

# The Arts and Language Development

*The arts can serve as a symbol system that parallels and supports language development, especially for students who have a need for language acquisition. This might include students with special needs or students for whom English is a second language. For these students the arts can be a valuable tool in fostering language acquisition and development, as well as an alternate means of communication.*

## Vocabulary Building

- Talking with students about their art or the artwork of others offers an excellent opportunity to build vocabulary skills, develop clear articulation of ideas, and sharpen powers of observation skills.
- Students often understand ideas presented in visual form before they are able to understand the same ideas presented verbally; consequently, looking at and talking about art can acknowledge and stimulate their cognitive processes.
- Students can look at and talk about works of art in three dimensions. From a *realistic* perspective, they can identify and describe exactly what it is they see: people (including ages and gender), animals, buildings, landscape, weather, vehicles, etc. From an *emotional* perspective, they can discuss the feelings that the picture generates - if any. And from an *aesthetic* perspective they can discuss artistic elements they can identify such as shapes, lines, patterns, textures, colors, perspective, balance, composition, etc.
- Description and analysis that include words relating to position, size and spatial relationships present opportunities for language development at a higher level.

## Listening Skills

- Studies show that listening is our primary communication activity, yet it is the one that receives the least amount of formal instruction compared to reading, writing, and speaking.
- *Hearing* is just the first part of the listening process. The rest of the process involves *interpretation* of what was heard, the *evaluation* of what was heard, and finally the *reaction* to what was heard.
- Through music education, students learn to *listen* for: high and low sounds, loud and soft sounds, fast and slow melodies, rhythmic patterns, moods created, the sounds of different instruments, the words to songs, different types of music, etc. In drama, students listen for verbal cues and respond to the facial and vocal cues provided by other actors.
- In doing so, they must *interpret* what they heard (which leads to understanding), *evaluate* (decide how to use it), and *react* appropriately.
- Language acquisition, especially for second language learners, is heavily dependent upon the ability to be a discriminating and critical listener.

## Self-Esteem

- For students with communication difficulties, self-esteem is critical. They need to feel comfortable, safe, and accepted in order to risk using a new or difficult means of expressing themselves, especially in a second language.
- Through art or dramatic pantomime students can visually communicate ideas and feelings they may not be able to express yet through spoken language. By engaging in singing, rhythmic, and movement activities, these students are not only able to demonstrate skill but, more importantly to, they can participate fully, just like their classmates.