

ICEVI European Newsletter

ISSN Number 2666-1527

Issue 81, Volume 28 number 3, December 2022

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

Subscription:

If you want to **subscribe** for ICEVI European Newsletter, or to **stop receiving** it, please send an e-mail message to: webmaster@icevi-europe.org.

Content:

- The President's Message2
- Educate to protect! Sex education for children and teenagers with visual impairment.4
- SMILE TOO – SOCIAL SKILLS MAKE INCLUSIVE LIFE EASIER TOO! A training programme for teachers and other professionals working with young people with visual impairments.....6
- Conference Announcement: Acquired Brain Damage and Sight 10
- Useful New Tools and Training Programmes for Developing Social Skills 11
- SENSEMATH..... 15

The President's Message

Dear Members and Non-Members of ICEVI-Europe,
Welcome everyone to the December 2022/2023 newsletter.

I am writing this from my "home office" wondering if we will ever see the sun again, as the rain and the wind pours down. However, as I went for a walk I did notice the first signs of spring – there were snow drops beginning to merge. This sight was very welcoming as it brought my mind back to the future to what we hope in ICEVI-Europe we can achieve.

Our colleagues from the Netherlands have been very busy this last year and I very much welcome from Bartiméus their free two day 9th and 10th February course on Cerebral Visual Impairment (see <https://bartimeus.nl/trainingen/trainingen-voor-zorgprofessionals/bartimeus-cvi-course>). I was told by the organisers that this course was full within two days. I hope they and others will also lead on CVI courses this year.

This fits in every nicely as our colleagues from the Royal Dutch Visio have agreed to take the lead in the development of a Professional Interest Group on Cerebral Visual Impairment and we hope to have our first meeting soon in spring. Please let us know if you are interested in joining this group.

This also connects very nicely with the Nordic Conference – Sight and Brain, 28th - 29th of March 2023 in Denmark (<https://ibos.nemtilmeld.dk/308/>) where colleagues will meet up and exchange knowledge on sight loss as a consequence of strokes, blood clots and other neurological damage. Again showing how CVI effects at all ages, and not just children.

ICEVI-Europe is also very pleased to be supporting the International Symposium on Physical Activity and Individuals with Visual Impairment or Deafblindness, held in Parma, Italy, 8-11th June 2023. See <https://sportrealeyes.it/ispaviparma2023/>. I will be attending this conference representing ICEVI-Europe so I hope to see many people from the region there. Please come up and say hello.

ICEVI-Europe has also been involved in a series of research projects. Currently we are supporting the research project that is understanding the impact of LEGO Braille Bricks on learners with significant visual impairment. This study is led by the University of Edinburgh, Scotland and includes research partners such as Perkins School for the Blind, Royal National Institute of Blind People, American Printing House, and i2Media. If you have not yet completed their practitioner survey, please do so in the following links.

LEGO Braille Brick Practitioner Survey

English: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LBB2023>

French: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LBB2023FR>

German: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LBB2023DE>

ICEVI-Europe and Enviter <https://enviter.eu/> have met to collaborate around developing a series of webinars and we hope to announce more soon.

However, I leave the biggest news to last. We have just received the official date for our Anniversary European Conference, the **10th ICEVI European Conference**. This conference will be hosted by the Robert Hollman Foundation and held in **Padova, Italy**. The dates of the conference are to be the **15th – 17th May 2025**. **SAVE THE DATE** in your diary! Padova is such a beautiful place and with the valuable support of the Robert Hollman Foundation we look forward to organizing an inspiring conference. The Call for Abstracts and Programme details will follow shortly as information becomes available to us. Please keep on checking the ICEVI-Europe website for further information (<http://www.icevi-europe.org/>).

I wish you all the best for 2023 as there is a lot planned and more to come and I hope this year I get to meet many more of you face to face rather than from my home study.

Enjoy this newsletter!

On behalf of the Board of ICEVI-Europe,

Dr John Ravenscroft

Professor of Childhood Visual Impairment

President



Educate to protect! Sex education for children and teenagers with visual impairment.

By Laetitia CASTILLAN (psychology researcher) and Caroline CHABAUD (Director of 'Mes mains en or').

“Sex education contributes to better knowledge and respect for oneself and others, to the prevention of sexist and sexual violence, and to the promotion of equality”.

Source: French National Education

Today, the benefits of sex education are well established. As proof, French Law requires the French National Education system to promulgate and provide sex education sessions for all young people and obliges medico/social services to include in their support questions relating to intimate, emotional and sexual life. However, reports continue to identify inequalities in sex education and circulars follow one after another to remind everyone of their roles.

While inequalities in sex education affect all children and adolescents, children and teenagers with visual impairments are particularly affected. The results of the study we conducted are clear: support for the intimate, affective and sexual life of young people with visual impairment is patchy and uneven across the country. The survey also points to a lack of accessibility to teaching tools and educational interventions. Faced with this situation, concrete solutions must be provided. Resolutely committed to reducing inequalities, the project “Educate to protect! Sex education for children and teenagers with visual impairments” proposes to work in favour of positive and inclusive sexuality education through the two pillars of: access to information, and training medical and social professionals. After meeting with many young people and professionals in order to identify their individual needs, we are currently in the development phase of a collection of works, resources and tools on the theme of intimate, emotional and sexual life targeted at children and teenagers and the professionals who work with them. This collection will include:

- Adapted books in braille, large print, and audio that are easy to read and understand
- Educational kits for professionals to facilitate sex education interventions
- Various resources that can be downloaded free of charge from the “Mes mains en or” website (e.g. bibliographies, image bank, etc.).

Awareness training for young people and professionals in the field will also be offered.

While the lack of statistics has long concealed the vulnerability of people with disabilities to sexual violence, recent figures require us to take concrete action on the ground. The establishment of positive sex education is an essential lever in the

fight against sexual violence and gender inequalities and contributes to the construction of better self-knowledge.

We are really interested to know more about sex education for visually impaired children and teenagers across Europe so please contact us if you want to exchange ideas about what is happening in your country: Laetitia.castillan@gmail.com.



Figure 1 : « Zisis et Zézettes » book.



Figure 2 : « Tout sur les règles » (all about menstruations) book.

**SMILE TOO – SOCIAL SKILLS MAKE INCLUSIVE LIFE EASIER TOO!
A training programme for teachers and other professionals
working with young people with visual impairments**

By Anja Pečaver, Centre IRIS – Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Introduction

“SMILE too” is an Erasmus+ project within Strategic Partnership for School Education and it is a follow-up to the SMILE! School education staff mobility programme.

It started in September 2019 and it finished at the end of August 2022.

The project is a collaboration of professionals in six partner organisations from five different European countries:

§ Center IRIS- Center za izobraževanje, rehabilitacijo, inkluzijo in svetovanje za slepe in slabovidne, Ljubljana, Slovenia, coordinator of the project,

§ Gymnazium pro zrakové postizene a Stredni odborná skola pro zrakové postizene, Praha, the Czech Republic,

§ Lega del Filo d'Oro Onlus, Italy,

§ Royal Dutch Visio, the Netherlands,

§ Jordanstown School, United Kingdom and

§ The Royal Blind Asylum and School, Sight Scotland, United Kingdom.

The organisations all work in the field of education for children and young people with visual impairment, and believe that social skills represent key competences that have an important impact on the behaviour, self-esteem and acceptance in society of their target group. The process of developing social competences for children and young people with visual impairment deserves special attention. Due to loss of sight it may differ considerably from the development process of their fully sighted peers. Students with vision impairment often cannot learn through imitation and moreover information given by nonverbal communication may be lost. Consequently, children and young people with vision impairment can display inappropriate social skills which are often misunderstood and although their behaviour may be indulgently tolerated in society, it alienates them from the ultimate goals of being an active participant in society, entering the labour market on equal terms with their sighted peers, and having a good quality of life. Data suggests that social competences do not receive adequate attention especially in inclusive education settings due to a lack of awareness of its importance, and lack of knowledge about how to approach

and deal with the area appropriately. The project aims to change the situation by addressing the needs of different target groups.

Goals of the project

In the project we wanted to raise awareness at different levels about the importance of developing social competences in learners with vision impairment:

- Among professionals in partner organisations, especially those who support inclusion.
- In inclusive education settings, e.g. teachers of children with vision impairment, psychologists.
- With parents of children with vision impairment.

Through our dissemination activities we wanted draw attention to this key area among the different stakeholders in our partner organisations' own countries and throughout Europe more widely.

Our second goal was to empower the stakeholders to be able to contribute to the process of social development using effective solution-oriented approaches.

How have we achieved these goals?

The project coincided in part with Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, some of the activities took place in a virtual format or were postponed, but most of planned activities were successfully completed.

We organized a range of Training events and Transnational Project meetings:

There were two online training events:

1. Solution focused programming training (virtual format), 26th January – 17th February 2021, 5 days, led by Royal Dutch Visio
2. How to create filmed resources (virtual format) 30th November – 2nd December 2021, 3 days, led by Sight Scotland

and three of the four planned Transnational Project Meetings took place (due to the pandemic):

- Transnational Project Meeting 1, 21st – 22nd October 2022, hosted by Center IRIS, Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Transnational Project meeting 4, 28th – 29th June 2022, hosted by Lega del Filo d'Oro, Italy

- Transnational Project meeting 3, 29th – 30th August 2022, hosted by Gymnazium pro zrakové postizene a Stredni odborná skola pro zrakové postizene, Praha, Czech Republic

As a result of the collaboration of the partner organisations two specifically designed training programmes have been created:

1. For the parents/guardians of children with VI (consisting of a motivation power point presentation and a series of workshop plans which can be adapted according to the audience and the selected topic)
2. For teachers and other professionals in inclusive education settings, with modules appropriately adapted to particular circumstances, e.g. the age range of children, teachers in boarding schools etc. This programme consists of a longer motivation PowerPoint presentation and a booklet called 'Let's talk about social skills' with 22 detailed lesson plans for developing social competences in inclusive education settings..

In addition, we have also produced tools observation tools (a set of materials to assess levels of social competences including: an interview form for children, questionnaires for professionals working with the child and child's parents with a set of instructions) and eight videos with practical advice about how they can be used in training.

Conclusion

In 2019, at an early stage in the project, professionals at the Centre IRIS were asked to complete a questionnaire which included questions such as how much attention they paid to the area of social competences when preparing individual plans for children, how important they find it, how they set goals and also how they evaluate the level of students' competences. Although the respondents all believed that the area is of utmost importance, they admitted that they had not paid enough attention to it, and they set the goals following their own feelings. Most of them did not use any relevant tools to assess the competences. Therefore, we are convinced that the Tools for Observation might be used in many ways to help planning further activities of professionals e.g. setting the goals in individual plans, directing teachers' attention to certain activities and directing parents.

At the moment most partner organisations already provide a range of training for professionals working in inclusive education settings or they support them in other ways. However, the training or the support we provide usually consists of information on adapted materials, assistive technology, communication with people with visual impairment, how to teach different subjects, etc.

Developing social competences must become an essential part of all training programmes in the future, and the outcomes of SMILE Too provide excellent materials to be used for that purpose. In addition, we have created a number of

lessons with detailed lesson plans that will encourage the teachers to tackle the issue in their classes.

The lessons were created on the base of knowledge and experiences of professionals - members of SMILE Too teams in the partner organisations.

A child's home environment plays a key role in the development of appropriate social competences, especially when children are educated in inclusive settings. However, according to our experiences parents do not have enough knowledge and skills to support this development on their own. Professionals need to approach the topic carefully and tactfully being careful not to hurt parents' feelings. SMILE Too workshop plans for parents provide strategies, materials and a safe environment to discuss this important issue with the professionals who know the child and other parents experiencing similar situations.

To conclude, the influence of project SMILE Too has already started to show a positive effect among the professionals of our organisation. The last few years have brought a significant change in the way of thinking, from considering socialisation issues as a problem to a seeing them as a challenge requiring a solution searching oriented approach. Social competences cannot be changed very quickly, but if levels of social competences can be accurately assessed using appropriate tools of observation, then individual development plans based on this assessment can be tailored to the needs of each individual child or young person to result in better social inclusion.

We believe that the project will contribute significantly to increase the competencies of all target groups on a social skills area.

You are kindly invited to find more details about the materials produced in the following article in this issue by M. Maljevac.

Conference Announcement: Acquired Brain Damage and Sight

Nordic Conference – Sight and Brain, 28th -29th of March 2023 in Denmark

IBOS – the Danish Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted will for the third time host a conference on Acquired Brain Damage and Sight, this time in collaboration with Norwegian Vision in Stroke. NorVIS is a cross professional network with more than 40 partners from 30 different organisations, municipalities, hospitals and researchers.

On March the 28th and 29th professionals and researchers from the Nordic countries will meet to exchange knowledge and discuss topics related to persons with a sight loss as a consequence of a stroke, blood clot, tumour, concussion of the brain, Covid-19, etc. The objective of the conference is to provide insights into the particular consequences of the brain damage and how, when combined with a sight loss, it affects the brain.

The conference languages will be Norwegian, Swedish and Danish. It takes place at Hotel Legoland, Billund, Denmark. The price is 6.395 d. kr. incl. accommodation. See the key note speakers, program and practical details for signing up at link: <https://ibos.nemtilmeld.dk/308/>

Conference Announcement: Infants and preschool children with visual impairment - "Prepared and equipped for transitions"

Synscenter Refsnæs is responsible for planning and hosting the Nordic Conference 2023 – Infants and preschool children with visual impairment - "Prepared and equipped for transitions"

Synscenter Refsnæs is happy to announce that the Nordic Conference 2023 will be held in Denmark June 8th-9th 2023.

The conference is presented in collaboration with NOVIR, Nordic Visual Impairment Network, the Nordic co-operation in the field of visual rehabilitation. The network consists of national vision rehabilitation institutions from Denmark, The Faroe Islands, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

All sessions will be held in English.

The main purpose of the Nordic Conference is to support highly specialised counselling for infants and preschool children by the sharing of knowledge from research and practice as well as maintaining professional networking across the Nordic countries. Further information about the conference and registration will be published at www.synref.dk during spring 2023.

Useful New Tools and Training Programmes for Developing Social Skills

By dr. Mateja Maljevac, Centre IRIS – Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted, Ljubljana

Introduction

The expanded core curriculum for people with visual impairment consists of nine areas, including social skills. Social skills is one of the most critical areas of development for people with visual impairment and needs to be given special attention from birth onwards. To this end, a range of individuals from across Europe came together to design and implement the Erasmus+ KA1 project SMILE!, whose outputs proved to be positively accepted.

In order to further develop our knowledge and prepare additional materials for the different target groups, the six institutions (Centre IRIS – Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted, Gymnazium pro zrakove postizene a Stredni odborná skola pro zrakove postizene, Lega del Filo d'Oro Onlus, Koninklijke Visio, Jordanstown School and The Royal Blind Asylum and School) from five different countries (Slovenia, Czech Republic, Italy, Netherlands and United Kingdom) decided to continue the work in the Erasmus+ KA2 project named SMILE Too.

As a result of international cooperation, three new sets of tools and didactic materials have been created:

1. Tools for observation: a set of materials to assess the level of social competences in students with vision impairment.
2. A training programme for professionals working with children with visual impairment.
3. A training programme for parents of children with vision impairment¹.

A more detailed description of the tools and materials can be found further in the article.

Presentation of New Tools and Didactic Materials for Developing Social Skills

Members of SMILE Too team improved their knowledge and competences in the field of social skills, and transferred this to the other professionals in the partner organisations. Partner organisations now have increased capacity to support development of social skills through the tools for observation and the various training

¹ Further in the text, we will use the abbreviation VI (vision impairment).

programmes created within the project. We would like to share this knowledge with all interested experts worldwide too.

Tools for Observation

The Tools for observation can be used as part of the process to assess the social competences of an individual child with VI. Following this, appropriate support with social skills can be put in place. The Tools for Observation consist of:

- Student Interview: A qualitative research tool designed to gain an insight into the views of the student with VI. The interview, consisting of 7 open questions, encourages the child with VI to talk about their social experiences in a relatable and non-threatening way.
- Parent and Educator Questionnaires that help gather data from both educators and parents of children with VI that can be compared with the results of the interview to highlight any differences in the perception of social skills.
- Student consent forms and clear instructions for how to conduct the student interview.

In addition, we produced a list of recommended literature for parents and educators.

Training Programme for Educators

The training programme for educators who work with children with VI in inclusive education settings was developed to help them think about the topic. The materials can be used in special schools and in other education settings too. The structure and the materials created are used on a regular basis to deliver training sessions for the professionals working with the ultimate target group by all partner organisations. The content consists of:

- a PowerPoint presentation and
- a booklet called 'Let's talk about social skills with lesson plans'.

The PowerPoint presentation is designed to be used in the first part of the training in order to raise awareness; explain to the audience of professionals why the development of social skills needs special attention with children and young people with visual impairment; motivate them to be part of the process and define the areas of social skills which deserve their attention. The second part of the programme consists of 22 lesson plans collected together in a booklet. A framework was designed around five themes to help build the training and design materials about how to develop social skills

Training Programme for Parents

The structure and the materials created in the project have been used on a regular basis by all the partner organisations to help train parents of children and young people with vision impairment. The goal is to enlighten parents about the issues that can impact upon the development of social skills for children with severe vision

impairment. During the training, the parents are provided with information on how they can best assist with development in this area. The content consists of:

- Introduction,
- Empowerment,
- Workshops (including PowerPoint Presentations and materials for each workshop)
- A Hometraining Module,
- Video films
- Additional advice for working with children with vision impairment and complex needs.

The Introduction presents the main goal of the project SMILE Too, the content of the training programme and its structure. The part called 'Empowerment' aims to show how a change of mindset to solution-oriented behaviour can support children. The emphasis is on the differences between a fixed (overprotective) and a growth mindset and the benefits of this approach. Empowerment includes several learning didactic strategies ranging from explanation of theory, to practising and sharing experiences. Workshops for eleven themes were created. Each partner can choose themes of the workshops according to the audience's interest or needs, or they can deliver the training programme over several sessions and change the order and themes of the workshops as they go. PowerPoint Presentations and materials for each workshop were created. Besides the training programme additional material called 'The Hometraining Module' was created. It is designed for parents to use at home to continue work on development of social skills. It can be distributed as printed material or in an electronic format. Eight films were also produced for during the training in both programmes to highlight different elements. Scenarios were written, scenes played and recorded, and the material was edited and subtitled in English.

During the process of designing the SMILE Too materials, some partners pointed out that special material targeting children with MDVI (vision impairment and complex additional needs) was needed in their environments. Therefore a special set of materials following the structure of Training programme for parents and adapted for the MDVI target group was prepared in addition to the materials planned in the project proposal. The same material can be used to train both parents and professionals.

Conclusion

The first target group in the project were the SMILE Too national teams and our main goals were to achieve professional development through better understanding of the ultimate target group; having tools with instructions for professionals in the field of visual impairment to observe and establish the level of social competences of children and young people with visual impairment; obtaining new competences in producing teaching materials (films) and in designing and performing training programmes for teachers/parents; developing arguments about the importance of good social competences of individuals with visual impairment and especially the role each

stakeholder (including teachers and other professionals in inclusive education settings and parents/guardians) plays in the process.

The second target group were partner organisations (special schools and centres of expertise) with their professionals. The task of the members of the national SMILE Too teams was to share their understanding, competences, awareness and tools provided in the project in their professional environment. Besides that the capacity of partner organisations has been increased by the programmes designed and the teaching materials (lesson plans, workshops, films) that have been produced to empower teachers and other professionals in inclusive education settings and parents/guardians as well as wider families. They are able to use the materials at the training events for professionals from inclusive education settings and parents and achieve better results for the ultimate target group.

The third circle of target groups represented teachers and professionals in inclusive education settings and parents/guardians of children with vision impairment and following changes also included those working with MDVI. Firstly, their interest will be initiated and the awareness raised by involving them in the process of establishing the level of social competences by using the Observation Tools created in the project. Teachers and professionals will be able to use the lesson plans in their teaching environments and parents will be able to recognise important socialization issues to contribute their part in developing child's social competences. They will learn to work with and approach the ultimate target group with a growth mindset. They are invited to explore the area further with the list of recommended literature.

All tools, training programmes, videos and other didactic materials will be translated to five different languages (Slovenian, Czech, Italian, Dutch and English) and can be found here (for free):

[Course: SMILE too Gradiva / SMILE too Results \(arnes.si\)](https://arnes.si).

Group members of Smile Too hope all the material to be found useful by a wide range of users. In the future, we would like to use all materials as often as possible, evaluate them and, if necessary, modify their content for the benefit of our users. You are invited to share with us your experiences and suggestions for the future.

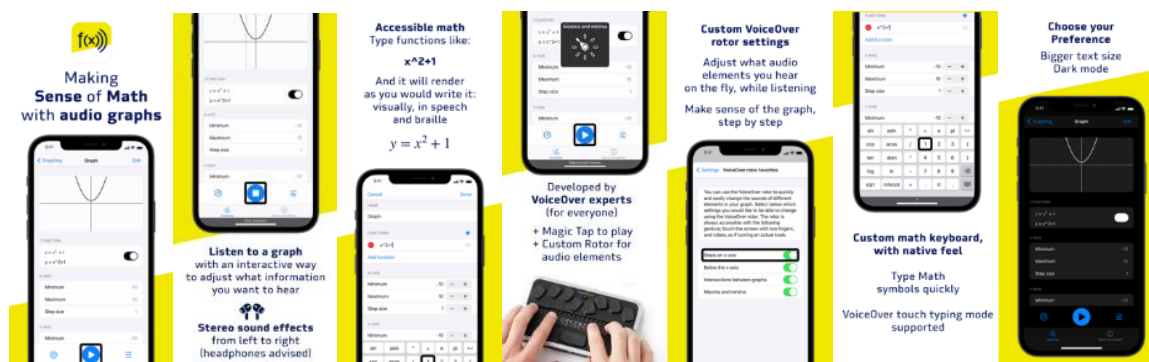
SENSEMATH

Mathematics is one of the most challenging subjects for many students. The level of abstraction in mathematics and the graphical nature of information can make Mathematics difficult to access and comprehend, particularly for students who are blind. However mathematics is a very important part of education, because the knowledge and skills that are acquired are applicable in both professional and daily life situations.

[PROMO VIDEO <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGyI4iqWykA>]

To make mathematics more accessible, more useful (and possibly even more fun!), Visio has developed the iPhone app 'SenseMath'. With SenseMath, every mathematical function (like y is x squared plus 3) can be converted into sound. With an audio representation of a graph, it's possible to get a quick overview of the information it contains. The app provides information about the type of graph (such as a mountain or valley parabola) as well as the number of functions that are presented in the graph. The mathematical elements, such as intersections and extrema, are made audible and the playback speed can be easily changed. SenseMath is not a calculator and reading the coordinates of a point is unfortunately not possible. But it's still a very valuable addition to tactile drawings.

SenseMath has been developed with a large group of contributors including mathematicians, programmers, accessibility experts and end users in order to achieve the maximum usability and accessibility.



In the app a function can be entered using the math keyboard specially developed for SenseMath. Each function can be displayed in image, speech and braille, via a linear or mathematical notation. In addition to the functions, mathematical elements such as intersections and extrema can be toggled on or off during playback with the use of the VoiceOver rotor. The user is in control and determines the most desirable way to analyse the graph. SenseMath makes optimal use of VoiceOver functionalities.

For a Dutch student it's possible to upload every graph from a specific math text book, by entering the ISBN number of the book.

THIS VIDEO HELPS YOU TO GET AN IDEA OF THE FUNCTIONALITY:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UnPUDyyilw>

In April 2022 SenseMath won two Dutch Interactive Awards; the most important awards in the Netherlands for online content. The jury in the 'Tools' category described it as "an example of cross-media approach at its best, built around user-centric design. This is clearly an innovative new interface with a huge and positive impact for the target group: an admirably well and extremely well executed concept". In the category 'future interfaces' the jury "particularly appreciated that this is indeed a completely new interface: exactly what this category is all about. The impact of this product is enormous and the worldwide potential is great."

To make this come true Visio is always open for suggestions and tips to improve SenseMath. If it would be possible to make it more accessible and fit for students outside of The Netherlands, Visio would love to be in contact to talk about your thoughts and concerns. So please contact Visio through visiolab@visio.org.

[WANT TO GET STARTED WITH THE APP? VISIO MADE A SET OF VIDEO TUTORIALS WHICH SHOULD HELP YOU GET STARTED:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9HD6EGAaDRyfs6VVvI2L8W8eUVLskLQW>]