

JVIB & News Features

This Mattered to Me

Editor's note: In this issue we introduce a new feature for the Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness (JVIB), entitled "This Mattered to Me," in which invited JVIB authors, peer reviewers, or readers will choose a classic article from JVIB's 100-year catalog and share with readers why the article is still important and relevant today. The chosen classic will be made available for online access and the invited guest will introduce the article by describing the impact it had on his or her professional life and thinking.

This project grew out of the JVIB centennial celebration as researchers delving into the journal's 100 years' worth of publications came to recognize the continuing relevance of so many of the past writings in the journal and realized the need to ensure that these contributions to the literature of the field of visual impairment and blindness are celebrated and absorbed by this, and future, generations of JVIB's readership. This centennial year, many treasures have been uncovered from within the pages of the journal. Readers are invited to partake in the rich history of the journal as it is preserved and continues to inform our profession through this series.

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SERIES EDITOR, "THIS MATTERED TO ME"

"The Exploration of a 'Tactile Aesthetic,'" by Judith A. Rubin, published in the November 1976 issue of *New Outlook for the Blind*, Volume 70, Number 9, pp. 369–375.

RECOMMENDED BY STUART H. WITTENSTEIN

"A feel is worth a thousand pictures."

—Tim Cranmer

"The Exploration of a 'Tactile Aesthetic,'" an article by Judith A. Rubin that was published in *New Outlook for the Blind* in 1976, informs my practice on a daily basis as I seek to understand how students at the California School for the Blind (CSB) perceive their environment, develop concepts, and use all of their senses to gather information about their world. As a former teacher of braille reading and writing, I have long been fascinated with both the similarities and the differences between obtaining literacy through braille as opposed to print media. Of course, the most notable difference is that with braille, the literary code is accessed through the sense of touch. Dr. Rubin's article has taught me much more about the sense of touch than other, more technical, articles on tactile perception. Perhaps this is because the article is simpler and more easily understood, but also because it describes a study that features children, rather than statistics, and their authentic reactions to tactile elements in their environment.

Dr. Rubin's article cleverly uses art as a tactile medium to uncover some of the truths about the differences and similarities in ac-

cessing the environment through touch or vision. The article describes a study in which children who are blind, have low vision, or are sighted created sculptures that were then judged by panels of other students who were also blind, had low vision, or were sighted. The insights provided by these students, and by sighted judges wearing blindfolds, go far beyond Rubin's stated intent to describe a "different aesthetic environment." The results of this study led me to recognize the qualitative ways in which the interaction of a child who is blind with tactile elements of his or her environment differs from that of a sighted child.

This article has led the administrators and teachers of CSB to emphasize art as a way of encouraging self-expression, and also as a vehicle for teaching many of the tactile skills needed by braille readers. We at CSB have discovered art to be an ideal medium for developing concepts that are critical to teaching several of the domains of the expanded core curriculum. Dr. Rubin's article also attacks preconceived notions that sighted individuals might harbor about blindness and the limitations that loss of sight places on the artistic sense. Within the pages of her article is a recognition that the aesthetic world for blind persons is completely valid, if vastly different, from that of sighted individuals.

Dr. Rubin's article mattered to me when I first read it, and it continues to influence me. I often refer to it in lectures and presentations about learning to read braille and developing tactile perception. I believe readers will find it useful and relevant to their work 30 years after it was published in *JVIB*. To read Dr. Rubin's article in its entirety, visit *JVIB* Online: <www.afb.org/JVIB>.

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On the web

The article relating to this commentary is available free to subscribers at *JVIB* Online: <www.afb.org/JVIB>. Nonsubscribers may purchase a copy of the article from the *JVIB* Classics area of AFB's ePublications web site: <www.afb.org/ePublications/JVIBClassics>.

A Look Back

(Continued from page 396)

includes graduates teaching in schools for the blind, home teachers for commissions for the blind, music teachers, and public school teachers. Teaching seems to be a profession which attracts many of our pupils, but we must admit that the openings for blind teachers are very rare outside of schools and organizations for the blind. Of our five graduates who are engaged in public school work, only one is totally blind. The other four have a certain amount of vision without which it is doubtful if any of them could have secured the positions which they now hold. Prospective teachers should realize in advance that their opportunities for employment are extremely limited, except among the blind themselves....

Nine graduates are employed in some capacity by local associations for the blind. Graduates engaged in the practice of law number six. With one exception they are totally blind. This profession seems to attract a certain number of our brainiest boys.... Our graduates number five practicing osteopaths and three professional masseuses. Two of the osteopaths have partial sight. The other six mentioned are totally sightless....

Four of our recent graduates are in institutions of higher learning and naturally their usefulness and success in the world can