

European Newsletter 2 • 2004

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

I hope you have had a refreshing holiday during the summer months and are now enjoying the new school and college year! ICEVI Europe continues its good work along with you and on your behalf. In this edition of the newsletter you see a photograph of our committee meeting which took place in Barcelona. At these meetings we deal with financial and organisational matters of the European region of ICEVI. Recent topics for discussion have been how to encourage corporate membership of ICEVI Europe; whether application forms in different languages would increase individual membership; the teacher training seminar which takes place in Budapest, 23-26 September; the European conference. On the latter topic, may I again draw your attention to the ICEVI Conference 2005 to be held at

Chemnitz, 14-18 August.

The theme of the conference is:

EDUCATION – AIMING FOR EXCELLENCE

We are expecting more than 500 participants for that important event. It will

be a wonderful opportunity to meet together and share your expertise with other colleagues working in the field of visual impairment.

This information asks you for a contribution to this conference to be submitted electronically. Find the online version of this call for papers via internet www.icevi2005.de Please fill in the Official Abstract Form and send it attached to an email back to e.fuchs@icevi2005.de More detailed answers regarding the submitting procedure and other important issues you will find on our webPage following the path to the "Call for Papers".

In case you do not have access to email or internet please ask Kongress 2005 **(SFZ Sächsisches Förderzentrum Chemnitz gGmbH, Flemmingstr. 8c, D-09116 Chemnitz, Tel. +49 (0) 371 33 44 0, Fax: +49 (0) 371 33 44 350)** for a written paper version which will be immediately sent to you.

Würzburg, 19.02.2004

Eberhard Fuchs
Chairman ICEVI

ICEVI EUROPE

International Newsletter

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Educational Books to develop tactile sensitivity and braille learning

Improvement of educational activity for children in general, and blind children in particular, is achieved through studying and practical experience, along with well-designed training programs. All these depend on the collaboration of a team of different specialists, who develop both theoretical and practical knowledge.

In this respect, a team of specialists from Cluj-Napoca, Romania, have created a theoretical book, with practical application in the field of developing the tactile sensitivity of blind children. The theoretical book is named "*Tactile exploration concerning the object perception, tactile images and Braille reading*" (*Explorarea tactil-kinestezica in perceptia obiectelor, a imaginilor tactile si in lectura Braille*), under the "Presa Universitara Clujeana" publishing house, in March 2004. The authors are Prof. Dr. Vasile Preda from "Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, Department of Special Education and PhD student Roxana Cziker, early intervention worker at the School for Visually Impaired Children of Cluj-Napoca.

Theory moves into practice in the pre-Braille books named "*Tactile exploration of images. Pre-braille books*", which aim to develop the tactile sensitivity of preschooler blind children and children in the first year of school. Roxana Cziker and Silviu Vanda, deputy head of this school, made these books at the braille-printing house of the School for Visually Impaired Children.

The novelty of these publications is that they: explain the theoretical aspects of the characteristics of tactile exploration of objects; explore the role of images for blind education, the principal objectives of images and the presentation

of Braille reading particularities. Also, an entire chapter is dedicated to the modality of tactile graphic conception, and the transposition of print material into Braille documents; the organization of the page by appropriate placing of the informational blocs for title, number of pages and the relations among images and text.

The pre-Braille books were made using special software named **TGD QikTac, version 2.3.2.6.**, which offers the possibility of making simple and complex tactile images. The tactile images are structured in 11 books, from simple to complex, beginning with exploration of vertical, horizontal, oblique and curved lines and the composition of different geometrical shapes from these lines. The set finishes with three kinds of tactile exercises:

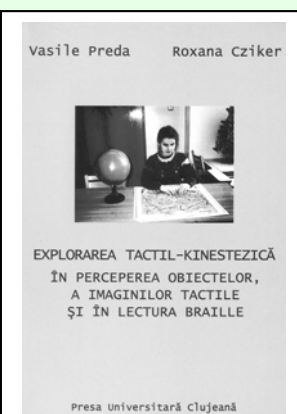
- identify the missing-image in case of two quasi-identical images;
- match the images from 3 similar shapes;
- identify, by memory, the identical images, exercise adapted from the test of geometrical shapes recognition realized by Andre Rey.

The objectives of these books are to:

- develop the capacity of tactile perception, identification and discrimination of vertical, horizontal, oblique and curved lines, simple and complex geometrical shapes;
- develop the capacity of spatial organization by identifying the spatial guiding mark, the rules of graphic configurations on the page;
- familiarize with fundamental Braille group and dots configuration which contribute to develop the activity to learn the Braille alphabet.

The books were presented to other schools for visually impaired children in Romania and they were considered to be a very important step in the education of blind children, providing a stage of crossing from concrete activity to symbols (Braille letters).

Prof. Vasile Preda, Ph.D.
Roxana Cziker, Early Intervention worker



Workshop with Anette Ingsholt (DK) on early social and emotional development – an initiative of ILO: Belgium – the Netherlands – November 2003

Last November 20-21 we organized a two day workshop with workers from early intervention centres in the Netherlands and Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium) who meet each other in the ILO. We meet each other four times a year in Breda (NL). In 2002-2003 the central theme of these meetings was the social and emotional development of children (0-6) with visual impairments. Some of the discussion topics were: early attachment and the development of autonomy, expression of emotions, the use of transitional objects, the neurological base of emotional behaviour. At the end of this two year period we invited Mrs. Anette Ingsholt from the Advice & Counselling Department at Refsnaes, The National Centre of visually impaired children and youth in Denmark.

Anette Ingsholt is well known for her work in early intervention and for her research on early social interactions between blind babies and their parents. She has participated in several conferences of ICEVI.

During her short stay in Belgium and The Netherlands Mrs Ingsholt held several presentations on the subjects of early development, the parent-child relations and peer interactions and of later social development, which is sometimes problematic or even distorted in children with visual impairments.

The integration of research findings, theoretical views and experiences in early intervention proved to be very fruitful, interesting and inspiring.

It was good to share our knowledge and understanding about this theme of major importance. It was very inspiring to 'join attention' and to experience 'togetherness' and 'true dialogue' during these few days. Once more we understood the value of international contacts. We hope to find the

means to repeat and expand this initiative ... maybe at the 2005 European conference?

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Farewell interview with Gunilla Stenberg Stuckey

Tuesday, September 30, 2003, was the last day in Gunilla Stenberg Stuckey's long career in education of the visually impaired in Sweden. Under her leadership Tomtebodas Resource Centre developed from a traditional school for the visually impaired into an internationally recognized resource centre.

(The article is based on an interview by Britta-Lena Jansson, librarian at Resource Centre Vision, originally published in Swedish. Based on this article Johanna Enqvist and Harry Svensson have prepared an English version for the ICEVI European Newsletter.)

Gunilla Stenberg Stuckey got in contact with the world of the visually impaired at a very young age. Her grandfather was a teacher in brush making and basket weaving at the vocational school for blind men in Kristinehamn. Her aunt was the headteacher of the vocational school for blind women in Växjö.

She is married to Ken Stuckey, who has been working for a great number of years as research librarian at Perkins School for the Blind in USA.

Gunilla, why did you become a teacher of the blind?

I was more or less born into that world. The school for the blind in Växjö was my

childhood paradise. There my younger brother and I could learn exciting things like basket weaving, brush making and to write in Braille. Later, when I was doing my training as a primary school teacher, I stayed with my aunt for two years. Since it was a boarding school I got a good insight in the world of blindness.

Tell us about some positive or negative Tomtebodas episodes that have made deep footprints in your memory.

- When I was seven years old, I visited for the first time the beautiful and red Tomtebodas School in the company of my aunt Frida, who was going to visit Gustaf Ek, the headmaster of Tomtebodas from 1923 to 1948¹. I remember that he was tall and big and had a roaring voice, and that the school looked like a palace.

- Every autumn when we started to teach the young blind beginners how to read and write. What a wonderful feeling. At the same time it was painful to see how they were longing for their families. The boarding school was an enormously protected and closed world. Therefore integration felt right although it involved other difficulties.

- When the first grader Erik lost his artificial eye at the bottom of the deep section of the pool during a swimming lesson.

- When an offer was made to the Students' Union at the Karolinska Institute, the school of medicine across the street, to buy the headmaster's villa for 1 Krona (approx. 10 Cent) by the State owned company that hold the buildings at Tomtebodas in trust. It was a tough time. However, a former student and employee, Bengt Lindqvist, at that time the Minister of Health and Social Affairs, managed to stop this in a joint action with the Minister of Education. The headmaster's villa later became Tomtebodas guest house.

- When we finally had to close the school



Gunilla Stenberg Stuckey
TOMTEBODA 1965-2003

at Tomtebodan because of the diminishing number of pupils due to integration. And at the same time it was positive because the Government had faith in us to establish a resource centre at Tomtebodan, a challenge which Kerstin Fellenius, Bengt Olof Sennerö and I accepted in good spirit.

- When we had the yearly conferences gathering the teachers from Tomtebodan and our regional organisation, consisting of 30 pre-school counsellors and 30 itinerant teachers. What an exchange of experience!

- When we each year invited internationally well-known researchers to give a seminar. At Tomtebodan we have met Anne Corn, Emerson Foulke, Cay Holbrook, Alan Koenig, Sally Mangold, Michael Tobin, David Warren and many others from all over the world.

What does the building Tomtebodan mean to you?

The red Tomtebodan building has to me become the symbol for the education of children and young people with visual impairment. Here you find the root of education of the blind in Sweden. Here a traditional school for the blind has developed into a modern and dynamic resource centre, which has been a model for many similar centres around the world.

On August 29 a big farewell party was held. Can you describe your feelings that evening?

The party my staff had organised for me was quite extraordinary. In the old assembly hall we had a banquet with representatives from centres from far and near present. The old Tomtebodan tradition with an autumn party was brought back to life. Dressed like flowers and vegetables the staff presented with great warmth a poem and song cavalcade.

How do you feel about the forthcoming life as a pensioner?

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Keep in touch with ICEVI European news by going to www.icevi-europe.org**

I started to work at Tomtebodan in 1965 so I have been here for a very long time. The last two years have been tough because of the reorganisation of the educational support to children and young people with disabilities in Sweden. It has been difficult for me to see that so many members of my staff have had a hard time during this process.

However, a lot of new and exciting things are happening now. It would have been nice to be involved, but it is time for my retirement. It is also nice to be one's own master, to have time for grandchildren, for books, for travelling, and for language studies.

What is your opinion about the new organisation?

The new Swedish Institute for Special Needs Education is getting more and more established. This is a very positive development. There is also an advantage of having one Resource Centre Vision, consisting of the former Tomtebodan and Ekeskolan Resource Centres. From September 1, 2003, there is also one director for the joint centres, Christina Nordqvist. I welcome her to a task I know she will manage very well.

1. Gustaf Ek was succeeded by Tore Gissler (headmaster 1948-1979). Mr. Gissler was also the president of ICEVI from 1972 to 1976. In 1979 Gunilla Stenberg succeeded Tore Gissler. It is quite remarkable that Tomtebodan had only three leaders during 80 years.

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Re-launch of British Journal of Visual Impairment (BJVI)

The BJVI is for all professionals concerned with children and adults who have a visual impairment and is a forum for all views on related subjects. The editorial board welcomes articles of current interest on research, education, health, welfare, employment and technology.

The BJVI has a new home with Sage Publications. The next issue will be available in September 2004 and on publication it will be available electronically to faculty members, students and other authorised users at institutions with a subscription for this journal. For further information go to: www.sagepub.co.uk/jvi

SPEVI – South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment – Biennial Conference

Rydges Melbourne, 9-14 January 2005

The theme 'Families and Educators: Facing Challenges' reflects the trend of strong partnerships between home and educational settings. The conference will offer a broad forum for further exchanges aimed at developing greater understanding and alliances. High profile speakers (including Larry Campbell, president of ICEVI) will discuss trends and directions based on research and best practice. Families and practitioners will present their experiences. All this in a wonderful, friendly Australian ambiance! For more information go to: www.cdesign.com.au/spevi2005

Resource Centre Vision Stockholm, Sweden

This summer Resource Centre Vision Stockholm has left the old venue at Tometoboda (see interview with Gunilla Stenberg Stuckey in this issue). The Swedish Institute for Special Needs Education, of which the centre is a part, has gathered all its units in Stockholm under one roof on the campus of Stockholm School of Education.

The new mailing address is:
Swedish Institute for Special Needs Education
Resource Centre Vision Stockholm
Box 12161
SE- 102 26 STOCKHOLM, Sweden
Tel: +46 8 7371600
Fax: + 46 8 7371699

The other half of Resource Centre Vision, located in Örebro and formerly known as Ekeskolan/Ekeskolan Resource Centre, is unchanged:
Swedish Institute for Special Needs Education
Resource Centre Vision Örebro
Box 9024
SE- 700 09 ÖREBRO, Sweden
Tel : +46 19 6762100
Fax : +46 8 6762200



Web Site Authoring Tool for Students with a Visual Impairment

As a teacher of the visually impaired, the advances in Web accessibility over the past few years have been very welcome. More effective legislation, improving access technology and more aware designers are creating accessible Web sites and thereby providing new and interesting learning opportunities. However, the Internet is also a very cost-effective way of publishing information which is equally important in the classroom. Teachers have long recognised that using wall displays to showcase work completed in class has a positive impact on students' motivation and sense of pride in their work. A natural extension of this is to use the Internet as a giant wall for students to present their work to the world. The challenge for the teacher of the visually impaired is to find ways in which the visually impaired students can build and publish their Web sites independently. Fortunately the creativity of a team from the Netherlands and Denmark has been of a great help.

Sonokids have provided accessible Web content for children and young people for a number of years. Their Web site (www.sonokids.com) provides a range of fun activities for the blind including online games, audio remixers, stories and a message exchange area. One of the most exciting developments over the past two years has been Max, a tool that can be used independently by blind students to create and upload Web sites. This is a free tool that includes complementary Web space meaning that the costs are minimal for the school.

After registering with Sonokids for a free Web site, the student is provided with a blank template. Web content is keyed straight into a text box and uploaded to the Web site at the click of a button. There is no need to worry about file transfer protocols which could make the whole process difficult and confusing. An accessible menu provides options to create new pages and subpages. Each

page can contain images and audio files as well.

The student has the option to include an online poll to ask his/her friends and family to vote on an important issue. Photos can be included in a photo album. A guest book is provided to receive comments and a Weblog is also available if desired.

All of the above can be created without the need for any particular technical expertise, either by the student or the teacher. However, Max can provide a very useful starting point to introduce the basics of a markup language. Students can specify font styles, enhancements, colours and alignment using Maxican codes.

The appearance of the Web sites can be changed by the viewer. A number of different themes are available through a system called Max-wear including nature and sport.

A group version of Max is available which allow students to collaborate on a joint Web site, providing the opportunity for students with and without a visual impairment to work together on a joint project.

I have used Max for a number of years with a group of students aged between 12 and 13 years old. In addition to learning how easy it is to create a Web site, the various projects have helped develop the students' confidence and motivation in using the Net. The lessons were so popular, students started coming to sessions before school officially started so that they could add to the content of their Web sites.

Max really is an accessible Web site authoring tool for the visually impaired. It is an excellent way to teach students how they can create and publish content on to the Web.

Rob Jones
Royal Blind School

ABOUT THE SEMINAR AND NATION'S FRIENDSHIP

Cristoffel Blind Mission means something real, not just a name, to a lot of people who work with blind or low vision impaired persons, not only in Lithuania, but in Latvija, Ukraine, Kaliningrad region. The mission supported the recent improvement seminar for trainers who work with blind and low vision impaired children.

Teachers working with pre-school children and school-age children, gathered at Kaunas Boarding School For Blind And Low Vision impaired children. The theme of the three-day seminar was "School children's training and work with families". Colleagues from LASUC, P.Avizonis centre, Kaunas special kindergartens "Vyturėlis", "Liepaites" and "Neziniukas", from Latvija, Kaliningrad school for Blind persons attended the seminar at which the main lecturer was Gabriele Feigl from Nurnberg, who works at the centre for Blind and Low vision impaired people. The centre celebrated its 150th anniversary earlier this year.

Gabriele Feigl has worked with young children at the centre for 23 years and she is the chief adviser. Her work experience was very useful for everybody at the seminar: for those who train children at an early age and for those (e.g. Kaliningrad) who don't train such children but are very interested in doing so and want to know how to organise this work.

We discussed and analysed a lot of themes: early training in Bavaria, team work organisation, how to appraise a child, how to make an individual training plan, the role of parents, the Nurnberg centre's work with families.

The main idea was: children, their mothers, families are the same everywhere. They've got the same basic needs: they need to feel safe, to know that there is a person who can help and counsel them, give them professional and human support. All parents of blind or low vision impaired children have got the same problems and all of them want their children to feel safe and become independent persons. We have shared our experiences, discussed, watched video films, played and analysed situations.

Teachers at Nurnberg work not only with the child, but with parents, family, neighbours, community and state authorities who can help to meet a child's requirements.

Our visitors became acquainted with the kindergarten's "Spindulelis" work. Guests were amazed by a wonderful concert, well equipped special training rooms, the many resources and their purposeful use.

Irena Matuliene, member of LASS central council, was interested in this seminar as well. She has consulted with Gabriele Feigl and asked for a list of literature which could be translated into Lithuanian. It would be very useful for all teachers in Lithuania who work with young children, school-age children and, of course, also for parents whose children are blind or low vision impaired.

By the way, our guests also enjoyed a cultural programme. The very impressive Jonines festival was on in Kernave. Despite the rain our guest was charmed with the opera "Pilenai" in Trakai castle.

Genovaite Vaitkuvienė

Are you working with children or young people who are functioning at the pre-intentional stage of communication? If so, you may find the information at www.innovativeprogramming.net.au of interest. The materials on this website have been developed to help develop symbolic communication, literacy, vocational, emotional and problem solving skills and provide positive behaviour support for challenging behaviour.