

ICEVI European Newsletter

ISSN Number 2666-1527

Issue 71, Volume 25, Number 3, Dec 2019

Coordinated by Andrea Hathazi ahathazi@yahoo.com
Edited by Stephen McCall s.mccall@bham.ac.uk and
 Martha Gyftakos mgyftakos@yahoo.com
Designed by Istvan Mozes webmaster@icevi-europe.org

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The President's Message, by Hans Welling, ICEVI-Europe President

Dear Members and Non-Members,

The end of the year is now rapidly approaching and it's traditionally a time for looking back. Of course this is something we always do in our annual report, but still, this presents a great opportunity to reflect on the progress we have made, especially in relation to our action plan and our strategic goals.

In the past few weeks I have had the honour and pleasure of participating in some important conferences: the 7th Africa Forum on Visual Impairment 2019 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, our 7th ICEVI Balkan Conference in Sofia, Bulgaria and the 11th General Assembly of the European Blind Union, EBU in Rome, Italy. All of these were special events with many points of interest.

A common theme throughout these conferences was how best we can work to realise quality in the education and the rehabilitation of people with a visual impairment. A lot of attention was given to innovations designed to develop inclusion and to promote an inclusive society, 'leaving no one behind' in the words of the theme of the General Assembly of the European Blind Union <http://www.euroblind.org/>.

Personally, I was very impressed by the Strategic Orientation 2020-2023 of the EBU, which outlines their future direction, priorities and objectives. EBU's Priority 1 is "Empowering blind and partially persons." Ten concrete targets are linked to this priority, relating to the importance of Braille, opportunities for fulfilling employment, equal access to technology, participation in public life, freedom from discrimination, access to inclusively designed goods and services, and improved mobility support.

Each of EBU's objectives are based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Sustainable Developments Goals. What appeals to me particularly is that all of these objectives align so closely with the objectives of

ICEVI-Europe. An obvious next step is therefore to investigate the extent to which the cooperation between EBU and ICEVI-Europe can be intensified. For example, a very practical way forward would be to establish joint Professional Interest Groups under the motto "Cooperation creates new possibilities." It is very important that the parents of children with a visual impairment should also be key partners in these developments, taking an active role with us in the process of realizing an inclusive society. In the coming years, I'm sure we will be able to show what we can collectively achieve.

At this, the end of the year, on behalf of the Board of ICEVI-Europe I would also like to thank everyone who has worked to share professional knowledge and skills and has contributed to international cooperation within Europe.

I would also like to thank the members of the Board for their commitment and efforts. Due to their continued dedication, generous contributions and productive efforts, we have realised many of the goals outlined in our Plan of Action: 2017-2021.

In the meantime we are working diligently in cooperation with the Israeli Host Committee to prepare our milestone 10th ICEVI-Europe Conference that will be held on August 8-12, 2021 in Jerusalem. You can find further information in the Save the Date notice found in this issue of the Newsletter. We encourage you to refer back to our website, www.icevi-europe.org from time to time, in order to familiarise yourselves with new conference information, updates and developments as they become available.

I wish everyone a festive holiday and a Happy New Year with a fruitful year in prospect.

On behalf of the Board of ICEVI-Europe,

Hans Welling
President ICEVI-Europe



Changes to ICEVI-Europe Membership, by Steve McCall

The contributions received from our membership are crucial to the work of ICEVI-Europe. We are grateful for the continued loyal support of organizational and individual members.

The terms and conditions of membership have remained largely unchanged for a number of years and in 2019 the board of ICEVI-Europe set up a working party to review membership to review and streamline terms and conditions of membership.

The working party's recommendations were carefully analyzed by the ICEVI-Europe Board and the following key actions were approved:

1. Update the ICEVI-Europe website to clarify the benefits of membership
2. In the light of increasing administrative costs, revise annual individual membership fees as follows:

Individual Membership from the Balkans and Eastern Europe will be set at 15 Euros a year (up from 10 Euros a year)

Individual Membership from the rest of Europe will be set at 30 Euros a year (up from 25 Euros a year)

(increases will be effective for new individual members and renewing individual members from January 2020)

3. Extend the membership fees offered to individual members from the Balkan and Eastern Europe Countries to individual members from Central Europe Countries. Individual Membership from Central Europe Countries will be set at 15 Euro a year.
4. Retain current membership rates for member organizations (no increase).
5. Extend eligibility for the supported places fund for ICEVI-Europe European Conferences to individual members from Central Europe.
6. Recognize the role of National Representatives by waiving their annual membership contribution.
7. Clarify the process of fee reductions to employees of membership organizations attending the ICEVI-Europe quadrennial European Conference who are not individual members of ICEVI-Europe.

The ICEVI-Europe conditions of membership will be revised to reflect these changes and website will be updated to reflect these changes and to provide additional detail on their implementation.

Steve McCall Chair of membership working party.

Save the Date: 10th ICEVI-Europe Conference "Access to Learning and Learning to Access"

On behalf of the Board of ICEVI-Europe & ALEH Society

We are pleased to announce

SAVE THE DATE

The 10th Conference of ICEVI - Europe

August 8th -12th, 2021

(August 13th- 14th Optional days for excursions)

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, ISRAEL

The Conference Theme

Access to Learning and Learning to Access

The aim of the Conference is to present and share up-to-date pedagogical, technological and social venues to enhance education, rehabilitation and social inclusion of people with Visual Impairments, by modifying environment and improving technology.

Target Audience

Professionals, educational staff and academics from universities, colleges, primary and secondary schools with a specialization in inclusion or special education, representatives of associations and organizations in the field of visual impairment, inclusion and care, parents of students of elementary, secondary higher and vocational education from Europe and other continents, non-governmental organizations, manufacturers and distributors of technologies and equipment for visually challenged people, policymakers and government officials, individuals with visual impairment and people who have special interests in visual impairment issues.

Leading professionals will deliver key notes; renowned professionals will offer presentations, experts will provide workshops and individuals will present posters.

In addition we shall discuss best practice in the areas of

- ◆ Segregation versus inclusion
- ◆ Chasing support technologies for independent learning, mobility and daily living
- ◆ The challenge of employment and regulations - are they impeding or supporting employment
- ◆ Age related sensory changes and related impairments

The ALEH Society was established in 1990. Our goal is to aid and advance higher education for the blind in Israel and promote social mobility. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, founded in 1918 and opened officially in 1925, is Israel's premier university as well as its leading research institution. ICEVI-Europe is an association

of professionals and Professional organisations that promotes equal access to appropriate education and rehabilitation of people with visual impairment so that they may achieve their desire to actively participate as full members of society.

For more information about ICEVI-Europe please visit www.icevi-europe.org

On behalf of the IHost Committee,

Tomer Rosner

100th Anniversary of IRIS Center, by Jera Svetek, Mag. Nina Celesnik Kozamernik and Dr. Mateja Maljevac

By:

Jera Svetek, Mag. Nina Celesnik Kozamernik and Dr. Mateja Maljevac,

IRIS Center – Center for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted,

Langusova Street 8,

Ljubljana, Slovenija



In Slovenia, organised education for the blind emerged at the end of the First World War. The founding date of the Institute for the Blind was 13th September 1919, when the provincial government appointed the first members of its curatorium. In the 100 years since its establishment, the Institute has changed its name and location several times. The Institute was first located in Ljubljana, then in 1922 it was moved to Kočevje, where in 1929 it was retitled as the 'Institution for Blind Children'. It was later again relocated to Ljubljana in 1944. In 1945, the Ministry of Education eventually located it at the Institute de Notre Dame in Mirje, where it remains today. Shortly after World War II, the institution was renamed again as 'The Institute for Blind Youth'

In 1965, a new school building was built to accommodate more children. At that point the Institute had started to accept students with more sight and the institution was given the title of 'The Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted.' In 2004, the Institute was joined up with the secondary school of the Center for the Blind and Partially Sighted in Skofja Loka. Finally, in 2016, the Institute took its present name, 'Centre IRIS' – the Center for the Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling of the Blind and Partially Sighted.

Throughout 2019 we have been celebrating the 100th anniversary of the School for the Blind and Partially Sighted in Slovenia. Since the anniversary is a venerable and significant one, we have put on many different dedicated activities, some of which which are presented below.

Special issue of the school newspaper "Naša misel" (Our Thought)

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary we selected some interesting articles from the school newspaper "Naša misel" ("Our Thought") from its very beginning to 2018. The newspaper was published in standard print (127 pages), in enlarged print (199 pages) and in braille. The issue also won a special prize for school newspapers!

Collaboration with the radio show "Luč v temi" (The Light in the Darkness)

A Centre IRIS student, Mihaela Rojht, reported on the 100th anniversary of the School for the Blind and Partially Sighted, on Radio Ognjišče in the radio show "Luč v temi" (The Light in the Darkness).



Remembrance of 22nd November, 1918

On 22nd November we commemorated the year 1918, when a nun, Klara Franica Vrhunc, took charge when the first group of twenty Slovenian soldiers, blinded on the battlefields of the First World War, was brought from Graz to Ljubljana.

In Ljubljana, Sister Klara set up a classroom and a workshop for teaching writing and reading in Braille, typing on a typewriter, playing the zither, and a workshop for knitting and brush making.

Franica Vrhunc (monastic name Sister Klara) is considered to be the first Slovenian teacher of the blind.



Tactile book Exhibitions

Our colleague Nina Schmidt organized 8 Tactilebook exhibitions at various locations in Slovenia:

- the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport,
- the Ig Library,
- the Prežihov Voranc Library in Ljubljana,
- Info 65+ in Ljubljana,
- the Škofljica Library,

- the gallery of the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana,
- the Murska Sobota Library,
- the Rudolf Maister Kamnik High School and Primary School.

The Chess Tournament (6th October, 2018)



8 chess players competed in the Centre IRIS tournament to mark the 100th anniversary of the education of the blind and partially sighted in Slovenia. Sighted players played chess with their eyes covered. It was enjoyable, fun and competitive!

OPEYE The Final Meeting (22nd and 23rd November, 2018)



In our jubilee year we also hosted the partners of the international project Opeye (Open and portable software library for rapid eye tracking). This was the last working meeting of a two-year project (2017–2018) under the European Erasmus + KA2 scheme. We were exploring the link between visual impairment and eye tracking technology and developing a software library for further application solutions. The promoter of the project was Institut pour Déficients Visuels from Luxembourg. Participants of the project

were Institut pour Déficients visuels, Legal del Filo d'Oro Onlus, ASPAYM Castilla y Leon Foundation, Polytechnika Waszawska, and the IRIS Center.

Dinner in the dark

In the jubilee year we have served about 200 dinners in the dark. The project "Blind Waiter" started six years ago at the initiative of Maja Murenc, a member of the Lions Club. When Maja was in Israel, she had visited a restaurant offering local gourmet specialties in Tel-Aviv where blind waiters serve the meals. When she returned to Slovenia, she contacted us and the idea came to life with the great help of teachers at the Centre IRIS, Damijana Dušak.

Workshop for all



On Saturday, 11th May, 2019, we organized a workshop for blind and visually impaired children and adolescents and their parents. Children from kindergarten to the end of elementary school took part and helped create the sign '100' to decorate our Plečnik`s Hall.

The March of 100 blind and partially sighted in Ljubljana (15th May, 2019)



A total of 158 blind and partially sighted people hiked! Nothing stops us, not least the rain! We started with a music program (Duo SIMI, Mia Koritnik, Benjamin Škrab and the IRIS Center Choir), a "Donate Your Braille Book" campaign, product stands, school newspaper, orientation training, a delicious snack and at 5 pm headed to the center of Ljubljana city. The Mayor of the City of Ljubljana, Mr. Zoran Janković, greeted us at the City Hall. We decided that this was the first hike of many to follow.

A Conference with International Participation for experts

On 16th and 17th May, 2019, we organized a Conference called Holistic Approach, Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion of people with Visual Impairment. There were 86 people at the conference and 49 different papers were presented. For this occasion we also published a book of the same name, edited by mag. Nina Čelešnik Kozamernik, which covers 502 pages.



MDVI Euronet, a two-day meeting with experts from different European countries (29th and 30th May, 2019)

The IRIS Center hosted an annual meeting of representatives of different institutions involved in the MDVI Euronet Professional Association. The purpose of the association is to exchange knowledge and good practice between participating institutions and ideas for new projects are often born here. In the past, successful projects coming out of these meetings include: OPTIC, STEP UP, EDUCARE, SMILE! And Slovenia was an important partner in all of them.



International sports games for blind and partially sighted youth (31st May to 3rd June, 2019)

We also organized International Sports and Games (5 sports, 5 countries, 7 different teams, 20 sports disciplines, more than 50 athletes and more than 70 participants) about which an article has already appeared in the September issue of the ICEVI Newsletter.

Exhibition "One Hundred Years of the School for the Blind and Partially Sighted in Slovenia (11th September to 5th October, 2019)

We opened this exhibition in the Historical Atrium of the City Hall in Ljubljana. The authors of the exhibition were Dušan Škafar, Nastja Strnad, Nina Schmidt, Jera Svetek. The exhibition took visitors through photographic and video material covering the centuries-old history of the only educational institution for the blind and partially sighted in Slovenia. In addition, there were exhibits of tactile books, books for practising the type perception of people with visual impairment, as well as artworks made by the students of the IRIS Center under the mentorship of Nina Schmidt and Jera Svetek. The cultural program at the inauguration was provided by the choir of pupils of the IRIS Center under the mentorship of teacher Neva Laščak, and the exhibition was opened by the



Mayor of the City of Ljubljana Mr. Zoran Janković and the director of the IRIS Center, Mrs. Katjuša Koprivnikar.

100th Anniversary Academy Ceremony, 19th September, 2019, The Slovenian Philharmonic Hall in Ljubljana

This event was attended by 391 people, including former and current students, teachers and staff of the IRIS Center with their families and friends and supporters of the blind and visually impaired. The event was held under the honorary patronage of the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Mr. Borut Pahor.

The cultural program consisted of music and singing performances and skits featuring the IRIS Center Choir led by teacher Neva Laščak, Mja Koritnik, Sebastjan Kamenik, Aleš Hadalin, Mila Vučko, Ricardo Janjoš, Benjamin Škrab, Klara Podobnik, Karin Grom, Zoran Škrinjar, Metka Pavšič and Zdravko Zupančič.

We were welcomed by Ms. Martina Vuk Godina, State Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, Ombudsman, Mr. Peter Svetina, retired director of the IRIS Center, Mr. Stane Florjančič and director of the IRIS Center, Mrs. Katjuša Koprivnikar.



Slovenian School Museum – An Exhibition for the 100th Anniversary of the School for the Blind and Partially sighted

The last major event of the year will be the opening of an exhibition about the school for blind and partially sighted in the Slovenian School Museum on 21st November, 2019.

Instead of the end

Roman Brvar, a longtime teacher of the blind and visually impaired youth, professor of history and geography, once said: "When we give our children the opportunity, an endless space of 'Why(s)?' is created, to the satisfaction of the teacher and the child." And our answer is: "Because we want knowledge, progress and a better future for all."

About our success, only future generations will tell ...

Challenges in Teaching Physical Education for Children with Visual Impairments, by Anja Pečaver

By Anja Pečaver, Physical Education Teacher, IRIS Centre, Slovenia

Teaching physical education to children who are blind and children with low vision is one of the most complex challenges in inclusion and requires thorough planning, implementation and evaluation of the educational process.

It is of great importance that physical education teachers are aware of the key role that visual information plays in learning. Various authors (Barraga and Erin, 1992; Ferrell, 2011; Ferrel, Shaw and Deitz, 1998; Norris, Spaulding, and Brodie, 1957; Ferrell, 2000; in Škrlec, 2016) state that:

- Sight stimulates movement (seeing objects motivates the child to move, and thus promotes a desire to explore and learn about the environment);
- Vision enables continuous contact with the environment;
- Vision allows the instant assessment of space (spatial awareness and judgement);
- Vision stimulates coordination and control (both by observing someone else's movement and coordinating one's own movement);
- Eyesight provides feedback (an individual learns how much and what kind of movement it takes to reach an object);
- Sight allows us to repeat movements observed through demonstration;
- Sight gives insight into whole processes;
- Vision represents a model for motor skills and provides feedback on their results (observing the movement of another individual with vision and the results of those movements);
- Vision promotes understanding of the body schema, promoting cognitive and concept development;
- Vision provides constant, coordinated and verifiable information;

- Vision is a distance sense over which we have control;
- Vision provides an initiative for communication (encouraging active involvement in the environment and in activities).

Many people with visual impairment face limitations due to vision loss. Lowenfeld (1981; in Ferrell, 2000) states that blindness and visual impairment have three main consequences:

- Limitations in the scope and diversity of experience - due to reduced visual information people with VI rely more on other senses, mostly hearing and touch, to gain information about the world. Looking at the field of movement, people who are blind and visually impaired may have reduced opportunities for physical movement or limited access to sports activities.
- Restrictions in Movement - it is clearly of the utmost importance that individuals with blindness and visual impairment receive orientation and mobility training, through which they can acquire the knowledge and skills that will enable them to explore the environment more independently. We need to make sure that this training is available from an early age.to ensure full motor development
- Limitations in controlling the environment and themselves in relation to it - difficulties arise in obtaining information about the spatial environment and about the persons and objects in that environment. Students need opportunities to get to know the layout of the gym, outdoor sports areas, and to explore the various sports equipment and tools before they use them so that they can be as independent as possible in these movements.

In my experience, blind and visually impaired students face the biggest problems with tasks designed to develop balance, precision, coordination and speed, with complex movements (passing, running) and with basic activities involving sports equipment (bouncing balls, skipping rope etc.).

It is very important that students and adolescents with blindness and visual impairment have regular exposure to activities designed to promote motor

development. This will ensure they become more confident and this makes the path to achieving set learning goals much easier.

ADJUSTMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ORGANISATION AND PERFORMANCE OF THE PEDAGOGICAL PROCESSES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Space: It is vital that sports equipment and aids in the gym are always kept in the same place (order is important for safety, and also it helps students to become more independent as they know exactly where a device is located). It is helpful to have the edges of the gym clearly marked with lines and the walls partially painted with a contrasting colour. You should ensure that any barriers are clearly marked and safely padded where necessary. Sports equipment should be highlighted with tactile markings and contrasting adhesive tape.

Aids: The equipment used in sports instruction should be as visible and audible as possible. For example, cones should have vibrant contrasting colors, balls should be bright and easy to hear when they move or roll. (Be aware that certain colours may not suit some individuals).

Time: Visually impaired students need more time to learn and explore, which must be taken into account when planning activities (allow up to 100% extended time).

Communication: Always say the student's name before you start talking to them. You should speak naturally, and communicate as descriptively, accurately and unambiguously as possible. Avoid vague instructions eg the words *here* and *there* should be replaced by 'to the left', 'to the right', 'below the knees', 'above the head' etc). Do not move or change your position when speaking, you should stand as close to the students as possible for them to hear your instructions. It's fine to use word like 'look' or 'see' when giving instructions to students.

Methods: A range of methods can be used - adapted to the student's degree of visual impairment.

TEACHING METHODS

My educational process is a combination of various teaching methods, designed to promote more effective learning. Authors (eg Allman et al., 2014; Downing and Chen, 2003; Lieberman et al., 2013; O'Connell et al., 2006; in Škrlec 2016) suggest a range of approaches including: verbal instruction, physical guidance and tactile modeling and step-by-step teaching. I also use observation and demonstration, and learning by imitation with some visually impaired students, and in addition to the above-mentioned methods I use these techniques:

1. Verbal instruction method:

This is useful for the simpler movement tasks or for consolidating knowledge that the student has already acquired.

- concrete, precise and clear instructions,
- shortened instructions can also be useful (for example, "starting position" for a specific element or for a specific goal that has already been mastered.

2. Physical guidance method:

This method is useful for more complex movement tasks, especially when students are acquiring new motor skills and should only be applied with the prior agreement of the student.

This method can give the individual the feeling, rhythm and the form of a movement (I often stand behind the student and guide him/her with a physical prompt eg the hand on hand and hand over hand technique). It can also be helpful for putting the individual in the correct position to perform a movement.



3. Tactile modeling method:

This is useful for more complex movement tasks and for the acquisition of new motor skills (again, only use it with prior agreement from the student).

Students can independently, and actively follow the teacher's demonstration (static pose or moving action), and can determine what he or she will first address (the position of the legs, upper torso etc.).



4. Step-by-step learning method:

This is useful in individual teaching when it's clear that a student is facing difficulties in performing a particular movement. It allows you to break down the movement task into smaller parts or sequences, and then when each part is mastered to connect them to the whole movement.

WHAT SHOULD THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER PAY ATTENTION TO IN TEACHING THE BLIND AND THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED?

- they should be familiar with the basic characteristics of students who are blind and partially sighted;
- they should know the capabilities of each individual, in relation to their motor skills as well as other areas of development;
- they should understand the cause and implications of the individual's visual impairment
- they should be familiar with any other special needs the student may have (eg possible ophthalmic consequences of impacts to the head and awareness of additional health conditions such as epilepsy);
- they should determine the adaptations that the student needs (what aids does students normally use? eg glasses, white cane, Braille machine, magnifying glass etc), and what medium they use (Braille or print);
- they should make appropriate adjustments in the implementation of the programme of physical education (content and teaching method) taking account of the individual needs of their students;
- they should set targets, make adjustments and tailor a method of evaluation in an individualized programme.

But most importantly, the teacher should gain their student's confidence. This is the only way a teacher can influence the student and help them gain the experiences

and confidence that will help them throughout their life, and make them feel included.

SOURCES:

Ferrell, K. A. (2000). The Growth and Development of Young Children. In A. J. Koenig & M. C. Holbrook (Eds.), *Foundations of Educations (2nd Ed.)*. Volume I. *History and Theory of Teaching Children and Youths with Visual Impairments* (pp. 111 - 134). New York: AFB Press.

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Škrlec, E. (2016). Involvement of Students with Blindness and Visual Impairment in Sports Activities. Master's thesis, Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education.

Sensory Stories- Stories through the Senses, by Nives Čačko Jerković and Ružica Zurak

Listening to stories is a natural way for children to learn and stories help enrich their experience of the world around them. Sensory stories can form an essential part of learning and development for children with multiple difficulties. Stories that are delivered through a multi-sensory approach can help these children to reach their full potential, helping them to focus better in the classroom by 'increasing interactions with peers, and improving overall daily functioning' (Downing, Aldrich and Shelly 2006)

Sensory stories are performed in Mali Dom as a group activity with children with vision impairment and blindness who have multiple difficulties. The activity described in this article is based on the theme of the four seasons. Educational content is presented through five sensory modalities - tactile, olfactory, visual, auditory, and proprioceptive stimuli that follow the key concepts in the story. The activity always begins and ends with a specific musical reference to the time of year. Storytelling that draws on multisensory stimuli allows children with learning

difficulties to participate meaningfully in the story-telling experience, leading to a better understanding of content and promoting the skills of listening and responding through active participation..

Sensory stories are a great medium of learning for children with multiple disabilities and visual impairments because of their flexibility and the opportunities they offer for children to absorb information through a range of different sensory modalities. Sensory stories can support turn taking, interactions with group members, and the learning of new vocabulary. They can also support memory development, and the acquisition of new concepts by allowing children to retell stories using a variety of materials related to the story line. Each individual child needs time to explore these sense stimulating materials and this helps them learn to wait for their turn in the group. At the centre of every sensory story is the child, and the delivery of the story has to be tailored to each child's needs, level of functioning, and way of learning and receiving information.

Sensory stories

A sensory story is a short story told through combination of spoken language and sensory experience. A good sensory story will allow for each key sentence to be paired with meaningful and relevant stimuli. Depending on the content of the story, creators should use as many kinds of sensory stimuli as possible (visual, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, auditory, proprioceptive and vestibular). Not every child will experience or accept every type of stimulus equally, but offering a wide range of different sensory experiences will help maximise the potential for group participation. Sensory stories are mostly used for children with profound and multiple disabilities, but they can also be used with other children, whatever their needs may be and so offer real possibilities for inclusive learning.

'Sensory stimulation is vital for the development and maintenance of the brain – and this is true for all ages. Sensory learning can enable you to engage students with a wide range of different needs, providing meaningful experiences to those learning in a purely sensory way, as well as relevant stimuli to those who are able to learn in more abstract ways.' (Strick, Grace, Evans, 2019, page 2)

Sensory stories can help overcome the difficulty that many children with disabilities encounter in understanding abstract literary situations and figurative meanings by providing opportunities to experience the story through concrete experiences that draw upon all their senses. Children are given enough time to absorb and react, to information, they are encouraged by group interaction and can participate in the creation of the story to the best of their individual abilities and interests. Some of the learning goals for children with profound and multiple disabilities involved in learning through sensory stories might include:

- Expressing preferences (likes/dislikes expressed through their reactions to the stimuli)
- Rejecting items in a socially acceptable manner

- Increasing joint attention
- Learning to use augmentative and alternative communication devices (eg switches programmed with sound)
- Retelling stories (for students who have some verbal or sign language skills)
- Increasing tolerance of non-preferred stimuli
- Enrichment of cognitive development
- Initiating communication, responding and requesting

Sensory story –MR. Branch

"We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories." — Jonathan Gottschall

This sensory story is a story created for children with profound and multiple disabilities. It is a story based on the travel of Mr. Branch through four seasons. In every season, this main character is experiencing different emotions and changes. Every season brings a new story, and each story is presented to a group of children over approximately two months. We identify in advance a few main concepts and emotions that we would like the children to learn and experience in the course of that season.

Mr. Branch - Autumn

We introduce each session with a 3D symbol that represents the activity. This 3D symbol has attractive tactile and visual qualities. At the end of activity we replace the symbol in red plastic basket to signify that that the activity is over.



Picture 1. *3D symbol* Picture 2. *At the end of activity* Picture 3. *The sun is hidden behind rain clouds*



The story is adapted for each child in the group, so that it aligns with their primary learning medium.. For example, the learning materials may presented with large color contrasts, or simply contrasted against a a black surface.

Picture 4. – *Resonating box*

After setting the ambience in the room and giving children time to adapt to the learning environment, we begin the activity. In the Autumn activity, the sensory story is always introduced with the same musical accompaniment - Antonio Vivaldi: The Four Seasons. The music is played through a speaker that is placed in a resonating box; this is important for children with hearing impairments, so that they can feel the vibrations.

After the music has finished, we reading the story line by line to each child. The lines of a story are always read out in the same tone, emphasizing the key words. For example, if the line is about rain, we may illustrate it with gentle drops of water on the hands or face. After the illustration we always observe and reflect on the reaction of the child. For children with both hearing and visual disabilities, the key word may be replaced with an appropriate sign or symbolic gesture.



Picture 5. – *'Rain is falling'*

'Try to use the same emphasis, and deliver the stimuli, in the same way, each time you tell the story. This can be especially important for some people, for example, if you are sharing the story with someone who has profound and multiple learning disabilities.' (Grace J., 2014, page 2).

When we read a line, we try to emphasize the key elements of the story with our voice.

'Storytelling often proves an important means for socio-emotional development as well as an valuable asset in establishing and improving attachment in relationships. Additionally it seems that if these social bonds are strong already, it can have a positive effect on the quality of how storytelling is experienced.' (Boer and Wikkerman, 2008, page 5)

In the Autumn, Mr. Branch is a part of a tree and is full of colors that reflect the season. As the story develops a strong wind tears him away from the tree and strips away all his colours. For this part of the story we blow off the leaves in front of the children while the sound of the wind is played through the speakers inside the resonating box.



Picture 6. – 'Autumn, leaves are falling'

Conclusion

In our experience sensory stories give children with multiple disabilities opportunities to be active learners in their environment. They encourage them to experience and interact with their surroundings and are a useful tool for interactive learning. These kind of learning experiences give opportunities for children with multiple disabilities to see, hear, touch, smell, taste and actively participate in a story. Then the story becomes the part of them, and they are the part of the story.

References:

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Book Review of Childhood Dementia and Education, by Dr Hans Welling

Childhood Dementia and Education

Some time ago I received a beautifully produced book entitled 'Juvenile Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinosis - Childhood Dementia and Education'. It is 540 pages long and covers all aspects of this family of rare neurodegenerative disorders in children (such as Battens Syndrome) but it has been carefully edited to make it easy to read.

The early chapters in this book describe the features of the early variant of the disorder, infantile neuronal ceroid lipofuscinosis (INCL), and the book goes on to explore a range of theoretical, empirical and practical issues relating to educational and other support for children, adolescents and adults with juvenile neuronal ceroid lipofuscinosis (JNCL)

The authors explore the progression of INCL within general developmental theory and draw upon Baltes' theory of goal selection, optimization and compensation. The concept of 'zones of proximal development' is used as a tool for understanding the variations in the development among individuals with JNCL and for supporting intervention planning.

Chapter 3 provides an introduction to medical issues relating to JNCL. This chapter is quite short considering that there is a huge amount of literature on the biological and physiochemical aspects of the disease, but the main aim of this book is to provide information about the educational implications and possibilities for children with these conditions. Chapters 4-7 describe the four main domains related to JNCL: development and decline in vision, cognition, language and motor abilities. Chapter 8 discusses ethical issues related to working with people with disabilities which are degenerative in nature. Chapters 9-12 are about the basic processes related to the assessment, planning, organization and implementation of educational and other non-medical interventions for individuals with JNCL, with special attention given to proactive, precautionary and hastened teaching and learning.

Chapters 13-21 deal with more specific teaching areas and educational approaches (especially those related to reading, writing and mathematics) but also address the issues in teaching technology, games, drama and music. An important consideration addressed in these chapters is the need for support personnel to recognize that each child with JNCL is in a process of moving from independent to interdependent functioning while at the same time participating in educational activities and coping with everyday life.

Chapter 22 discusses the consequences of JNCL for peer interaction, social life and participation in society. Chapter 23 goes beyond the school years and discusses processes related to transition from school into adult life. Chapter 24 addresses parental needs and support and Chapter 25 presents experiences of brothers and sisters of persons with JNCL. Chapter 26 describes the important functions of family

associations and, finally, Chapter 27 discusses the behavioural and emotional reactions that may be observed in individuals with JNCL; the relationship between these reactions and the developmental course of the disease and the complexities of the difficult life situations that ensue; and ends by proposing strategies that may lessen the stress and frustration of the individual with JNCL and ease the frequently associated behavioural and emotional difficulties.

The overview that is reflected throughout the book may also illustrate the one area where the book could be strengthened. In my opinion it does not sufficiently acknowledge the central role of parents, and sometimes of other children in the family. Parents have responsibility for the education of their children and, even in case of JNCL, they should be seen as the managers of the process of support.

This important book was created through the international cooperation of parents and professionals and any parents, rehabilitation workers or educators who are involved in supporting children with early blindness and dementia should take careful note of it.

Dr Hans Welling

News from Denmark, by Ole Guldborg

1. Using LaTeX as a tool in STEM-subjects

By Ole Guldborg, ICT-consultant, IBOS

Mathematics involves the use of a range of symbols that can be difficult to access for learners with visual impairment, especially for those who use a screen reader or who learn through braille. In Denmark the maths curriculum also requires students to use the CAS (Computer Algebra System). The CAS is used to make calculations (numeric and symbolic), plot graphs and draw geometrical figures. When we meet high school students with vision impairment, the one main problem area they report is with subjects in the field of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). In this article we will describe how learners with a vision impairment can use LaTeX, a typesetting toolchain that is widely used in the academic world for reading, writing and CAS work in STEM subjects.

Reading

Often the key STEM materials and the books that students with VI need to read are not available in an accessible format. The Danish National Library for people with print disabilities (Nota) can now assist these students by making those materials accessible. Nota uses LaTeX to translate complex maths expressions into linear form, which makes it ideal for people with visual impairments.

An example of a LaTeX math expression could be: $\frac{\sqrt{13}}{\sqrt{23}}$

This is a way to write a fraction and describes the square root of 13 divided by the square root of 23. As you might have noticed, math expressions in LaTeX can be marked by using the dollar-sign.

Nota produces a Microsoft Wordfile for students that contains the contents of their material with any maths formulas presented in LaTeX-expressions.

Writing

When the students have to hand in assignments in STEM we recommend that they write the assignment using LaTeX and then produce a PDF handout that they can give to their teacher. The students will be able to read the LaTeX version and the teacher will be able to read the PDF version that will contain maths symbols in the standard format that the teacher is familiar with.

CAS

Because the CAS-tools are generally inaccessible to learners with VI, we recommend that students use an integration between a CAS called 'Maxima' and LaTeX. This will enable the student to use a CAS-tool within their LaTeX-editor and when typesetting the LaTeX-code the CAS will calculate and solve the calculations the students write in LaTeX.

To use the CAS (Maxima) to solve a second degree-equation the student would write:

```
$$\begin{maxima}
tex(solve(x^2 + 2*x +5 =0,x))
\end{maxima} $$
```

This will output the solution in both a PDF and also in an LaTeX solutions file for the student to read.

Plotting

There are numerous ways that students can plot from within LaTeX. One way is to use a La-Tex-package called TikZ. By using TikZ, students will be able to plot, for example, a sinus-curve from a LaTeX file thus:

```
\begin{tikzpicture}[domain=0:4]
\draw plot (\x,{sin(\x r)}) node[right] {$f(x) = \sin x$};
\end{tikzpicture}
```

What we have learned

Most teachers in the STEM-field will already be familiar with LaTeX from their university studies and students with VI can get help from their teachers who will understand that LaTeX can be used to help students to read, write and use CAS.

For students who are blind, braille is an essential tool in this process. Reading LaTeX with a screen reader and speech-synthesis is hard and time-consuming whereas using a screen reader with Braille support makes the process easier. Activities involving drawing and plotting require access to specialist tactile materials and equipment, for example a tactile drawing board.

While it takes time for students to learn LaTeX, Maxima and the LaTeX packages like TikZ, they need to be taught them and the sooner the better.

For more information or input, please contact:

Ole Guldberg, ole.guldberg@kk.dk

2. Further developments in the Pre-employment Programme (PEP)

The Association of Young People with Disabilities (SUMH) has, with IBOS as a partner, received funding for an employment project based on IBOS' Pre-employment Programme (PEP), 2017-2020. SUMH and IBOS want to develop and extend PEP to more target groups. The programme has achieved good results in empowerment and employment for visually impaired participants, but it has been a challenge to recruit participants for this group-oriented programme from such a small, dispersed and not always identifiable target group.

You can find further information about PEP here: www.ibos.dk/pep

3. The potential of electronic glasses in vision rehabilitation for people with Stargardt Disease

In collaboration with the Kennedy Center eye clinic, IBOS is involved in a project testing the potential of electronic glasses (EG) in vision rehabilitation for people with Stargardt disease. The aim of the project is to clarify whether EG can improve the visual function and daily life of a group of people diagnosed with the same eye disease (Stargardt disease) compared to other rehabilitation interventions. The project is designed as a pilot project, in which 10 people with clinically and genetically verified Stargardt disease of working age (18-66) will be recruited for testing and instruction with on-loan EGs. Four different EGs have been selected: eSight3, IrisVision, Acesight and Jordy2. The EGs represent the various price ranges available in the Danish market.

The four selected models all have a camera on the front of the glasses and the live image is displayed on screens viewed from the back of the glasses. The image is autofocused and can be enlarged as required and colour and contrast can be changed or set. Additional features vary depending on the model. Participants are instructed in the use of the electronic glasses and then borrow the glasses for testing at home, at work and in other daily activities for two weeks. The effect of the intervention (the EG) is primarily measured on the participants' qualitative

feedback as well as the effects on the quality of life, which assessed by the NO VFQ-25 and supplementary questions. Reading ability and activity performance will also be compared. Through the pilot project, we want to discover how experienced users of assistive technologies assess EG, and whether EG maintains the vision-enhancing effect across different activities, which we would expect. The effect of EG on participants' quality of life will be assessed through measuring changes in performance, qualitative interviews and using questionnaires targeting vision-related quality of life.

For more information or input, please contact:

Joaquim Torner Jordana, Kennedy Center, joaquim.torner.jordana@regionh.dk

Pernille Duelund Højstrup, IBOS, pernille.duelund.hojstrup@kk.dk,

Schack Larsen, IBOS, bo.schack.larsen@kk.dk

4. BlindTech – the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by blind people

By Lea Johanne Sarfelt, Special Consultant, IBOS

In collaboration with the University of Copenhagen, IBOS is involved in a future project on how people with visual impairment or blindness can use accessible AI solutions in everyday life.

We will be looking at two different situations: 1) digital assistants in the home, such as Google Home, and 2) apps on the smartphone when on the move, such as Seeing AI. The project will last for approximately three years and will involve ethnographic studies, analyses, workshops, development of learning material and dissemination of results to all interested parties. Some of the questions we will explore include:

- How can AI technologies be used in everyday life?
- What part might they have in social situations?
- How can blind people creatively manipulate the opportunities offered by these technologies and situations to make the most of them?

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the way these technologies are currently designed and what are the contexts in which they are used?
- What are the challenges of using these technologies in social contexts?

Based on these studies, the project will lead to new knowledge that will be shared with all interested parties and will lead to the development of a learning model that can be used by professionals in supporting people with visual impairment or blindness.

For more information or input, please contact:

Birgit Christensen, IBOS, [Birgit.christensen@kk.dk](mailto:birgit.christensen@kk.dk)

Lea Johanne Sarfelt, IBOS, lea.johanne.sarfelt@kk.dk

Masters Projects

1. What matters most in the experience of learning in school for children with blindness?

Abstract

Author: Bente Pedersen, Synskonsulent, Synscentralen Vordingborg

Purpose: This study is a presentation of the experiences and know-how that students who are blind and their parents have gained from the learning process at school. The study was undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding of the conditions that are experienced as being particularly meaningful in respect to learning.

Students in Denmark who are blind are currently taught in public schools with the purpose of enabling them to pursue an education and to participate in the job market as adults. But recent studies suggest that a dwindling number of young people with blindness achieve a successful education and get a job. In the public schooling programs, many students with different needs are included, and they all need to be accommodated to ensure that they are properly taught. Students who

are blind need specially planned and carefully designed teaching, and there is some uncertainty about whether their learning needs are being met in public schooling.

Methodology: A total of 6 qualitative, semi-structured research interviews were conducted with students with blindness ranging from 15 to 18 years who have attended public schools and 6 interviews with their parents. The scientific-theoretical approach that was adopted involved hermeneutic, phenomenological and theoretical interpretative frameworks about transformative learning and learning in a life-world perspective. Self-psychology approaches were also used.

Results: In the study, responses from students and parents were organised into themes that deal with the experience of assuming responsibility, the experience of motivation and mastering what must be learned, as well as the experience of inter-subjective conditions, of trying out and of organizing the teaching.

Conclusion: in the experience of students and parents it is meaningful that teachers are empathetic and committed, that they are knowledgeable about the task of teaching a student with blindness and are motivated to perform it well. It is important for the students that they can be active, and that they feel confident in their ability to master the tasks set for them at school. This creates motivation and a desire to learn. Their experience is that their learning is inhibited if the teacher lacks knowledge about teaching students with blindness. It also inhibits the teacher's capacity for understanding the student and the student's needs. There is a need for further research into inter-subjective conditions and the students' self-understanding.

Master project 30 hp. Nordic Master in Vision Rehabilitation (120 hp.). Spring 2019.
Supervisor: Inger Berndtsson, Gothenburg University.

2. The meaning of meeting others with Visual Impairment. A lifeworld phenomenological study among people with Visual Impairment

Abstract

Author: Lea Johanne Sarfelt, Special Consultant, IBOS

Background: In Denmark, professionals who work in vision rehabilitation often focus on the importance of persons with visual impairment meeting other people with visual impairment and regard it as a key part of the rehabilitation process. This process is not always a systematic part of rehabilitation, but research generally supports the idea that group rehabilitation is important in promoting performance because it allows people to discuss, share and compare experiences from everyday life.

Purpose: To examine the importance of meeting other people with visual impairment in vision rehabilitation or in other contexts.

Theory: The theoretical frame for the study is life/world understanding with focus on the following dimensions: the lived body, lived space, lived time, horizons and intersubjectivity.

Method: Eight people between 54 and 90 years participated in qualitative life/world phenomenological interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was used. The empirical material was transcribed and interpreted based on a phenomenological approach focusing on the participants' life world and lived experiences.

Results: Four central themes were identified in the analysis: 1) Belonging to a community and recognisability; 2) Own understanding of situation, more self-confidence and joy of life; 3) Sharing experiences and opportunities with assistive technology and other activities and 4) Relations with other persons. Through meetings with others with similar life/world experiences and similar physical conditions, participants were able to do more than expected, and experienced greater opportunities to regain skills and participate in activities. Their horizon of opportunities opens, making them able to move forward while living with visual impairment.

Conclusion: Meeting others with visual impairment, who are, or have been, in the same situation as themselves is important for the participants in terms of living with a visual impairment - both in relation to practical and emotional aspects. This study

supports the finding that group rehabilitation or peer support could usefully become be a more permanent part of vision rehabilitation in Denmark.

Masters Project 30 hp. Nordic Master in Vision Rehabilitation (120 hp.). Spring 2019. Supervisor: Inger Berndtsson, Gothenburg University.

Websites for People with Disabilities

Here are a few links to relevant websites with information that may be beneficial for people with disabilities of all ages:

[Empowering Parents with Mobility Restrictions](#)

[How to Make Your Home Handicap Accessible](#)

[The Consumer's Guide to Stair Lifts for the Elderly and Disabled](#)

[The Fully Accessible Guide to Home Loans for People with Disabilities](#)

[Medicare Enrollment Guide](#)

[Social Security Benefits for Disabled Children](#)

[When Is It Time to Put a Loved One in a Retirement Home?](#)

[How to Manage Disability-Related Pain as You Age](#)

Announcement: ICEVI-Europe Professional Interest Group Early Intervention Conference, by Kathleen Vandermaelen

The upcoming ICEVI-Europe Professional Interest Group Early Intervention Conference will be held in Leuven, Belgium on the 23th and 24th of April 2020.

The title and General theme of the conference will be:

The development of social and emotional skills in young children with visual impairments

From birth of onwards a meaningful and valuable relationship develops between parents and their baby.

This attachment relationship is a growth process, in which the bond between parents and child ideally keeps on growing stronger. Both the parents and the child get to know each other better. They learn to understand each other and learn to adjust their behaviour to accommodate each other's needs. For the child, the attachment relationship with his/her parents forms the foundation for all social interactions later in life.

Parents guide their children step by step towards life in the wider community outside of the family. Over their development into early adulthood, the relationships that children build and maintain with meaningful others gradually expand in number. Well-developed social and emotional skills can help children to manage this challenging transition successfully.

But what happened if a baby or child cannot see or can see only a little?

What is the impact of vision on this important aspect in the development of a child?

What role can the wider social network of the child and the child's family play in promoting social and emotional development? How can the professional network provide the appropriate support to these families?

Keynote speeches will be given by Paula Sterkenburg (The Netherlands), Marlies Praet and Griet Pattyn (Thuisbegeleiding Accent Belgium) and Katrien Strauven and Joke Luyten (Centrum Ganspoel Belgium). These keynote speakers have kindly agreed to give us their insights into general theme of the conference from their different perspectives.

More detailed information on the conference, the venue and the call for papers will soon be available on the ICEVI-Europe website. <http://icevi-europe.org/>

We look forward to welcoming you at the conference in Leuven!

Best wishes

Kathleen Vandermaelen

Announcement: ICEVI Math Made Easy, by Mani, M N G, CEO, ICEVI World

Larry Campbell, President Emeritus ICEVI and Todd Reeves, CEO, Overbrook School for the Blind(OSB), Philadelphia jointly inaugurated the ICEVI MATH MADE EASY YouTube Channel at the OSB on 4th September 2019. You can access the channel by clicking the link https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrmcpSzNg_9EXLbqExtVIAQ and view 30 instructional videos on mathematics education for visually impaired children. Please subscribe to the channel and also share this news with teachers of visually impaired children, parents, teacher educators and all those who are interested in the education of children with visual impairment. We will be uploading another 20 videos in September and more videos will be uploaded on regular basis. We hope teachers will find these instructional videos useful to make mathematics easy for visually impaired children. We hope to receive your comments and suggestions for improving the video instructional materials.

With kind regards

Mani, M N G

CEO, ICEVI World

Conference Announcement: The Tactile Reading Conference in Oslo in 2021

Tactile Reading Oslo 2021

Reserve the 29th and 30th of April in 2021, and come to Oslo, Norway, to share ideas, find inspiration, and enhance your knowledge within the field of tactile reading.

We are pleased to announce a follow-up to the very successful international conference, [Tactile Reading](#), held in Stockholm in 2017

<https://www.statped.no/tactilereading2021> .

The Tactile Reading conference in 2021 will focus on braille and graphics, including digital aids for braille-reading and the use of 3D-printed material. The aim of the program is to concentrate on early intervention and education for children, youth, and adults within the field of tactile reading. We also hope to include topics related to current and future braille users at various levels of literacy, e.g. children with additional impairments and minority language speakers.

#tactilereading2021

Contact: tactilereading2021@statped.no