

ICEVI European Newsletter

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Content:

- President's Message 3
- ICEVI European Awards 2017 6
- Elections for ICEVI-Europe 7
- Individual and social premises for inclusion of visually impaired students 7
- European Survey on Early Intervention..... 13
- Audio Description (A.D.) in Israel as an innovation in provision of support services to the community of visually impaired persons 17
- EBU / ICEVI- Europe joint Braille project..... 22
- New material for beginners in mathematics..... 24
- United Kingdom Learning Media Assessment 25
- Education for children, adolescents and young adults with Juvenile Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinosis (JNCL)..... 26
- TYFLO Research Group – Exploring the blind alleys. With Vision..... 29
- How to teach literacy through braille to children - an online course 31
- Touch to learn, touch to communicate 34
- Statped, Norway 36
- Haptices, touch messages, sharing enviromental information 39
- Joint Meeting for ICEVI –Europe Nordic and Baltic Country Representatives and NOVIR – Nordic Visual Impairment Network in Finland September 201640

- Report from the 36th VBS Congress in Graz (01. - 05.08.2016)
Perspectives in Dialogue 41

President's Message

Dear Members of ICEVI-Europe,

Shortly the year 2016 will come to an end, as we move forward with even greater optimism and efforts for improving the services for the visually impaired.

2016 has been a year in which many professionals and organizations have held meetings and events for the purpose of improving the education and rehabilitation opportunities for people with visual impairments.

In 2016, the Board of ICEVI-Europe in close cooperation with the Belgian Host Committee have focused their efforts on the preparations for the organization of the 9th ICEVI European Conference, which will take place on July 2 to July 7, 2017 in Bruges, Belgium.

In Paris, France, INS HEA (The National Higher Institute for Training and Research on Special Needs Education) organized a successful international conference on the sense of touch, in partnership with Universcience.

In Graz, Austria, the VBS (Verband für Blinden und Sehbehindertenpädagogik e. V./ The Association of Pedagogy for the Blind and Visually Impaired), in close cooperation with the Host (Local) Organizer, Odilien-Verein zur Förderung und Betreuung Sehbehinderter und Blinder Steiermarks, organized a successful 36th Convention of Pedagogy for the Blind and Visually Impaired "Perspectives in Dialogue," wherein ICEVI-Europe was involved as one of its co-operating partners.

In Orlando, Florida, (U.S.A.), the WBU/ICEVI Joint Assemblies 2016, hosted by the National Federation of the Blind (U.S.A.) took place on August 18-25 2016 at the Rosen Centre Hotel. The Joint Assemblies were organized with great success and were attended by many participants interested in its content from various countries throughout the world. An ICEVI Day was organized within the Joint Assemblies with the theme "Education for All Children with Visual Impairment: Beyond 2015". The theme highlighted the United Nations 2000-2015 education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals that have guided global and national efforts to achieve universal primary education and gender parity by 2015.

In Jyväskylä, Central – Finland, a productive and successful meeting of the Baltic and Nordic National Representatives of ICEVI-Europe took place on September 22-23, 2016, organized by Mrs. Tarja Hännikäinen, Board Member of the Baltic and Nordic Countries subregion, and generously hosted at the Valteri – Onerva, Center for Learning and Consulting. During this fruitful meeting, several topics of importance were discussed including the situation in each country concerning the support in education and rehabilitation services

for persons with visual impairment and the role and tasks of the National Representatives within ICEVI-Europe. Especially noteworthy, was the joint collegial day held with the NOVIR - Nordic Visual Impairment Network – representatives, in which the critical issue of how to support and maintain professional development in the field of visual impairment was discussed.

In Budapest, Hungary, the 6th European Conference on Psychology and Visual Impairment (6th ECPVI) with the theme "Psychological Survival Skills in a Sighted World," took place On November 10-12 2016. It was organized by the European Network for Psychologists and related professions working in the field of Visual Impairment (ENPVI) of ICEVI-Europe, in close cooperation with the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE). Keeping with tradition, this conference is successfully organized by the ENPVI every two years, with a high level of interest from a great number of participants who are looking to participate. The next European Conference on Psychology and Visual Impairment is scheduled to take place in Thessaloniki, Greece in 2018.

In Tbilisi, Georgia, the 7th ICEVI Eastern European Conference was held on December 14-17, 2016 at Tbilisi State University. The theme of the conference is Partnership: Parent professional cooperation in the process of education of visually impaired children. The conference was organized by ICEVI-Europe with the non-governmental organization Mariani and with the valuable support of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Sports and Youth in Georgia.

Now for the New Year, 2017, we mainly look forward to the 9th ICEVI European Conference that will take place in Bruges, Belgium. The conference promises to be a platform of exchange, wherein professionals, practitioners, academics, researchers, institutions, policy makers and people with visual impairments and their environment, can come together and share knowledge and best practices, promoting the social inclusion of people with visual impairment.

The theme of the conference is "Empowered by Dialogue," centered on the Quality of Life Framework by Dr. Robert Schalock. We encourage all of you to join us in Bruges and actively take part in this conference, as we are sure, in dialogue, we will empower each other, and we will be looking for a way to improve the independence, social participation and wellbeing of people with visual impairments, definitely three aspects that significantly matter in human life.

The 2017 ICEVI-Europe General Assembly will take place within the ICEVI European Conference in Bruges, wherein, Elections of the Board Members and National Representatives will be held. This is a good opportunity to consider if you would be interested in submitting your nomination for a position. More specific information shall become available in upcoming issues of the ICEVI-Europe Newsletter.

Moreover, the 2017 ICEVI European Awards will also be held during the European Conference in Bruges. In the event you would like to nominate someone as an award recipient, please contact your respective ICEVI-Europe National Representative or Regional Representative (Board Member). Shortly, our Webmaster will send out the Nominations Form to the ICEVI-Europe National Representatives and Board Members. Please keep in mind that the deadline for Nominations is March 1, 2017. Further information regarding the Criteria and process can be found in this issue of the Newsletter.

I would like to take this opportunity to kindly remind you to pay your membership fees of ICEVI-Europe. It will provide you with voting rights in the General Assembly, which will be held during the 2017 ICEVI European Conference. The payment of membership fees also entitles you to a discount on the conference registration fee.

Wishing you and your loved ones a Happy Holiday Season and a Healthy, Joyful and Prosperous New Year!

On behalf of the Board of ICEVI-Europe,
Panagiota (Betty) Leotsakou, President



ICEVI European Awards 2017



The Board of ICEVI-Europe has proudly decided to continue the tradition of presenting an award to individuals or organizations that have made a significant improvement in the quality of life of people with visual impairment.

Two awards will be given every four years at the General Assembly of the Association, one award to an Individual and one award to an Organization. Recipients of the awards are individuals or organizations of recognized prestige in the field of education and rehabilitation of people with visual impairment. The intention of the awards is to recognize the work of those individuals or organizations whose contributions, efforts, research, best practices, innovation or cooperation have had an impact in Europe and an after effect in the field of visual impairment.

The awards will be a Certificate of Recognition and a Commemorative Plaque.

National Representatives and Board Members are kindly invited to submit to the Awards Committee the nominees who meet the following criteria:

1. Awards Nominees must be or must have been active in the field of Visual Impairment.
2. There will be two areas in which awards may be given: Past Experience and Innovation.
3. Only Individuals and Organizations within Europe will be considered for awards.

The Nominations Form for the 2017 ICEVI European Awards will be sent by the ICEVI-Europe webmaster to the National Representatives and Board Members for their completion and submission.



Completed nomination forms should be sent to the ICEVI-Europe Webmaster, Mr. Peter Teplicky, at peto@bam.sk by **March 1, 2017**, the deadline for Submission of Nominations.

We look forward to receiving your nominations!

Sincerely,
The ICEVI-Europe Awards Committee

Elections for ICEVI-Europe

During the upcoming 9th ICEVI-European Conference from July 2 - July 7, 2017 in Bruges, Belgium, the General Assembly of ICEVI-Europe will take place.

An important part of this meeting will be the elections of the new Board. At this time, we invite you to consider if you would be interested in submitting your nomination for a position on the Board of ICEVI-Europe. Further information will be made available in the Special Issue of the ICEVI-Europe Conference Newsletter, which will be published in March 2017, as well as in the following issue of the Newsletter in April 2017.

Individual and social premises for inclusion of visually impaired students

By **Peter Rodney**, Independent psychologist at Special Needs Counselling, Denmark

The process of inclusion of visually impaired students is in focus in many European countries. There is a tendency towards thinking that inclusion is good in itself and the more the better. But several research projects question this. More and more students don't get an educational degree and even worse, they don't get a job. The unemployment rate is extremely high in Europe, between 70 and 85% depending on how you measure it. Several projects and programs aim to change this situation, but none really goes deep into finding out why this problem occurs at all. Why do visually impaired students have to "learn" to go to work?

What is missing in the inclusive educational school system? Students without an impairment get jobs (if there are any), but visually impaired students have to be trained in special programs to get jobs. This intervention is often put in too late and is often rather costly.

So what are we doing wrong? What is absent in the current school curriculum? What have we overlooked? Answers to these questions will be outlined in this paper.

It is important to underline that there is absolutely nothing wrong with promoting inclusion in itself. Inclusion is the best way of educating visually

impaired students. The important issue to focus on is the premises for inclusion and the content of the required curriculum.

Inclusion is a balance between pedagogical ideology and social and individual reality. The Salamanca and UN convention speaks for inclusion. Students at universities are taught that inclusion is the best way of teaching. But without consideration of the principles in the social context or in the individual or personal dispositions of the impaired person.

Inclusion is often regarded as a process of change, that can be decided and then launched with success. For inclusion to be successful, it is essential to review the specific premises or framework.

How does present society cope with people who are different – and how is the individual person able to meet the expectations from that society?

Attitudes in the surrounding society

Attitude is a learned matrix or advance readiness. It is a mental factor, which explains human behavior and predicts our future activities. Attitudes are functional since we don't have to build up an approach whenever we engage in an interaction with other people.

You can argue that it would be a more "fair" world, if people did not have these preconceived opinions, but you must realize that attitudes express our values in central areas of life e.g. religion and humanity. Attitudes form or shape our knowledge and experiences and create meaningful connections. They play a big role in our identity.

Attitudes consists of 3 aspects

- A cognitive one, how we see and understand the world.
- An emotional one, how we value actions and beliefs in other persons in either a positive or negative way.
- An action point, that makes us act in one way rather than the other.

The emotional aspect is the most important or dominant part of an attitude. Absence of knowledge (cognitive) leads to a simple positive or negative interpretation. That is why attitudes become prejudices and stereotypes of e.g. disabled people.

The usual public reaction to such attitudes is information campaigns. As I show later, unfortunately without much effect.

What is the attitude towards disabled people in Denmark?

In general, people agree that people with a disability should have the same possibilities as other people have. 80 % of students in the mainstream school think that you should treat children with a disability equally to other children.

But if you ask these questions closer to daily life, the answers are quite different.

Attitude in the Danish labour market

77% of people without disability are in a job, but for people with disability the percentage is 27-67% depending on the degree of disability.

This is independent of education degree or level. On all educational levels people with a disability have a lower employment rate.

A survey went deeper into the attitudes towards disabled people.

One question was: "Whom would you rather not have as a colleague?"

- 42% would rather not/not at all have a person with psychiatric disorder as a colleague.
- 21% would rather not/not at all have a person with visual impairment as a colleague.
- 6% would rather not/not at all have a person with cerebral palsy as a colleague.

What was the general attitude in the school?

57 % of the students would not be willing to sit next to a person with cerebral palsy.

51 % of the students would not be willing to sit next to a person who was blind.

31 % of the students would not be willing to sit next to a person who was a wheelchair user.

The attitude outside the school, in the public arena

72 % thought it would be embarrassing to be seen in the street walking with a person who had cerebral palsy.

70 % thought it would be embarrassing to be seen in the street walking with a person who was blind.

48 % thought it would be embarrassing to be seen in the street walking with a person who was a wheelchair user.

The Danish ministry of education found these figures disturbing and launched an information campaign with educational material. The educational package was meant to change these attitudes, but the outcome was devastating:

- "Sitting beside an impaired student" was changed by 10%
- "The embarrassing meeting" was changed from 2 to 5 %

This shows that cognitive intervention in the form of information only changes peoples attitude in a very limited way.

The aspect of attitudes in society and schools are a major element when we talk of inclusion. Attitudes are difficult to change, but it is important always to remember that they have a huge impact on the process of inclusion. We, the professionals and the visually impaired students, have to learn to live with this reality. We will all meet people, whom we think of as having the "wrong" attitude, but that is the reality in many social settings today. Instead we must put our joint forces in arenas where we can make things change. That is in the individual personal disposition of the visually impaired person.

Mental or personal requirements for inclusion

What personal or individual demands are required in a person, so he or she can be included? We know that some types of disability are easier to include than others. E.g. are wheelchair users easier to include than autistic children?

There are important cultural requirements. You should be able to interact with reference to your common cultural context. I have often met blind boys who say: "I cannot discuss football with the other boys because I am blind and because football does not interest me". This is wrong. You always have opinions or experiences. This has nothing to do with sight. If you want to be a part of a social gathering, you have to interact on the premises of the majority. This does not mean you have agreed, but you have to be able to express your opinion. This is emotional competence.

Emotional competence

All this leads to the requirement for emotional competence. Which is a part of attachment competence and impulse control. It is the ability to withstand frustration. It is the ability to understand other people's emotions, intentions and motives. It is the ability to get motivated and maintain your own motives.

Central to this thinking is the ability to choose and understand the implications of a choice, while you at the same time recognize the importance of your own responsibility in acting and solving problems.

The development of all these areas of competence is essential for the individual visually impaired person if inclusion is going to be fruitful.

We must develop an educational environment that creates these needs.

Daniel Goleman highlights the importance of developing emotional competence today. He says that the process of creating emotional competence today is too essential to be handled by the students themselves.

The same thing could be said for visually impaired students. The development of these competences should be part of the inclusive curriculum.

Too often I see specific curricula for visually impaired students that mainly build on the topics and thinking of the old schools for the blind. Braille reading, tactile maps, mobility and in best cases social skills, without any description of what that consists of.

If we want to change the future position of visually impaired persons in present day society, we must create and implement the required curriculum.

What should be the central issues in such a curriculum?

One thing I have learned after 25 years in the service of visually impaired students is, that the visual impairment never is a problem in itself. The real problem is how the person thinks about his or her visual impairment.

The focus of the required curriculum is therefore the mindset of visually impaired students. This includes the ability to understand the social implications of your own visual impairment. The way to achieve that is what Vygotsky in his 1924 book "The Blind Child" called "psychological tools".

Today psychology has a variety of methods or strategies that help the promotion of reflection and insight into your own mentality. This psycho-education must be the core in the new curriculum. This does not of course mean that topics like Braille reading are out. But it is essential to underline, that these other important subjects must always be seen and understood in a social context.

If we manage to enrich inclusion with such a curriculum, the future will look much more positive for visually impaired students.

When we start to teach disabled and not-disabled children together in the same classroom, we have not at all achieved inclusion, we have just started the process. When we place visually impaired students in the same room with others and give them technical aids or an assistant, we have to be aware, that technical aids and especially the actions, attitude and behavior of the teacher

or an assistant can promote exclusion instead of inclusion, because they may disturb social interaction between the students.

We have to put and answer several questions to make sure, that we really enable and promote inclusion in a lifetime perspective. For example:

- What can I (as a teacher) do to promote social and emotional learning?
- Do I have the competences needed for that?
- Do my pedagogical interventions promote the social inclusion of a student with disabilities? What didactic methods do I use? Does it help the student later on in life when he or she is seeking a job?
- How can I develop new methods so I strengthen the social competences of the students with and without disabilities to promote inclusion?
- If I feel that I need some new skills to promote this way of thinking about inclusion, where can I get it?

In general, it is important to emphasize that if we want to change this overall critical situation, with fewer students getting a degree and even fewer getting a real job, it cannot be up to the individual teacher or support person to do this. We must develop and implement the required curriculum and we must have teacher training courses that qualify staff for these new assignments.

What the individual teacher can do until this is up and running is to make sure that time, focus and resources are given to the students "individual social and emotional learning plan". Just as the teacher focuses on the individual cognitive learning plan (The ILP).

By Peter Rodney

- Independent psychologist at Special Needs Counselling, Denmark
- Co-coordinator of European network for psychologists working in the field of Visual Impairment.
- Former vice-chair of ICEVI Europe.
- Former Senior Advisor at IBOS - Danish National Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted

European Survey on Early Intervention

DATO Group. ONCE. Spain

Introduction

Throughout its history, ICEVI Europe has considered to be important, the creation of interest groups on specific topics, such as early intervention. For different reasons, these groups have functioned only intermittently.

During the 8th European Conference on Education and re/habilitation of people with visual impairments, celebrated in Istanbul (Turkey), from June 30th to July 5th 2013, there were several sessions, with professionals interested in specific topics who had the idea of re-launching these groups again.

As a result, during the meeting of the European Committee in Budapest, Hungary, in October of the same year, it was decided to finally re-launch the interest groups, each being coordinated from one sub-region.

The Early Intervention group was entrusted to Ana Isabel Ruiz, representative of the Southern European countries and Director of Education, Employment and Cultural Promotion. In Spain there is a group called DATO, devoted to promoting Early Intervention (EI) all around the country, and she could ask that group to be involved at a European level.

For that reason, the DATO group, which operates nationally in Spain, has been entrusted with the task of organizing the Early Intervention group in Europe.

Among the proposals submitted by the DATO group, was to start by raising a survey on the current status of EI in European countries, in order to start from the existing reality and the proposals of professionals and institutions involved.

The survey was launched twice during 2014 and 2015, and the report was finished at the end of 2015.

Thus the objective of the survey report, which is presented here, was to know how EI is structured and organized nowadays in Europe and to draw some conclusions and recommendations for future improvements, not only at a national or regional level, but an international level also, based on the exchange of experience and training.

The information gained was not representative of all countries in Europe, as the survey was responded to by professionals and institutions of only 10 countries. However, it is a starting point that allowed us to reflect on the manner in which EI services are provided in some countries, as well as the

needs of the clients of this programme and the professionals who take care of it.

While it was our objective to know the specific situation of each country, we have not fully achieved this goal, because of the diversity of profiles and institutions that have answered and at the same time, because of the way the survey is formulated, with closed questions that have shaped some answers that could have been richer and would have provided us with more information if they had been raised as open questions.

It is necessary to keep in mind that what surveys reflect is the perception of the professionals or institutions that have answered, so they may not describe the full reality of each country.

However, the summary of surveys received and the conclusions and recommendations drawn from them is presented below.

General Conclusion

- There are certain basic points of agreement such as:
 - The importance given to early intervention and its preventative nature
 - The involvement with both children and their families
 - The need for specific training in EI
- However, the lines of work differ from one country to another: in some of them the attention to children is a priority; in others, the priority is the family; the age of starting school is different in different places; the professional profiles involved also differ and so on.
- Some countries suggest that the current crisis has had a negative impact on the development of programmes and intervention in general.

Final Recommendations

From the conclusions and answers given in the questionnaire, we offered some reflections and recommendations to ICEVI:

- There is a need for a common framework for early intervention, large enough to cover all the organizations that work in the field, but specific enough to address the individual problems of children with visual impairments and their families.
- It would be interesting to map EI resources at a European, national and regional level, keep it updated and spread it by various means, to aid a better understanding by professionals and the general public.

- Improve knowledge on population data in each country and the percentage of the population of early intervention compared to other people with visual impairments.
- Putting the population data together between countries in order to serve as a framework to help to assess the internal situation of each country in respect to the others, with the aim of establishing changes which improve services, intervention and resources.
- Urge governments to avoid cutting funds for EI services in times of crisis, not only because of the vulnerability of the population, but also due to the preventative nature of the programme. Providing adequate care at an early age represents an investment for the future.
- Create and promote trends for cooperative and joint working between professionals from different countries, sharing resources, best practice and training.
- Analyze the criteria of schooling and how the transition to school occurs in different countries, in order to agree on minimum standards in this respect, as well as the necessary support and attention.
- Know about those intervention programmes that are considered basic and also the most innovative or new, in order to guarantee the basic ones and share the innovations.
- Analyze the existence and needs of people with cerebral visual impairment, as well as any existing programmes for this population.

Recommendations to the EBU

Once the EI report was delivered to all Board Members of ICEVI Europe, in February 2016 it was decided to send some key points to the EBU, in order to find a means of cooperation between both organizations and advise the governments of different countries about this field.

Those recommendations summed up what we thought were the main points to achieve in the near future:

1. Raise awareness, inform and urge governments and institutions to ensure detection of and attention to children with visual impairment under the age of 6 and their families, with special emphasis on the group 0-3 and on the totally blind, considering that early detection and immediate attention at this age is preventative.
2. As a result of the above, create minimum standards for detection, attention and appropriate intervention for children with visual impairment and their families.

3. In order to ensure an initial and specialized training qualification for professionals in the field of Early Intervention with visually impaired children and their families, there will be developed training programmes in the universities and institutions that qualify these professionals. Therefore, the minimum curricula to be included in planned studies for both initial and specific training, must be defined.

We deeply thank all the professionals who responded the questionnaire:

Austria:

Gerti Jaritz. Master specialist AT; ICEVI national representative in Europe. VBSÖ (Verband für Blinden und Sehbehindertenpädagogik)

Belgium:

Eliane Bonamie. Coordinator (head) of the service for mobile and ambulant support for persons with visual (multiple) impairment and their family/ context. One of the two regional organizations in Flanders, offering services for people with visual disabilities: early intervention, education and other services.

Cyprus:

Maria Kyriacou. Special Educator of St Barnabas School for the Blind, that delivers services for visually impaired people at a national level.

Czech Republic:

Jana Vachulova. Vicedirector of EDA (till the end of 2015 Rana pece EDA, o. p. s.), regional, for early intervention, integrated in a Resource Center.

Pavla Matyasova. Head of the Association for Early Intervention, regional and general.

England:

Steve McCall. Honorary Lecturer. School of Education, University of Birmingham

Finland:

Arja Marila. Rehabilitation Instructor of the Finnish Federation for the visually impaired. It serves national and visually impaired people in general.

Anne Latva-Nikkola. Coordinator of the Finnish Association of parents of children with visual impairments. It is national for early intervention.

Tarja Hännikäinen. Consulting teacher; In-service trainings; National and international cooperation. Onerva Unit (for children with visual impairments), under Valteri, Center for Learning and Consulting. It is National.

Iceland:

Elfa Hermannsdottir. Manager of the National Institute for the blind, visually impaired and deaf blind individuals.

Hungary:

Sára Dobrik-Lupták, Éva Lantos, Csilla Liptai, Lívia Rabárné Szabó . 4 persons of the National Board of Assessment Special Educational Consultant, Early Invention, Trainer Care Service. It is composed of teachers, physiotherapist, coach PSMT, somatopedagogo, psychologist and specialist vision.

Serbia:

Medved Tatjana. TVI and early intervention specialist from the College for the Blind "V. Ramadanović"

Spain:

DATO Group, devoted to invigorating EI in the National Organization of the Spanish Blind (ONCE). National and specific for the visually impaired.

Audio Description (A.D.) in Israel as an innovation in provision of support services to the community of visually impaired persons

Nurit Neustadt-Noy

In Israel 24,000 people are registered legally blind. In addition, estimates indicate that over 100,000 people have low vision. Most are above age 60 and retired, which means that they have more opportunities and time to fulfill desires to attend cultural events. Audio Description (A.D) was not practiced in Israel until 2014. The newly applied law and service regulation call for audio description at events, without details on the kind of events, which left its application vague.

Establishing this service was a challenge that required the involvement of several parties and extensive financial resources. The process and steps taken to establish the valuable A.D service included: developing the curriculum, recruiting the potential describer for the training, running and supervising internship at real time theatre shows and following up with short Continuing Education sessions with international guests.

Four parties collaborated in making this new service available: The Central Library for the Blind, The Center of the Blind (the umbrella organization of blind persons in the country), Hebrew University (H.U.) Department of

Communication and Social Security Fund for Developing Services for People with Disability, that initiated and financed the project.

Fourteen people with a background as readers at the Central Library for the Blind, theatre actors and those who were active in various arts medias were selected, after screening that followed a call for action in local newspapers.

As there was no experience in training for the new service, an experienced renowned describer from London was invited to train alongside with the H.U. trainer of radio broadcasting and a few relevant professionals such as standard Hebrew language, diction and phraseology, relevant technology to perform and transmit A.D. among others.

In order to apply the newly learned skills it was necessary to establish affiliation with a few leading/popular theatres and offer them the service as a no fee bonus including the technology necessary for provision of the description to the VI&B visitors. At the same time promotion of the availability of the service was held at social clubs of visually impaired persons and at organizations catering for blind people. In addition, individuals were invited to attend accessible performances on low cost tickets to allow the new describers to perform the internship after which they graduated with a diploma.

The procedures established at the theatre are: The VI&B patrons are invited to arrive an hour before the show starts. They are provided with the audio receiver at a distribution stand in the theatre's lobby, located next to the stand where hearing devices are distributed to people with hearing impairment (a service which has existed in all theatres in the country for over 12 years). They are instructed in how to operate the receiver. They are then met by the describers with whom they are invited to go for a touch tour back stage, where they have an opportunity to explore the stage, be introduced by touch to the show's sets and meet the cast who present their roles and speak their first sentence as they appear on stage, to allow voice recognition. Usually short dialogues with the performers take place. The touch tour takes about 30 minutes. Following this, the visitors are seated in the hall and listen to a prerecorded introduction to the play in which they are exposed to the story of the play, receive facts about the cast and vital information to help them follow more easily the visual action on stage.



Photo: Hana and Avi describing "Everyone wants to live"

A.D. is provided by two describers, each taking half of the show, to portray the visual character of the performance. In order to provide worthy descriptions, the describers have to prepare methodically. The preparations include: Viewing live play, reading the play, watching a video of the play and marking the short segments where they may slip in the description without overlapping dialogues, preparing a script of the visual scenery and rehearsing live before the actual performance. All in all, the preparation takes about 30 working hours before the actual live audio description takes place.



Photo: Touch Tour and A.D. "The Handicapped" by Miki and Adi

The first training session in A.D. was held in November 2014. The service is managed under the auspices of the Central Library for the Blind. Thus far over 12 popular plays have been described in different regions and cities in the country. Some shows were described a few times. A Gala event was held and covered by news medias to promote the service which seems to be in demand. The Social Security Fund distributed the necessary equipment to 10 theatres that responded to the call for service. By accepting the equipment free of charge including 5 described plays with no fee to them, they agreed to offer 3

shows each sponsored by them during the coming year. It is believed that the theatres as business organizations will notice the increase in ticket sales by the potential patrons and will find it worthwhile to offer A.D. on a regular basis to include VI&B visitors among the 600,000 annual theatre visitors.



Photo: Touch-tour, "The new criminals"

In addition to theatre plays, the describers adapted pre-recorded description to over 50 Israeli films which may be lent from the library online, or viewed at certain announced movie theatres, events where A.D. is performed open to all. Since the service of Audio Description started 2 national events were described and a few conferences where VI&B people attended were described.



Photo: Adi Harub, Audio Describing

The young service is becoming popular among visually impaired persons who marvel at the opportunity to enjoy the visuals on stage without having to guess and presume or interrogate their companions.



Photo: Touch-tour "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night"

In the short time since the service of A.D has been provided, over 2,000 visually impaired individuals have attended various audio described events. The request for describers is growing and preparation for training another group of describers is in process. It is hoped to expand the service to musicals, operas, museums, exploration tours and sightseeing.

EBU / ICEVI- Europe joint Braille project

Following the European Blind Union strategic plan for the period 2015 - 2019, Braille as a topic has come into extensive focus. One intended goal by EBU is that all learning material for visually impaired children and youth should be offered in appropriate and timely formats.

The Danish Association of the Blind has offered to take the lead in the two-year-project, which will analyze the situation and proper solutions for children and young persons using Braille and to bring up the main points with a summary of the situation and observations registered in the different countries. The desired result of a project is also to find out what is best practice in training braille, the availability of good and up to date training materials, and the general propagation of braille, including in the public domain.

The target group is limited to the children and young persons with visual impairment using braille, under the age of 18 years and who do not have a severe additional disability apart from the visual impairment.

The project is run in two phases by the steering group with members from Denmark, Sweden and Finland - the latter being the ICEVI - Europe link. The project will screen and analyze the various situations and solutions in the Nordic countries during phase one, and then spread the screening further to Estonia, Austria, Italy and France.

In the end, the project wishes to establish the following:

1. The use and availability of braille. Whether the use and availability of braille in whatever format - paper or electronic- and for all crucial purposes (education and/or leisure) is increasing or decreasing?
2. The impact of technology. Is modern technology (ICT) promoting a larger amount of braille and does that mean that persons who are blind or very severely partially sighted make use of this opportunity?
3. The potential impact of other formats and media on the usage of braille. How could the availability of text on computers (synthetic speech) and narrated text (human voice) be seen as effecting the extent of use of acquired skills amongst children and young persons who are blind for writing and reading braille?
4. Availability of relevant braille material at the relevant time and of an equal content. Are blind children from an early age (pre-school, early grades and later on) offered braille educational material and do these

children get the same educational material and at the same point in time as their sighted classmates?

5. Educators and educational materials both. Are children met by trained and skilled educators who can teach them braille competently and in an inspiring manner? Are educators using relevant training material?
6. Do children and young persons who are blind maintain their skills in using braille? And if so, do they continue to use it as a major or minor part of their handling of texts. How can training courses etc. be put in place to ensure that children and young persons who are blind do not over time lose their competences in mastering braille?

On behalf of the project, the steering committee are:

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New material for beginners in mathematics

By **Benjamin Juliusson**, product manager NIB Iceland

In 2014, The National Institute for the Blind, Visually Impaired and Deafblind in Iceland, received a grant from the Icelandic Centre for Research to develop and produce a new type of textbook in mathematics for blind students. Very little material existed before and what there was usually only consisted of braille text and whatever the teacher could think of at the time. Often the blind student would have different material than his classmates and would therefore often miss out on what the other textbooks had to offer and the other students were working on.

The aim of this project is to provide the blind student with material that will enable him to:

- have the same assignments as the other students
- work on them at the same time as the others students
- work on them independently.

Mathematical textbooks for young children are often very colorful and have many pictures, puzzles and games to make them more entertaining. This new textbook is more diverse and entertaining for the blind student and should make mathematics easier for him to understand.

To make this possible the student has to be provided with different types of material to help him. This can for example include:

- braille text
- embossed pictures
- toys
- different shapes
- playing cards
- coins
- ritmuff

The assignments the student has to solve include pairing, counting, shapes, patterns, numbers from 0-20, measuring, plus and minus.

The first copy was ready in the fall of 2015 and presented to a 6 year old student. The creators worked closely with the teacher to see how it worked and how it could be improved. The student and teacher were very happy, had

very few comments and the student said this was his favorite textbook. He is now in 2nd class and has received another book he is working with now.

In April 2017, the creators of the books will be at the Tactile Reading Conference in Stockholm where they will introduce the books and the thought process behind it.

United Kingdom Learning Media Assessment

By Steve McCall and Rory Cobb

The United Kingdom Learning Media Assessment (UKLMA) is a new online resource that has been developed by the Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB) and VIEW (the UK professional association for teachers of the visually impaired). Its purpose is to help teachers of the VI make decisions about what learning media will best support the achievement of children with vision impairment.

In the case of children who have severe low vision or deteriorating vision, it can be especially difficult to decide whether print, braille or a combination of print and braille best meets their needs. The UKLMA is a process that can be used to record, evidence and justify decisions about the choice of literacy and other media for pupils with visual impairment over time. It considers all the media children use in their learning, not only literacy media but also the technology and teaching and learning materials that will best promote individual attainment. The UKLMA can be used with children between the ages of 3 and 18.

The key principles of the UKLMA are that:

- LMA is based on objective data collected over time and examined closely by all members of a pupil's educational team (including the pupil when appropriate)
- The evidence used for each decision related to a learner's literacy media should be clearly documented and updated every year
- A key purpose of Learning Media Assessment is to enable the team around the child to design and target instruction that will meet the individual media needs of children
- The process for decision-making should be transparent
- There is no assumption that print is inherently superior to braille (or vice versa). The choice of one medium over the other is based entirely on the medium's ability to support the individual needs of the child
- LMA is an ongoing process of evaluation and the pupil's teaching and learning goals should be modified regularly to accommodate changes in,

or additions to, the learning media needs and options identified by the process

The original Learning Media Assessment (LMA) procedure was developed by Alan Koenig and Cay Holbrook in the USA and published by the Texas School for the Blind in 1994. With the help of Cay Holbrook the original resources have been updated and adapted for the UK context. The UKLMA online site contains:

- Background information about the LMA process
- Video case studies that provide examples of how Learning Media Assessment is used in real-life situations
- Detailed information on how to implement the UKLMA
- Downloadable forms to record findings of evaluations conducted in the process

The site also contains a Frequently Asked Questions section, video guidance from teachers and other professionals, and advice on issues relating to LMA including record keeping, transferring from print to braille, developing literacy in children who have learning difficulties, assessment of literacy, and dual media use.

The resource is currently only available to members of VIEW but if you would like additional information about the resource or advice about constructing a similar resource for your own country please contact Rory Cobb.

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Education for children, adolescents and young adults with Juvenile Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinosis (JNCL)

By Bengt Elmerskog

The project aim and the main target group:

To improve educational opportunities and non-medical interventions for a disadvantaged and very low frequency group in Europe – children and young people with Juvenile Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinosis (JNCL), also called Spielmeier-Vogt disease or Batten disease. The disease is characterized by a developmental course including blindness, epilepsy, speech problems, cognitive regression/dementia, motor coordination problems and emotional

reactions including anxiety and depression. There are 33 individuals with JNCL in Norway, the incidence level in other European countries is approximately at the same level.

Background:

A comprehensive medical and biological research has been going on for the last decades in order to understand the nature of the disease. There is no medical cure yet and the disease leads to premature death, often 20 – 30 years of age. There is a substantial need for alternative initiatives and actions within education and other non-medical services to meet the challenges of the disease in the best possible way.

There are very few organisations in Europe responsible for non-medical service provision for individuals with JNCL diagnosis because of the low incidence. Non-medical knowledge of the target group's needs and best practice is scattered and hidden for others, and written documentation hardly exists.

Target groups:

1. Children and young people with JNCL diagnosis and their families
2. Children and young people with other dementia diseases and their families (parts of the project may be relevant for these groups)
3. Professionals within non-medical service provision
4. Relevant higher education institutions

Objectives:

1. Compose a non-medical textbook of JNCL that focuses on the possibilities and importance of formal, non-formal and informal learning in a lifelong perspective and quality of life issues. To be used as a basic foundation of knowledge and improved evidence-based non-medical services for the target groups
2. Develop educational tools based on the textbook to optimise learning conditions and make educational planning/implementation more effective and targeted.
3. Disseminate the project results to relevant stakeholders and through presentations at conferences, seminars and meetings

4. Make plans of action to ensure future sustainability in close cooperation with key organisations such as higher education, relevant service organisations, peer organisations etc.
5. Make plans of action to sustain networking and cooperation between relevant professionals and organisations

Project period and organisation model

Project period: 1. December 2014 to 31. November 2017.

Project participating organisations: Statped Heimdal and Norsk Spielmeier-Vogt Forening (Norway), WESC Foundation and the Batten Disease Family Association (England/UK), Bildungszentrum für Blinde und Sehbehinderte and NCL-Gruppe Deutschland (Germany), Onerva Mäki School and Suomen JNCL-perheiden tukiyhdistys ry (Finland) and Royal Blind School (Scotland). A Working/Steering committee has been appointed and there are resource groups available for the project composed by researchers on JNCL from various disciplines.

Activities and methodology

The project has 3 main phases: (1) Fact finding and developing new knowledge (2) Documentation/textbook and development of educational tools (3) Dissemination

The project will be organised in periods of 6 months in accordance with different working activities. The Working/Steering committee plan to have 2-day transnational meetings per year attached to these periods with the following agenda:

- Evaluate the last implemented period
- Compose a detailed plan of action including mid-term goals for the next period

The textbook and the educational tools will be translated into Finnish, German and Norwegian and will be available as PDF files. The textbook will be submitted to relevant institutions of higher education, relevant service providers and peer organisations in all participating countries at no cost.

Longer term benefits

The Working/Steering committee will assist higher education and relevant service providers in preparing curriculums and service portfolios based on the textbook.

Training of professionals in using the educational tools will be organised in all participating countries.

The Working/Steering committee will organise meetings/seminars in each participating country in order to promote project results. Each participating country will make plans of action in how to ensure the sustainability and further development of knowledge and service provision, and to ensure further collaboration between project participating organisations. The project results will be presented in different international/national conferences after 2017.

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TYFLO Research Group – Exploring the blind alleys. With Vision.

By Małgorzata Jedynek, Second Language Learning and Teaching Department

The interdisciplinary TYFLO Research Group was founded on one belief - that we as five passionate researchers can provide research to improve education of the visually impaired. We are dedicated to contributing to innovation and excellence in the education of the blind and partially sighted through cutting-edge research in the domains of applied linguistics, language teaching, psychology and special education.

The incentive for establishing the interdisciplinary TYFLO Research Group in March 2016 was a shortage of comprehensive quantitative-qualitative research in the field of visual impairment having practical implications for education of visually impaired learners. Analysing the available psychological or educational research in the field of visual impairment we observed that it does not provide a detailed profile of partially sighted or blind learners. Research based on quantitative methodology seemed to ignore individual differences whereas research based on qualitative methodology frequently offered data from anecdotal observations or personal impressions with no quantitative information to support conclusions. Furthermore, a substantial number of studies were carried out from a comparative, cross-sectional perspective.

The main aims of the interdisciplinary TYFLO Research Group are as follows:

1. conducting interdisciplinary research in the fields of language teaching, psychology and special pedagogy and
2. promoting foreign language learning among blind and partially sighted people through the organisation of various events.

As TYFLO Research Group's members, we aim to obtain funds in the form of grants for research project development, which will be of benefit to such domains as foreign language typhlology or typhlopsychology. Above all, we intend to employ the pragmatic approach to science i.e. to cut off from philosophical debates and focus on the practical implications that can be translated into specific regulatory solutions, facilitating visually impaired people's lives in such domains as education, work or entertainment. TYFLO Research Group focuses on the following research aspects:

1. verbal and nonverbal communication of blind learners at school and out-of-school context,
2. prototypes developed by blind people and prototype-related implications for publishers designing foreign language learning course books and resources,
3. motivating blind learners to foreign language learning through promoting movie audio-description and unlimited access to digital resources.

TYFLO Research Group also intends to be engaged in popular science activities aimed at promoting foreign language learning among visually impaired people (e.g. organising language contests).

Currently the members of the interdisciplinary group are the researchers and practitioners from Poland. They represent five institutions such as universities and schools for the visually impaired located in various regions in Poland. **Yet, we would like to invite other researchers to cooperate, particularly the ones involved in the field of visual impairment and having expertise in language learning, cognition, education policies and educational psychology.**

The Group's chairperson is Małgorzata Jedynek, PhD (applied linguist, specialist in typhlology working in Second and Foreign Language Department, Institute of English Studies at University of Wrocław) who authored the book 'Visually Impaired Learners and Selected Correlates of Their Foreign Language Achievements' published in 2015 by Wrocław University Publishing House. Other members of TYFLO Research Group are: Kornelia Czerwińska, PhD (psychologist, special education specialist working in Special Education Institute, Typhlology Section in Academy of Special Education in Warsaw), Beata Ingram, MA (teacher of German, Braille techniques teacher in Special School for Visually Impaired in Cracow), Agnieszka Piskorska, PhD (English linguistics specialist working for Applied Linguistics Section in the English Studies Institute of Warsaw University), Monika Szczech, MA (PhD

student at Birmingham University, teacher of English in Laski School for the Blind). TYFLO Research Group's adviser is Joanna Zdobylak, MA (former teacher of English in the School for Visually Impaired in Wroclaw).

On September the 10th the Group's first working meeting took place in the Institute of English Studies at the University of Wroclaw in Poland which is also a seat of TYFLO Research Group. The meeting agenda included such aspects as the current legal and policy context of special education in Poland, tailoring language education to the needs of visually impaired learners through the use of special didactic devices and material adaptation. The meeting also contributed to our presentations at the first scientific conference 'Typhlopedagogy – theory and practice' organised by Special Education Academy in Warsaw on October 14th.

How to teach literacy through braille to children - an online course

By **Steve McCall** and **Rory Cobb**

Background

In 2010 the Royal National Institute for Blind people RNIB commissioned a review of the literature into effective practice in the teaching of literacy through braille <http://www.rnib.org.uk/knowledge-and-research-hub/research-reports/education-research/lit-review-braille>. The subsequent report (McCall et al 2011) found that levels of support and expertise available to children who use braille in UK mainstream settings vary greatly. Many mainstream teachers lack confidence in applying their literacy teaching skills to the medium of braille and many qualified teachers of the visually impaired feel they lack sufficient training to support braille users in mainstream schools. RNIB subsequently received government funding to develop a certificated advanced online training course to support the teaching of braille literacy by QTVIs. The programme has been running twice a year for two years and responses to the course have been overwhelmingly positive. The next course will be commencing January 2017.

Course overview

- The course is open to Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired (QTVIs) or those in training to become QTVIs.

- Students are expected to be competent in the braille code before studying the course.
- Students will need regular access to at least one blind child or young person who is learning or using braille for the duration of the course.
- The course involves around 125 hours of study time over four months.
- Students study online using the Moodle Virtual Learning Environment .
- Assessment is undertaken by a mixture of techniques:
 - Collaborative online discussion activities
 - Contextual written tasks
 - Multiple choice tests of factual knowledge
- The course leads to an RNIB/VIEW certificate on successful completion.
- Cost and availability
- The cost of the course is around £750 (880 Euros). Applicants need a good command of English.

The course has the potential to take teachers from countries outside the United Kingdom if there is sufficient demand. For further details on joining the course or for advice about setting up a similar programme in your own country please contact Rory Cobb.

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Core units and their constituent modules

Students will take all the core units and two supplementary units. The units contain interactive instructional texts and supporting video materials including interviews with experienced teachers of children who use braille and sequences of teaching.

1. General overview

- Common methods/approaches to teaching reading through print (phonics, whole word, language etc.)
- Differences between tactile and visual reading

2. Pre-reading

- Developing pre reading , emergent literacy for pre-schoolers
- Working with parents (pre-school)
- Mechanics of reading for pre-readers

3. Early reading

- Early formal reading strategies (teaching letter shapes, letter character recognition etc.)
- Braille reading schemes for early readers
- Deciding on contracted and un-contracted braille in the early stages
- Mechanics of reading for early readers
- Working with parents (primary school)

4. Fluent reading

- Mechanics of reading for fluent readers
- Strategies for building reading fluency (speed, accuracy, comprehension)
- Braille reading schemes for fluent readers/individualised approaches/adapting sighted schemes

5. Other core material

- Record keeping/assessment of reading performance
- Principles of braille writing and spelling
- Assistive technology (eg braille notebooks) and sourcing braille equipment /resources
- Developing and defining the role of professionals in supporting braille users

Supplementary units and their constituent modules

Students choose two of the following:

A. Specialist braille codes

- Principles of braille maths (e.g. setting out calculations, laying out graphs etc.)
- Introducing specialist codes science, language, music

B. Late beginners

- Transferring from print to braille

C. Selecting literacy media

- Selecting appropriate literacy medium (print or braille or both)

D. Learners with additional needs

- Teaching braille to learners with additional needs

E. Working with braille users who have English as a Second or other Language (ESOL)

- Teaching braille to ESOL learners

Comments from students

- "Altogether I thought it was a great course, I have really enjoyed doing it and feel it has been very beneficial for my work and my confidence working with and promoting braille".
- "I have found this course to be both enjoyable and instructive. I liked the way it combined reading, discussion, portfolio and test and a complete absence of long essays!
- "I feel every QTVI teaching educationally blind children should complete the course as the reading materials, discussions and tasks were so relevant to teaching literacy through braille in inclusive mainstream schools. I think this it is one of the most beneficial VI courses I have ever done since the QTVI course."

Touch to learn, touch to communicate

By **Nathalie Lewi-Dumont**, Associate Professor INS HEA Grhapes

Within a series of conferences about "Sensory issues and disability" ("Olfaction, memory and learning" in 2009, and "Listening, acting, music and brain plasticity" in 2011), INS HEA (Institut national supérieur de formation et de recherche pour l'éducation des jeunes handicapés et les enseignements adaptés- National higher institute for training and research on special needs education- <http://www.inshea.fr>), organized an international conference on the sense of touch, in Paris, 17-19 March 2016. This event was organized in partnership with Universcience and took place at the Science Museum in Paris, a museum which aims to be fully accessible to people with disabilities. The symposium was organized in plenary and poster sessions, round tables and exhibitions. It aimed to:

- Identify current scientific knowledge about touch.
- Show how the use of touch, interacting with other senses and with language, may foster learning processes, autonomy and access to culture, particularly for people with disabilities or special needs, but also for non-disabled people.

- Allow participants to meet and exchange views so as to mutualize good practices and skills in this field

For those reasons, presentations did not only focus on people with visual impairments and on school matters. Around 390 people participated, from 18 countries besides France (Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States). They were researchers (psychology, education, linguistics, neuroscience, computer sciences...) students, teachers, educators, therapists, culture professionals, parents, people with and without disabilities. Papers accepted by the scientific committee were presented by researchers as well as practitioners.

The opening session started with a brilliant presentation by Vincent Hayward (Pierre and Marie Curie University, Paris) about the state of the art concerning touch, as well as presentations on sensory substitution. Other sessions showed how touch and haptics (touch in movement) may not only help students with visual impairments but also regular students or struggling learners, in inclusive settings. The role of touch in interpersonal communication was discussed, in particular communication between babies and mothers, or with children with multiple disabilities.

Oral and written presentations addressed the issue of communication for people with deafblindness: Riitta Lahtinen (Finland) and Russ Palmer (UK) made a strong impression on the audience when presenting the resources they developed to enhance the quality of communication.

Of course, in the country where Braille was invented, the questions of perceiving and learning Braille had to be addressed: Torø Graven (University of Oxford) lectured on Discrimination strategies for Braille and Mira Tzvetkova-Arsova (University of Sofia, Bulgaria) gave a presentation on the assessment of tactile discrimination skills of blind students of primary school age. A session was also dedicated to reading tactile pictures and raised line drawings: this round table lead to lively discussions.

The topic of the closing session was so appealing that most participants stayed until the end to learn about adapting museums, and access to art. Very promising experiences in Italy and France were shown.

A book is planned on the topic, with chapters written by most of the presenters. Soon some audio recordings and some PowerPoint presentations are downloadable from the INS HEA website:

<http://www.inshea.fr/en/content/jo05-colloque-international-toucher-pour-apprendre-toucher-pour-communiquer> then click on "consulter les interventions du colloque".

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Statped, Norway

Statped is a national state agency that offers special education services within the educational sector. The municipalities and county municipalities are obligated to meet children, young people and adults in an adequate manner according to their rights within an inclusive learning environment. Statped intends to contribute actively to achieving this objective. Statped's services are voluntary and offered as supplementary support.

Statped is divided into four regional sections and provide services within six different disciplines or fields:

- Acquired Brain Injury
- Complex Learning Disabilities
- Deaf-blindness / Dual Visual and Hearing Impairment
- Hearing Impairment
- Speech and Language Impairment
- Visual Impairment

We also have a department dedicated specifically to the development of learning resources and new educational technology. Statped has a total of 748 FTEs (full time equivalents).

Read Statped's Annual Report for 2015: <http://www.statped.no/om-statped/statpeds-arsrapport/statpeds-arsrapport-2015/statpeds-arsrapport-2015/>

Learning resources and technology

Statped intends to be a driving force behind the development of learning resources and technology within the field of special needs education. We produce special learning aids, teaching materials and media for adapted education such as audio books, books in braille and other tactile teaching

materials. During the school year 2014 /2015, Statped has produced approximately 80 textbooks in braille, audio books, or e-books intended for braille display. In addition, Statped has delivered approximately 300 different adapted textbooks in braille or as e-books (reproductions). To make adapted books in braille easily accessible to the schools, Statped has this year developed a searchable overview and a simpler booking system on statped.no.

Research and Development work (R&D)

Statped works strategically to develop new knowledge based on research and practical experience. Our agency has developed its own R&D strategy for this kind of work. To coordinate, promote and unify Statped's research in the field of special education, a section for R&D was established in 2015. Statped's research is in collaboration with universities, health care institutions and others.

In 2015, Gro Elisabeth Aasen defended her doctoral dissertation for the degree of Ph.d. (Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Oslo): Language and activity among children and adolescents with congenital blindness. An observation-based study. This thesis is written within the field of special needs education regarding children and adolescents with congenital blindness and varying degrees of additional difficulties such as autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Focusing particularly on echolalia, the thesis is concerned with how unconventional utterances expressed by children and adolescents with congenital blindness and ASD can be understood, and the effect augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) – using tactile symbols and schedules – can have for children with blindness in a heterogeneous sample.

A new course model

Statped has developed a new model for courses for pupils with visual impairments in primary, secondary and comprehensive school, grade 1 – 13. The main purpose is to ensure equal access in all of the four regions, which is a change from how the situation is today. Especially for partially sighted the possibility to attend courses varies depending on where in the country the pupils live.

The model is a so-called triple model, which means that both pupils, parents and teachers participate. Braille users get the opportunity to attend one course a year, which is the same as today, while partially sighted may attend four courses during their school carrier. The courses last for four days and are free.

Central topics in the courses will be Reading and writing in braille, and Reading and writing with optical devices. We will also offer courses with special themes

such as Braille and mathematics, Arts and crafts, Physical education and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

The essential new in this model is the committing cooperation between Statped's regions to ensure equal services. We also emphasise that it has to be a clear connection between the pupils' curriculum or individual plans at the local school, and the content of the courses.

Publications

Commands for the screen reader VoiceOver for iOS:

<http://www.statped.no/fagomrader-og-laringsressurser/finn-laringsressurs/syn/Kommandoer-i-VoiceOver-for-IOS/>

Learn how to read braille:

<http://www.statped.no/fagomrader-og-laringsressurser/finn-laringsressurs/syn/lar-a-lese-punktskrift2/>

ABC in braille: <http://www.statped.no/fagomrader-og-laringsressurser/finn-laringsressurs/syn/abc-med-punktskrift--leseopplegg-i-punktskrift-for-begynnere/>

See also learning resources at statped.no:

<http://www.statped.no/fagomrader-og-laringsressurser/finn-laringsressurs/>

Parent training

During 2016, we will continue the project "Parent training". The aim is to develop, strengthen and coordinate the parent training in Statped. The training program is initiated with an aim to take care of parent's needs so that they can take part in their children's education more actively. Parent training will be offered to all of Statped's target groups in all regions.

Networks in Statped

In 2015, internal professional networks were established in all our areas of specialization. The purpose is to coordinate, build and develop competence within and between regions and professional disciplines. Four networks in the field of visual impairment were established last year. These networks are Network for braille, Network for mobility and orientation, Network for ICT and Network for evaluation and assessments of visual functions.

Haptices, touch messages, sharing enviromental information

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What are haptices?

Haptices are touch messages produced onto the body allowing people to experience emotions, facial expressions, social quick messages and confirmation elements. Environmental, visual and auditory information can be experienced and drawn onto a person's body.

Visually impaired people's perception of space is based on auditory and haptic information and may differ from those who are sighted. To enable the experience of environmental forms and social behaviour, can be described as environmental description using haptices. (Lahtinen, Palmer & Lahtinen, 2010). The portrayal of visual and auditory images through haptices originates from social-haptic communication using verbal or signing interaction between two people (Lahtinen, 2008).

This approach consists of either drawing or mapping out the core elements of the particular space onto a person's arm or back of hand(s). The presentation will enable the participants to experience how shapes, space and non-verbal expressions can be applied and interpreted through touch. This allows the visually impaired person to gain a unique insight and to map out a mental image of the environment (Lahtinen, Palmer & Ojala, 2012). These approaches can be used with different client groups including sensory impaired, learning disabilities, elderly and terminally ill people.

Keywords

Environmental description - Haptic - Haptice - Sensory impaired - Social-haptic communication - Touch.

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Joint Meeting for ICEVI –Europe Nordic and Baltic Country Representatives and NOVIR – Nordic Visual Impairment Network in Finland September 2016

By Tarja Hännikäinen

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The Chair for ICEVI-Europe Nordic and Baltic Subregion
The Member of European Committee of ICEVI
The Contact Person for NOVIR in Finland

Valteri – Onerva, Center for Learning and Consulting, had the privilege to host the ICEVI - Europe meeting for subregion Baltic and Nordic countries during 22. – 23.9.2016 at Jyväskylä, Central - Finland. This meeting gathered together the national contact persons from Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Estonia, Latvia and Finland. During the first day participants presented and discussed the situation in each country concerning the support in education and rehabilitation services for persons with visual impairment. Among the other issues, the tasks of the national representatives were highlighted. The second day was, for the first time, a joint collegial day with the NOVIR - Nordic Visual Impairment Network – representatives. Participants for NOVIR - meeting came from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland. The key idea was to utilise this rare possibility to combine these two meetings and share thoughts.

The topics of discussion were about models for supporting inclusive education in each country and the challenges in this work. Also we shared information about the ongoing projects, research and the upcoming events and seminars for the next two years. One key concern was 'How to support and maintain

professional development in the field of visual impairment?' All participants expressed their concern about training in visual impairment at all possible levels. It is very common – especially in Nordic countries – that centers are merging with bigger units and the new staff has no opportunity to be officially trained. In many cases the training happens using the 'house - practices'. Some countries still have their own training at university level. It was also admitted, that we should enable and encourage our colleagues to cooperate across the organisational and geographical borders, in order to maintain the special skills in education and rehabilitation in visual impairment. More information can be found by contacting the ICEVI- Europe country representatives and later e.g. via <http://novir.net/> - pages.

Report from the 36th VBS Congress in Graz (01. - 05.08.2016) Perspectives in Dialogue

By Mr. Patrick Temmesfeld & Dr. Elke Wagner

Summary in key words:

- Host: Odilieninstitut Graz
- Cooperation with the University of Graz and ICEVI-Europe
- Over 600 international participants
- Large variety in keynotes, lectures, workshops and exhibits, impressive venue (university campus), friendly, competent hosts, great atmosphere and lots of input

There were many representatives of universities, politics and regional administration, and none other than Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, was the patron of the conference.

The personal patronage of Verena Bentele, commissioner of the federal government of the Federal Republic of Germany for the interests of disabled people and Dr. Erwin Buchinger, attorney for equality of treatment for people with disabilities of the Republic of Austria, testified to the innovation of the topics and focus of the VBS Congress.

"This congress stands for continuity and innovation," emphasized the previous (and later re-elected) Chairman of the VBS Dieter Feser.

It is novel that the ICEVI- Europe (International Council for Education and Rehabilitation of People with Visual Impairment) participated as a European co-

operation partner at the congress - the President Betty Leotsakou was present as a representative and gave an impressive welcome speech.

The issue of the participation of people with blindness and visual impairment is not new, but the very broad international perspective on the relationship between medicine and pedagogy and the discussion of different therapeutic approaches extended the horizon of the topics and therefore the input and knowledge for the participants.

The 36th VBS Congress is thus not only the largest congress in the German-speaking countries, it is also the largest Europe-wide.

From the congress, new signals and messages were sent, new processes were started and new paths were taken.

The organizers have impressively succeeded in offering professionalism in the broadest possible form, while at the same time not forgetting the interaction and the personal exchange. The festival "La Strada", which took place in Graz at the same time, brought a welcome change after lectures, workshops, exhibits and keynotes.

The congress and program committees had decided to name a specific thematic area each day, which was amplified mainly by means of keynotes, lectures, workshops, and exhibits.

Topics were defined as: Inclusive regions, professionalization, law and public policy, life phases, medicine, media, inclusive models.

Through the cooperation with the ICEVI-Europe this time, English-spoken presentations as well as the German language keynotes were interpreted simultaneously.

Therefore a thoroughly successful congress filled with knowledge innovation and expertise, which has bundled and focused the current issues in the field of special education for people who are blind and visually impaired that has been able to bring all other parties involved into the dialogue: "Perspectives in Dialogue".

At the end of the 36th VBS congress, Peter Haberer, director of the Odilieninstitut Graz passed the baton to Claus Duncker, director of the Blindenstudienanstalt Marburg, where the 37th VBS congress will be held.

We hope you all return!