teaching Means:

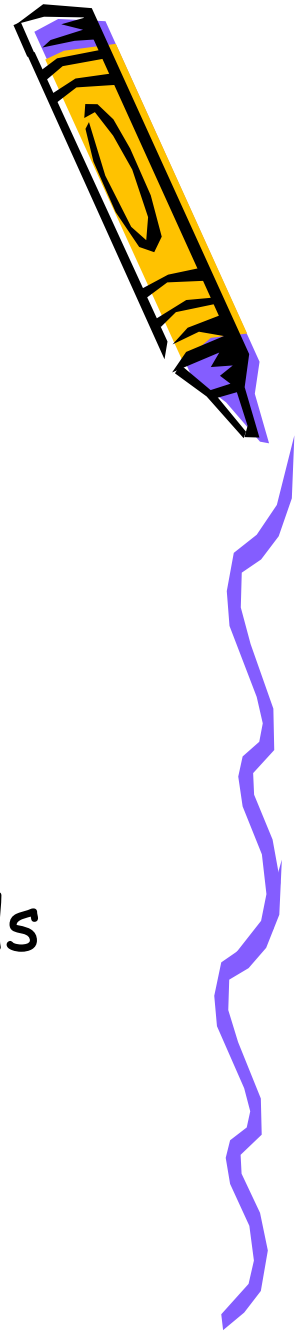
*Acknowledging that your students have:*

- A range of individual learning styles
- Are members of diverse communities
- Should not be pigeonholed into specific groups with predictable approaches to learning.

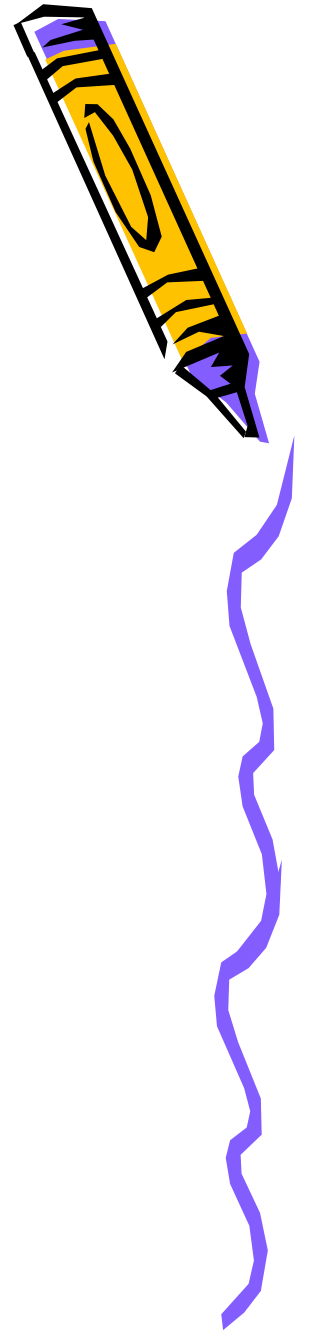


# Inclusive Teaching Means:

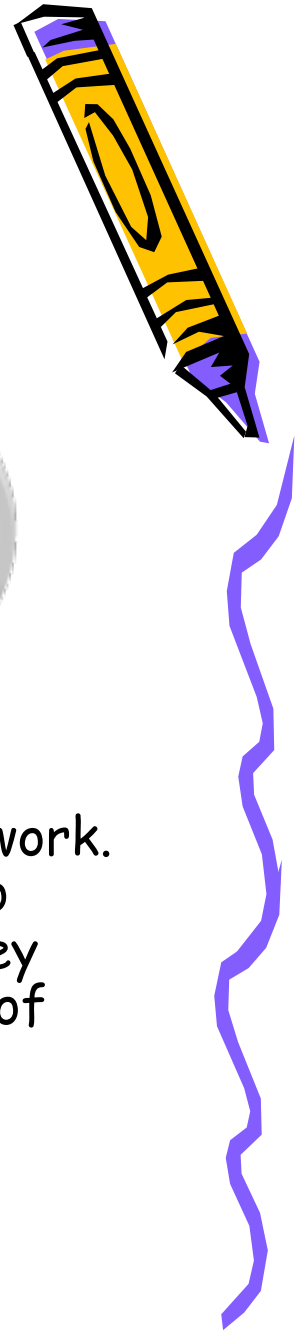
- Takes a coherent approach which is anticipatory and proactive
- Involves the whole educational environment
- Matches provision to student needs
- Incorporates regular reflection, review and refinement of strategies and methods that actively involve disabled students.



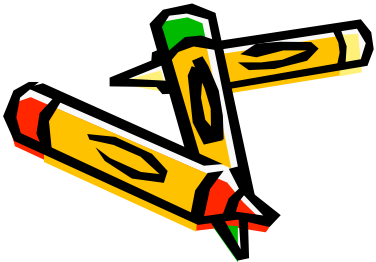
Things you can do in  
your planning that will  
make your teaching  
more inclusive and  
benefit many  
students...



# TIME

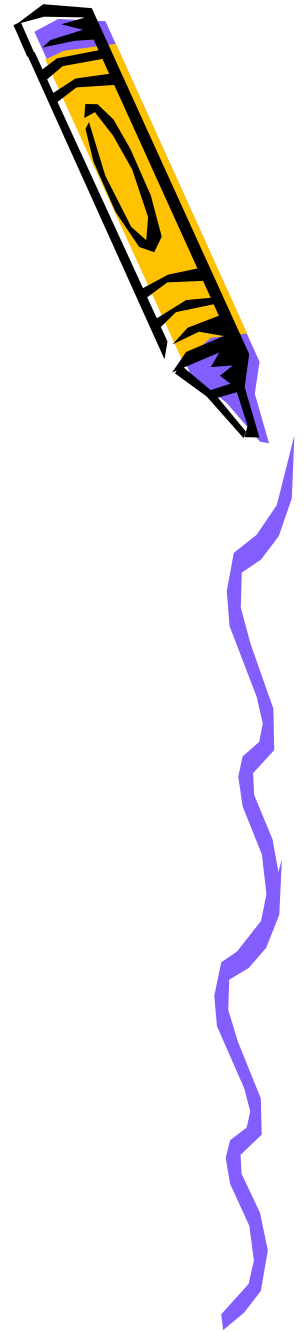


- Creativity does not follow the clock. Children need extended, unhurried time to explore and do their best work. They should not be artificially rotated, that is, asked to move to a different learning center or activity when they are still productively engaged and motivated by a piece of creative work.



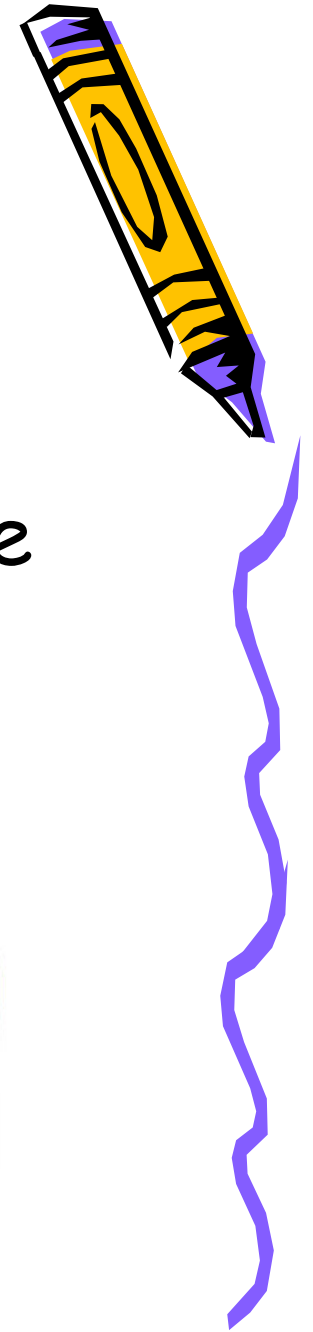
# Adapted Materials

- Without spending great amounts of money, teachers can organize wonderful collections of resource materials that might be bought, found, or recycled.

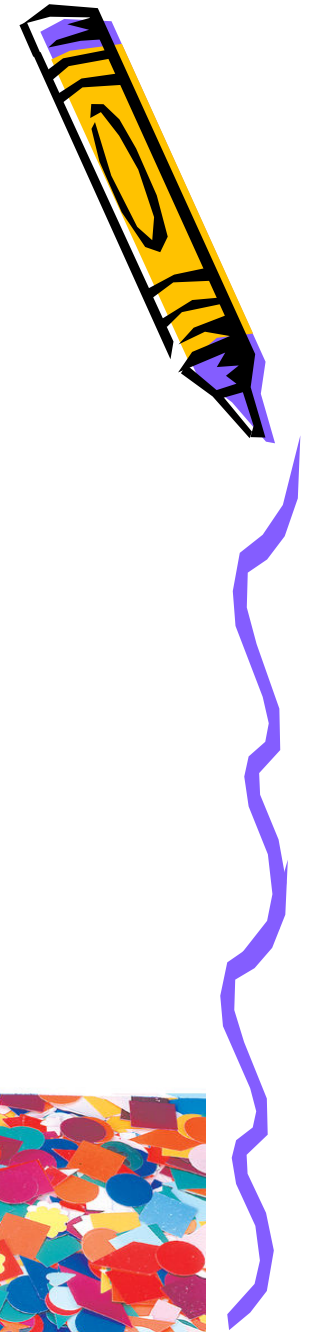


# Adapted Materials

- These materials are used most productively and imaginatively by children when they themselves have helped select, organize, sort, and arrange them.

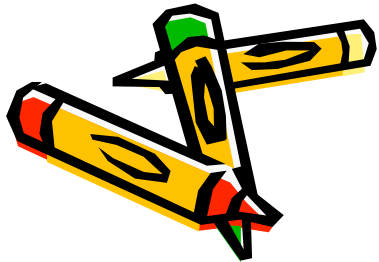


- Materials can include :
  - paper goods of all kinds
  - writing and drawing tools
  - materials for construction and collages, such as buttons, stones, shells, beads, and seed
  - sculpting materials, such as play dough, goop, clay, and shaving cream.



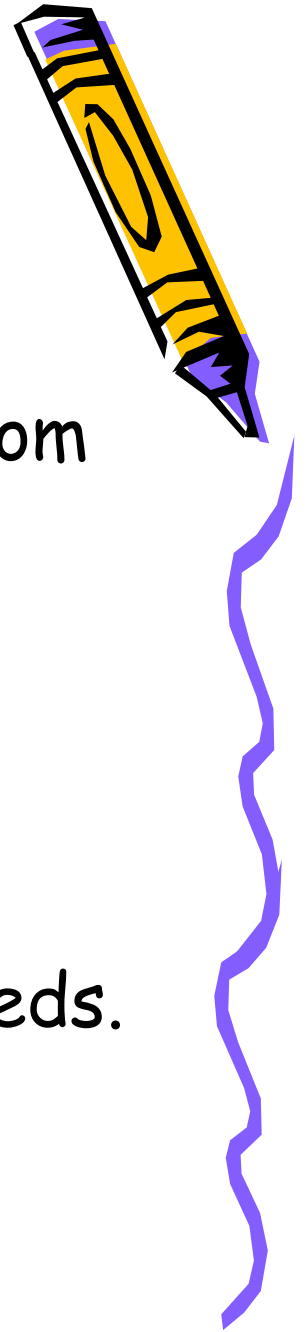
# Preparation

- Has always been an important part of teaching.
- It is particularly important when teaching differently-abled students because their needs are highly individualized.



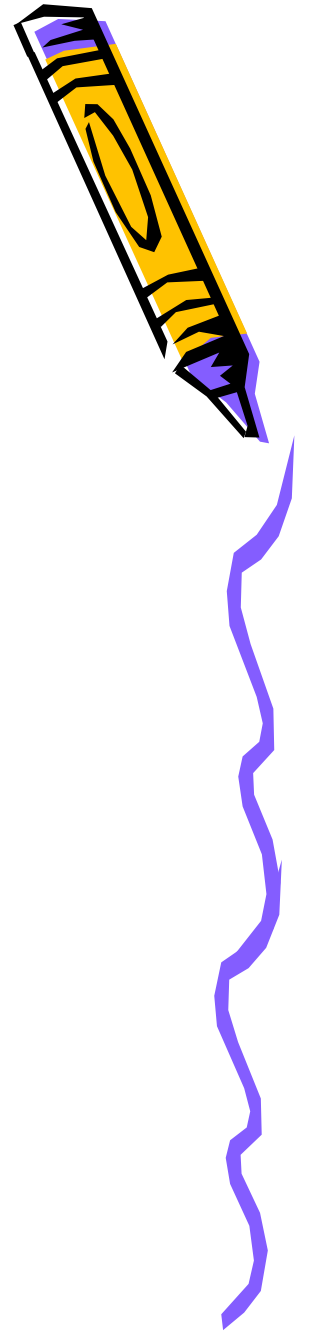
# Identifying A Student's Needs

- Remember that needs may fluctuate from day to day.
- Try to review whether you are meeting their needs often and with a range of evaluation tools.
- Different individuals with the same impairment may have very different needs.



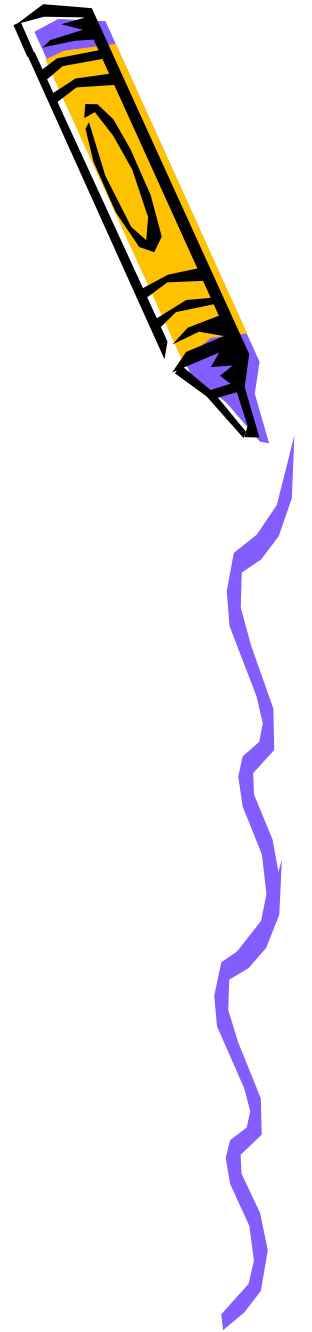
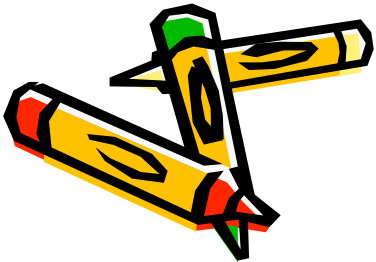
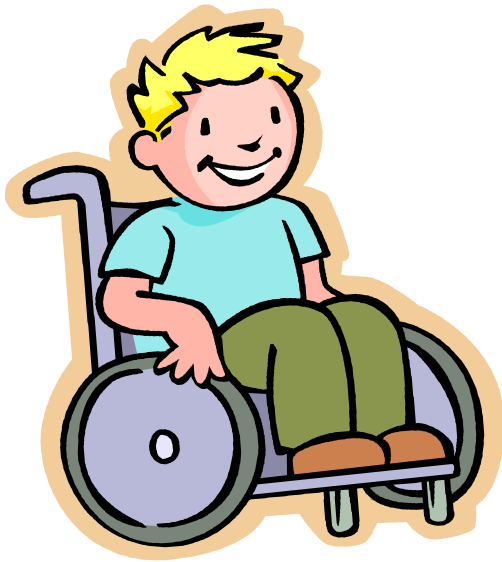
# Consider...

- - The type and extent of the impairment of the student.
- - Has the student only recently been diagnosed or only recently become disabled?



# ASK...

How can a classroom be modified...  
to best support children's emerging creativity?

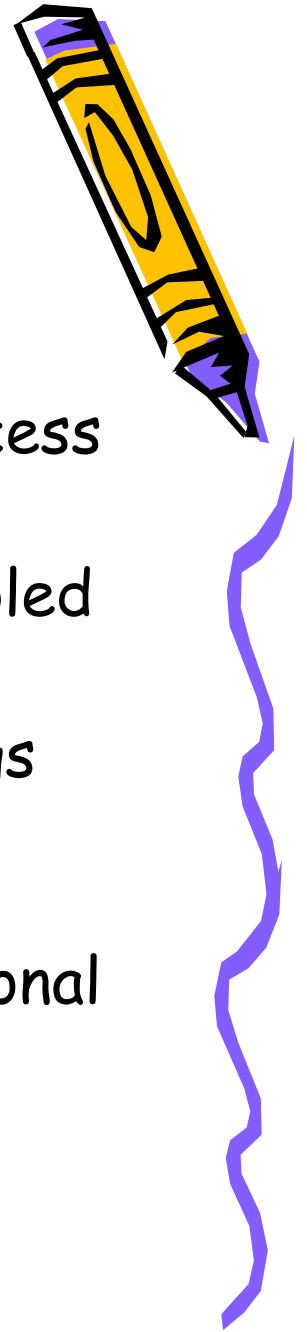


Look at potential barriers to learning that students may face



# Ways to Break Down Barriers

- Access means physical access as well as access to the curriculum and materials used.
- Awareness of the needs of differently-abled people and the barriers they may experience.
- Acceptance that you may need to do things slightly different than usual.
- Appreciation of the effects of hidden difficulties, such as pain, tiredness and emotional stress.



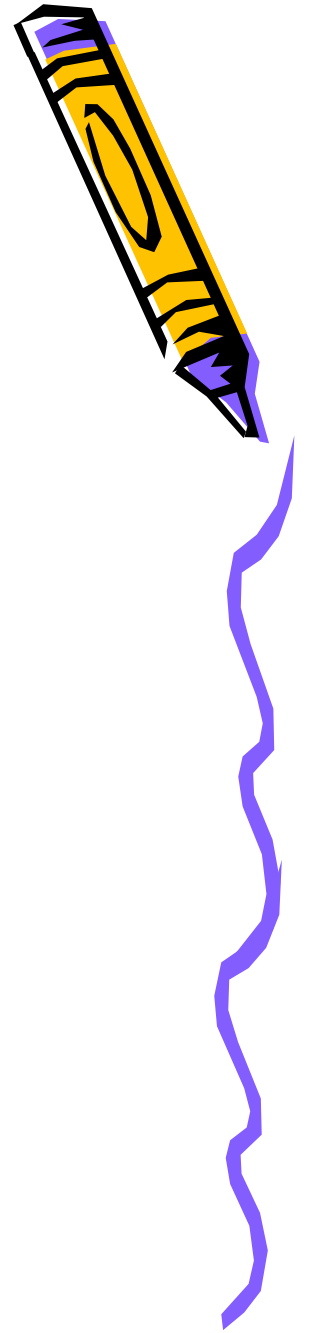
# Reasonable Adjustments You Can Make

- Make sure that the physical environment is as accessible as possible.
- Incorporate anticipatory adjustments or specific individual reasonable adjustments into your planning, such as including rest breaks, lighting, table height, etc.



# Things to CONSIDER...

- Seating arrangements
- Contrast of materials
- Leave room for staff access
- Make room for technology
- Access to materials



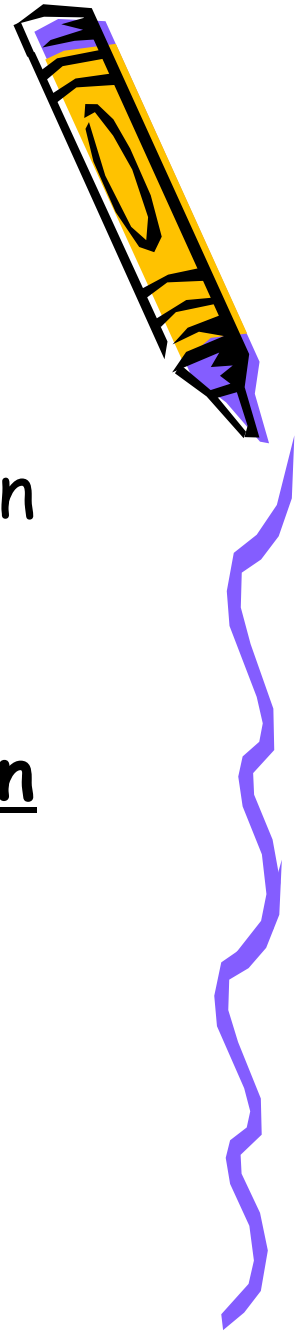
# Tools to USE...

- Handouts, demos, or written instructions for hands-on arts activities.
- Visual materials such as samples, instruments, books, movies or photographs.



# Safety First!

- Artistic settings can be hazardous and safety should always be considered when making arrangements for students.
- It is important to think about the setting, the equipment and the hands-on activity.



# Adaptive Equipment

- Adapt equipment by adding larger handles to assist those with dexterity difficulties.



# Mobility Difficulties

**Access** is often the main barrier for students with mobility difficulties.

**Artistic exploration** and coping with other aspects of life can be awkward for those who have pain, fatigue or dexterity difficulties.



# Multi-Sensory

- Hands-on activities can play to the strengths of many students with specific learning challenges, who often find the multi-sensory approach to hands-on tasks is very helpful.



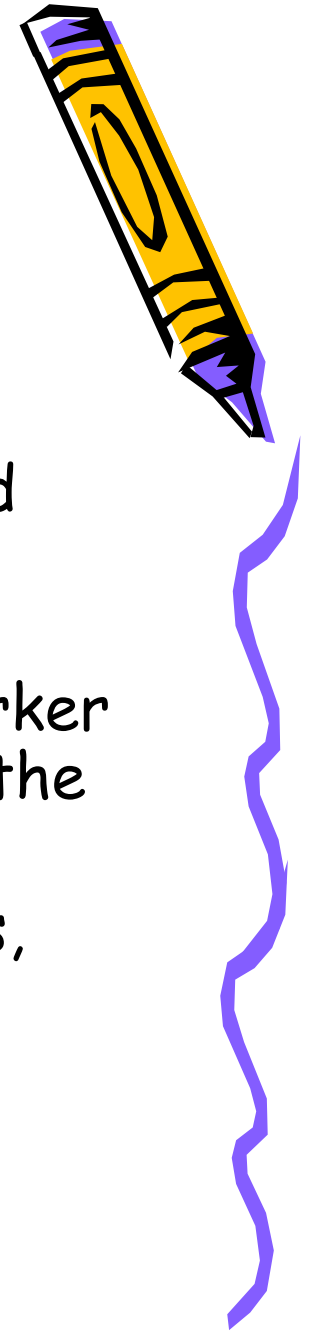
# Blind and Visually Impaired Students

- Have particular difficulties accessing print or other materials that are presented visually.
- Before you teach, ask your student about their individual needs and what reasonable adjustments would help provide access to the places and materials you intend to use.
- Hands-on activities may present particular & significant challenges for blind & visually impaired students because they are so visually orientated. This applies to any verbal instructions or creative demonstrations you may provide as well as to the activities students may undertake for themselves.



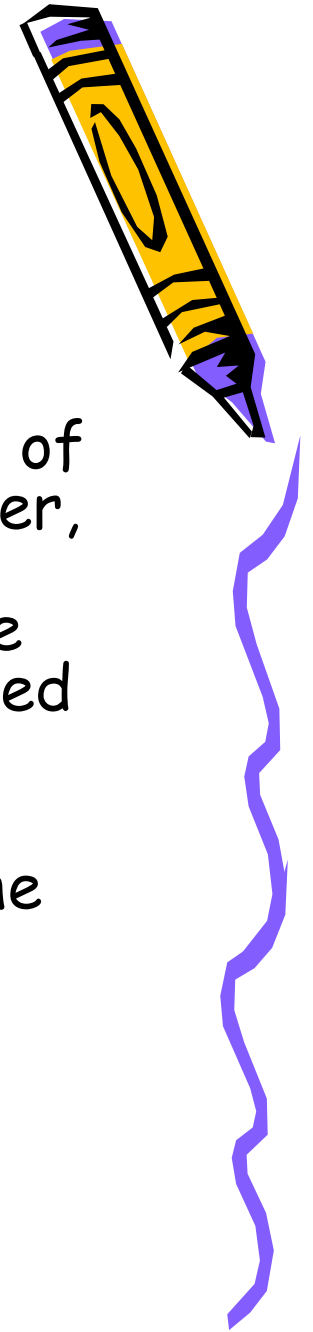
# Deaf or Hard of Hearing Students

- Effective preparation for teaching a deaf or hard of hearing student centers around good communication.
- Provide printed copies of teaching material in advance, so the student and their support worker can prepare by familiarizing themselves with the content, process and vocabulary.
- Instructions for practical work, project steps, glossaries and new vocabulary lists are also helpful.



# Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- ASD is a general term used to describe a group of neurological disorders including Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorders, Rhett's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS).
- Symptoms can range from mild to severe and affect four times as many boys as girls, with the notable exception of Rhett's Disorder, which affects only girls. ASD is thought to affect as many as one in 500 individuals worldwide.



# What are the Symptoms of ASD?

- Delayed or absent language development or loss of speech at an early age
- Poor eye contact
- Uneven skills development
- Unusual or "stereotyped" behavior, such as spinning, rocking, or other repetitive body movements
- Limited social interaction skills
- Over- or under-sensitivity to sensory stimuli
- Unusual play style
- Fascination with certain objects, textures, sounds, sights or movement



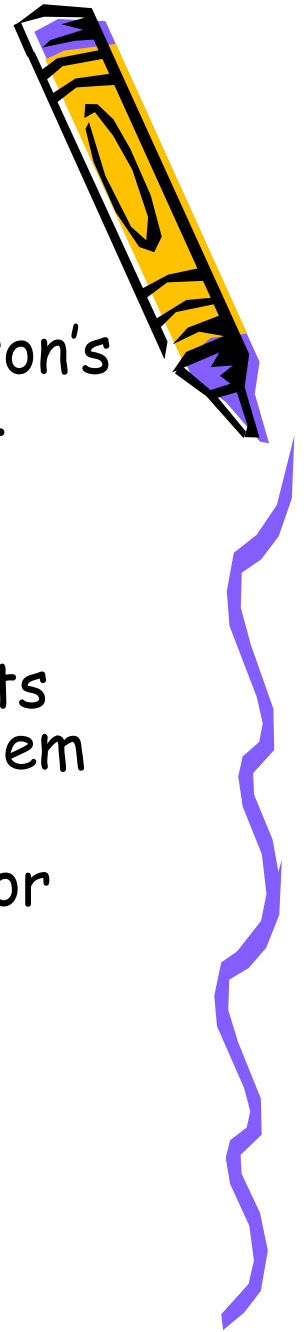
# Hidden Disabilities

- When you are preparing to teach you may not necessarily know that you have an exceptional learner in your class.
- For example, mental health difficulties are often not disclosed, and there are others...
- Even if you have not prepared modifications for a particular student you should be aware of common barriers to learning.



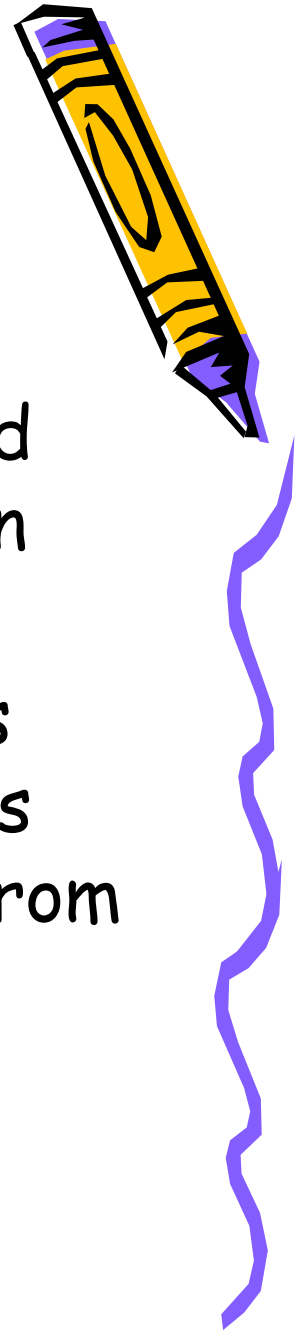
# Hidden Disabilities-

- Catch-all phrase that simply means that a person's impairment is not obviously apparent or visible.
- You may have students in your group who are disabled but who you may not instantaneously recognize as such.
- You may only discover that one of your students has a hidden disability once you get to know them better.
- Some may not consider that their impairment or condition is a disability .



# Other Helpful Hints for Exceptional Learners

- Students with Asperger's syndrome and Autism often find teamwork in hands-on learning environments very stressful.
- Students with coordination difficulties find some aspects of hands-on activities particularly difficult and may benefit from working with their peers.



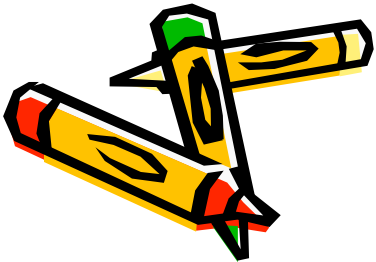
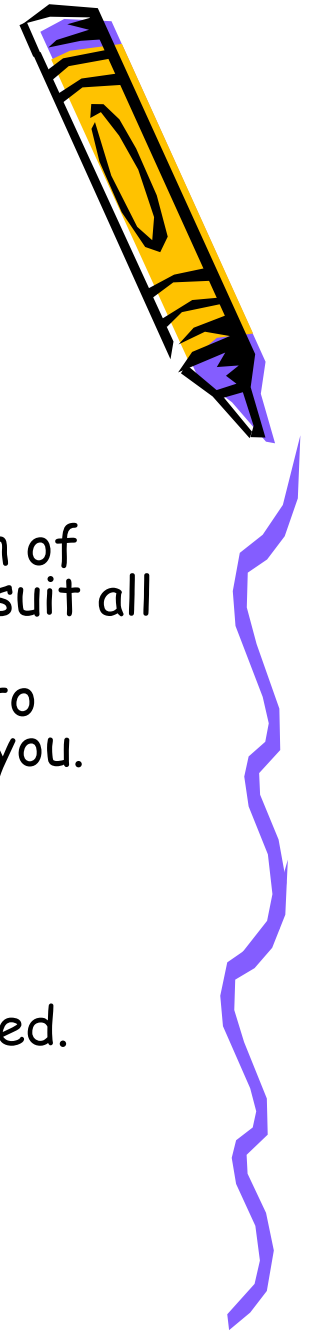
# Tips for Classroom Practice

- **Provide:**

- Clear learning outcomes and describe your expectation of how these will be achieved - offer some flexibility to suit all learning styles. This allows a student who is unable to achieve your preferred layout, for example, a chance to negotiate an alternative method of presentation with you.

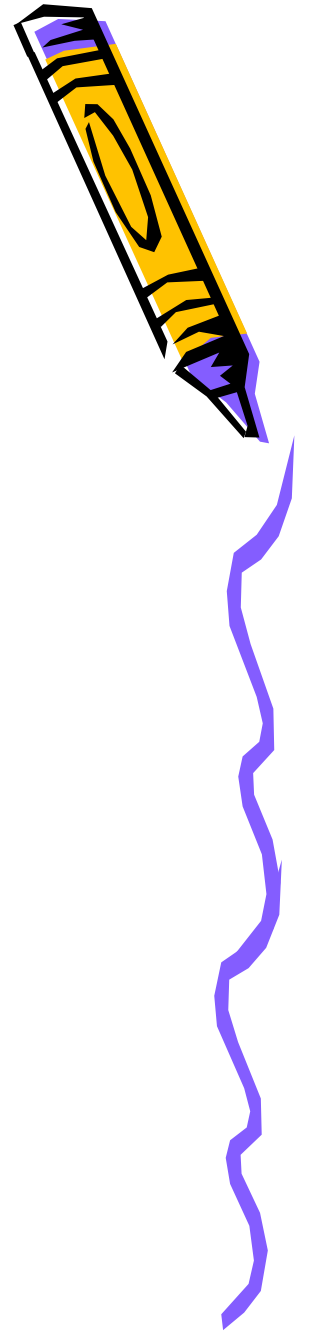
- **Plan:**

Clear structure of your sessions to allow question and discussion time, as well as moments for reinforcing knowledge and building on what has already been learned.



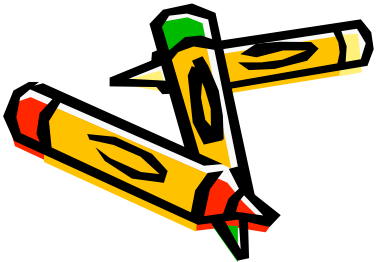
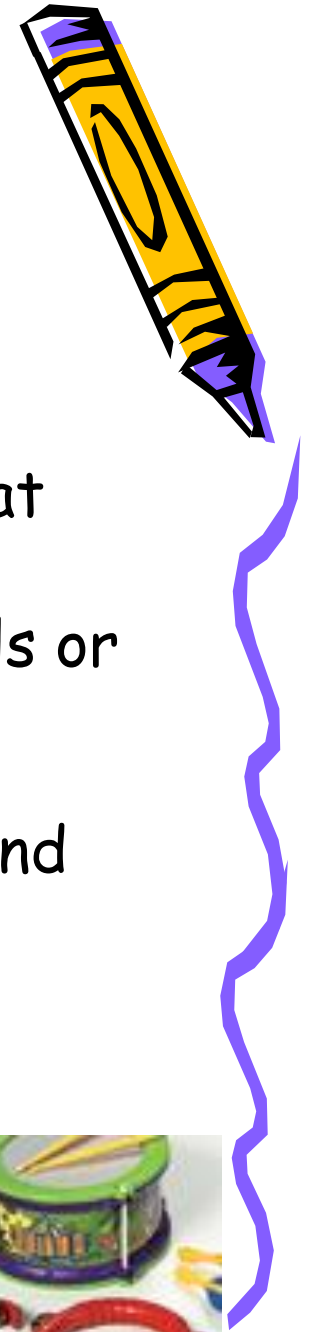
# Students with specific learning difficulties

often have to chunk their learning into "bite-sized pieces" with plenty of time for completing their work.



# Think About The Skills

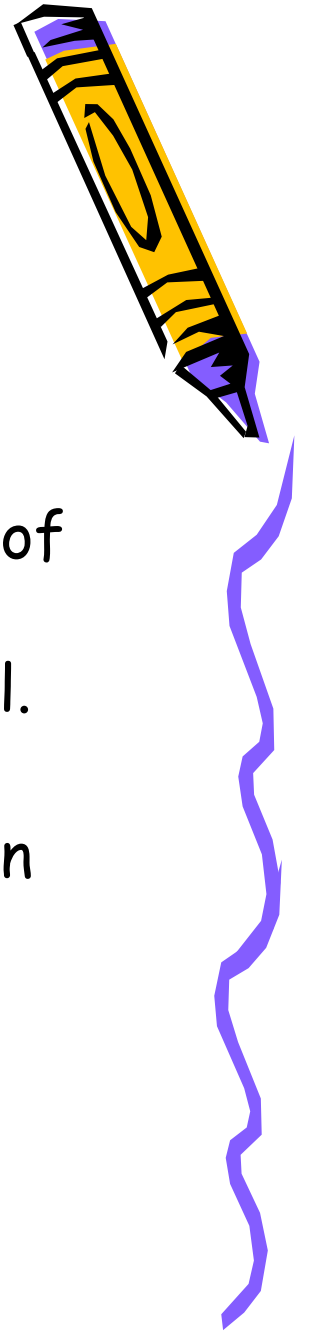
- These may be visual, auditory or tactile skills.
- They may be related to language, perception, memory, concentration or other attributes that are easily taken for granted.
- A lack of or a difficulty with any of these skills or attributes may affect knowledge acquisition, construction and assimilation. This in turn will affect your teaching delivery and strategies and how learning materials are used.



# Teaching Strategies for Exceptional Learners

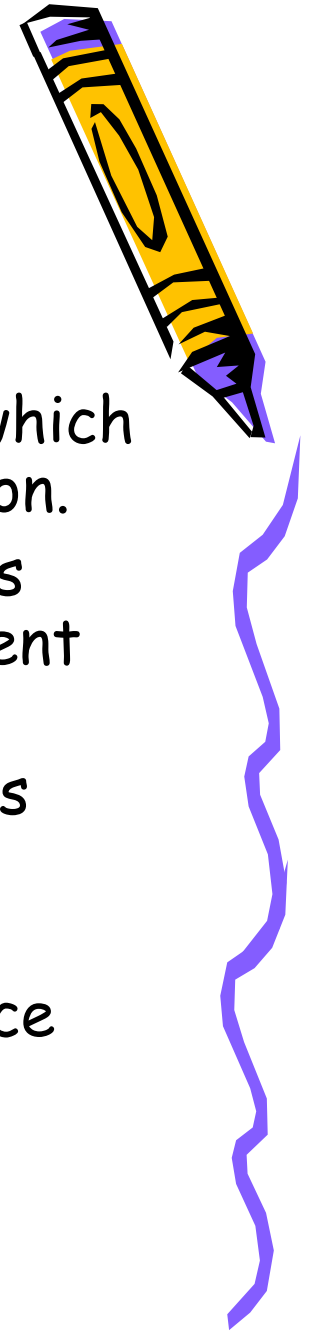
You should think about :

- the objectives and desired learning outcomes of the artistic teaching activity.
- the needs of the student as a unique individual.
- the resources and expertise available to you.
- how any adjustments you make might impact on your usual teaching methods and resources.



# Other Instructional Strategies May Include...

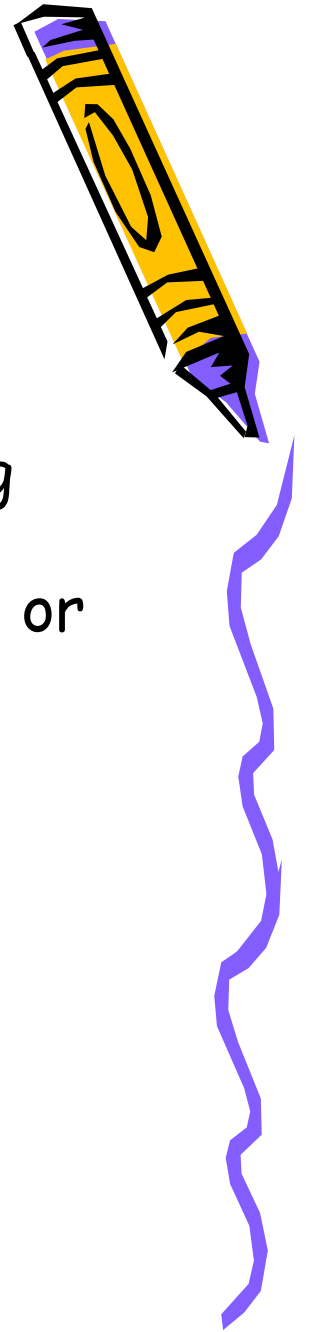
- Providing instructions or notes beforehand, which the student can read before the demonstration.
- Allowing the student to familiarize themselves with the equipment or to try out the experiment or activity in advance of the class.
- Minimizing noise during the activity as much as possible.
- Ensuring that demonstrators and studio or workshop assistants are aware of good practice and know if a student needs support.



# Ask Yourself...

- Might this make it difficult for a student to achieve the learning outcomes?
- Is it possible for them to achieve the learning outcomes in another way?
- If is advisable to get advice from other staff or the student what will help the most.

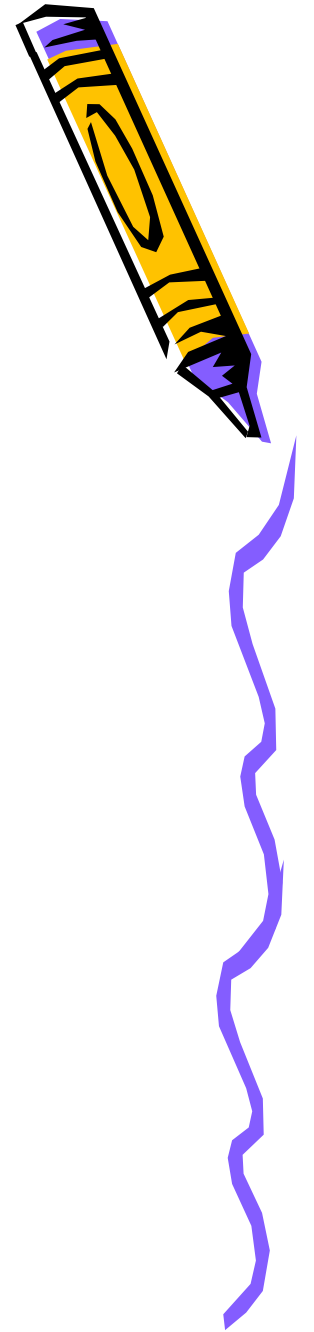
**Do Not Make Assumptions!**



# Paraprofessionals

## Remember:

- Arts teachers are entitled to the same aides and support systems as other teachers, but there is a lack of understanding about the roles of paraprofessionals in arts classrooms.
- Para's may not have training in the arts and are unaware of the artistic developmental levels and materials.
- Many para's try to "do" the artwork for the students. Model for the para effective ways to work with a student.



# Reducing STRESS

- Provide clear and precise directions.
- Provide instructions in written and oral form.
- Encourage questions & allow time for answers.
- Talk through procedures as you demonstrate them.
- Allow more time for the completion of tasks.
- Check that students are not stuck on a particular activity.
- Long hands-on sessions may be taxing
- Allow students to work with a partner or in a group so different strengths and abilities can be encouraged.

