



## **CHALLENGES AND PROBLEM SOLVING- Teaching Autistic Students**

### **Teacher(s):**

Mary Beverwyck and Terri Nitihara

### **Artist(s):**

Jacqui Russell, Drama, Lookingglass Theater

Ellen Tritschler, Visual Artist

### **Academic Content and Learning Skills:**

Language Arts, Math, & Social Studies

### **Arts Content:**

Visual Art & Drama

### **Overview**

The reason for choosing this topic arose from discussions among teachers and artists. Our starting point for discussions was the student in the classroom. The students are children with autism. Autism is a life long developmental disability, which affects language, cognitive, social, emotional, and motor skills. People with autism must cope with challenges everyday in almost all aspects of their life. Often the world is a confusing place filled with noise and light and people talking and activity.

### **Research and Inquiry**

The challenge that children with autism face is trying to make sense of the world around them, to participate in family and community, life, and to communicate their needs and wants. It is often very difficult.

### **A Variety of Hands-on Approaches to Developing and Representing New Knowledge**

This unit, Challenges and Problem Solving, certainly did not attempt to encompass all challenges that face children with autism. Rather, we attempt to present a unit based on the assumption that problem-solving skills can be developed in many different ways. We use literature as a basis for this unit and incorporate drama, visual art, and academics.

-Mary Beverwyck & Terri Nitihara, Teachers

### **Classroom Goals Addressed by Project**

Academic skills as well as functional skills; also objectives that are on students IEP's (Individual Education Plan).

### **State Goals Addressed by Project**

*Academic*

"Academic goals and objectives as stated in Chicago Public School's 'Systems-wide

Objectives and Standards.' Students are moving towards age appropriateness Functional Adaptation."

*For Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten Student will:*

25. A: 1.

Use mind (imagination, memory), body (movement), and voice (sound) to explore setting (environment).

26. A: 2.

Use mind (imagination, memory), body (movement), and voice (sound) to explore setting (environment). Name body, voice and mind primary drama tools (tools).

B: 3.

Demonstrate the following skills: (skills) - control personal space (hands, feet, mean words to self):

- Follow directions
- Stop/start at a given signal
- Concentrate and focus
- Give attention to others
- Show audience behaviors: paying attention, listen without speaking
- Transformation

*For Fine Arts: Drama & Visual Art*

State Goal #25:

Know the language of the arts

Learning Standard A:

Understand the sensory elements, organizational principles and expressive learning qualities of the arts.

State Goal #26:

Through creating and performing understand how works of art are produced.

Learning Standard A:

Understand processes, traditional tools and modern technologies used in the arts.

### **What Resources were used?**

Books:

A treasury of Fairy Tales, Smithmark

The Classic Grimm's Fairy Tales, Louise Betts Egan

Cinderella, Barbara Karlin

Cinderella, Christine San Jose

Strongheart Jack and the Beanstalk, Peasent Despain

Jack and the Beanstalk, Paul Galdone

Hansel and Gretel, The Brothers Grimm

Hansel and Gretel, Rika Lesser

Hansel and Gretel, James Marshall

Hansel and Gretel, Jane Ray

Internet:

Jack and the Beanstalk Story - This worked well for it's simplicity and repetition (Both Jacqui Russel and Ellen Tritchler used this story version.)

Videos:

Hansel and Gretel Fairy Tale Theater, Video  
Jack and the Beanstalk Fairy Tale Theater, Video  
The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Eric Carle, Video  
Kidsongs, Video

Art Supplies:

Marblex, Self-hardening clay/ AP Nontoxic from American Art Clay Co., Inc.

**Key Words/Vocabulary that are most important to this unit**

- Clay/Ceramic Terms:
- Roll
- Shape Ball/Oval/Egg
- Coil
- Press
- Pound
- Cut
- Texture

**Brief Step-by-Step daily/weekly lesson plan for this unit**

• All lessons provided opportunities for students to develop such skills as following directions, attending, listening and answering questions. The academic areas of Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, and Science were integrated into each lesson and activity.

• Appropriate skill levels and expectations of individual students were taken into account in the academic components of the lessons.

• Classroom teachers followed the System Wide Goals and Objectives used by the Chicago Public Schools. Special Education students are working towards all goals in academic and functional skill activities.

**Assessments used for this project**

The lessons contained in this unit were developed for students with a severe and profound disability, autism. Due to the nature of this disability, and the children's deficits in language, speech, fine motor skills and cognition, the lessons were designed to meet the needs of all students on an individual basis assessed individually.

**Comments/Reflections from Teachers, Artists, Students, Parents**

As in all lessons and activities in our class, students participate as independently as they are capable. In order to ensure a high, successful level of participation, adult guidance is often necessary. Students are provided with communication tools such as word cards, pictures, or electronic devices. Guidance may consist of verbal prompts, gestures, or physical guidance. In addition, lessons are focused on meaningful, functional skills, with an emphasis on language, communication, and social development.

- Mary Beverwyck & Terri Nitihara