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The President's Message

Dear Members and Non-Members of ICEVI-Europe,

This is my first ICEVI-Europe newsletter that I have the pleasure in writing so I feel that I should introduce myself, outline some of the developments that I am currently thinking about as well as highlight some of the ICEVI-Europe Board member decisions that we have made since my investiture.

However, before I do any of that I would like to take this opportunity to thank again our friend who we all know and have spent many a wonderful time with, our Past President Hans Welling. He has tirelessly given his valuable time and resources to increasing the integrity and visibility of ICEVI-Europe across all European regions and driving it forward towards achieving its mission of promoting an inclusive society in which persons with a visual impairment achieve their desire to actively participate as full members of society. He has been for ICEVI-Europe a visionary and inspiring leader and has put great efforts into facilitating the exchange of knowledge and expertise by supporting the organization of regional and European conferences, realizing the need for a strong network of professional interest groups and encouraging the implementation of training and professional development activities. The relationships he has nurtured with our members, stakeholders, and partners will ensure ICEVI-Europe will prosper and continue to stimulate cooperation and create networks between professionals, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life of people with visual impairment. Hans, I cannot personally thank you enough for all the work you have done, and will continue to do for ICEVI-Europe as a board member, and from all of us at ICEVI-Europe "heel erg bedankt voor alles wat je hebt gedaan."

For those who do not know me, I am Professor John Ravenscroft, Chair of Childhood Visual Impairment, at the Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh. I am the Head and Director of the Scottish Sensory Centre, and I am also the Editor in Chief of the British Journal of Visual Impairment. I have been very fortunate to know and collaborate with many colleagues from ICEVI-Europe and I hope to not only reinforce our collaborations but also to get to know many more people who are dedicated to the education (in the broadest sense) of children and young people with visual impairment. If I was asked on a radio show what my main expertise regarding childhood visual impairment would be, I think I would answer in several ways but perhaps my first answer would be related to Cerebral Visual Impairment. As we all know our vision is fed by our eyes, yet all that we see is created by our minds as a mental emulation of our surroundings. If it is indeed the case that over 40% of our brain's structure and function is involved in vision, brain injury, at any age (often before birth) commonly alters and impairs vision. This is Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI) and occurs where one or several of the many brain processes that come together to create our visual world, are not working typically. CVI is the most common form of visual impairment in children in the UK and perhaps across all of Europe, therefore during my presidency, I will aim to increase knowledge of CVI and develop a new professional interest group for professionals who support and work with children and young people with CVI.

Another answer in the radio show, and subsequently my focus as ICEVI-Europe President would be trying to understand what inclusion means for each and every child with visual impairment. Inclusion itself is a difficult concept to define but rather than

taking an adult perspective on what inclusion means, I tend to focus on the child and young person perspective and to consider what they deem inclusion means. This approach has yielded some very interesting results, highlighting and recognising how visual impairment may impact on what the child understands as being included.

Another area that I would like to focus on during my presidency is the connection between theory, research and practice. I am yet to be convinced that you can have each of these areas in isolation from each other, yet interweaving these three elements into our work becomes more and more difficult. This may be due to the pressures of work, time and caseloads, however it is important as professionals that we are aware of current theories, research and practice to ensure that children and young people with visual impairment achieve their most capable potential. As such, I will build upon Hans's excellent work on the interest groups and will be open to discussion on how to support such groups across Europe so that all can benefit from each other's expertise including those of children and young people themselves as well as their parents and carers.

Finally, in this introduction I would like to bring your attention to the 10th ICEVI-Europe Conference schedule. It was announced in the last newsletter that we were planning to have the 10th European Conference in Cluj, Romania, next year in 2022 and in this newsletter, I would be announcing the call of abstracts and themes. However, after holding an extraordinary board meeting it was decided that with respect to increasing number of COVID-19 cases across Europe this winter, and to those families, friends and colleagues that have lost their lives to this terrible disease, that it would be inappropriate to announce and launch with fanfare such a face-to-face conference. The board's decision was instead to hold a series of online webinars throughout 2022/2023 hosted by ICEVI-Europe which are free and accessible to all focusing on a range of themes under the banner of "Access to Learning and Learning to Access" which was to be the original theme of the conference. I am chairing a series of meetings to implement this new series of lectures for ICEVI-Europe and I hope to be able to bring more news on this shortly. We encourage you to make frequent visits to the homepage of ICEVI-Europe, <http://www.icevi-europe.org/>, as it is regularly updated with latest developments and announcements regarding the online webinar series, as this information becomes available to us.

Soon it will be a holiday period for many (but not all) of us. I hope that you have the opportunity to have important family time, to reflect on what has been a difficult and terrible eighteen months, but also to think positively about the work we all do, and as a collective the impact we are having together on the lives of children and young people with visual impairment and how as an organisation we can continue moving forward under the banner of ICEVI-Europe.

With my sincerest wishes,

Dr John Ravenscroft

Professor of Childhood Visual Impairment

President



Congratulations of the Higher Order

Congratulations of the Higher Order

By: Dr John Ravenscroft

One of the roles of being President of ICEVI-Europe that brings me the biggest sense of pride is to celebrate the success of those who are dedicating their career to the education of children and young people with visual impairment. How fortunate I am to be able to do this twice within the first few months of my Presidency.

The first award I would like to celebrate is for Nathalie Lewi-Dumont who is an ICEVI-Europe board member representing the French speaking countries.

Nathalie has been awarded the Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur. The Legion of Honour is the highest French decoration one can receive and Nathalie's reward is for recognition of all of her work as an expert in the field of adapted teaching for students who are blind or partially sighted. Nathalie conducted her research in this field, coordinated training for special teachers for the visually impaired, as well as producing various tools for improving literacy and inclusion.

This is a real honour, and I am so delighted that a specialist teacher of learners with visual impairment is being recognised at this highest level. Nathalie, I hope you can all hear us stand up and congratulate you for this most magnificent of awards. Absolutely fantastic!

And here is a picture of Nathalie giving her acceptance speech wearing the Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur



Congratulations from all of your friends and colleagues at ICEVI-Europe.

The next award is also international recognition of the amazing work that teachers of learners with visual impairment do. During the last few months it was announced that David Swanston from St Vincent's School, Liverpool, was a top ten finalist in the Global Teacher Prize (Varkey Foundation) [David Swanston \(globalteacherprize.org\)](http://globalteacherprize.org). The Global Teacher Prize serves to underline the importance of educators and the fact that, throughout the world, their efforts deserve to be recognised and celebrated. It seeks to acknowledge the impacts of the very best teachers – not only on their students but on the communities around them. David's innovative approach to teaching children with a visual impairment and dedicated work in developing St Vincent's School's physical education curriculum has received a great deal of recognition. David has been helping children with visual impairments for over a decade, providing them with the necessary skills and tools to navigate a whole range of sports. Many of his students have continued on to participate in further education, employment, and competition at the Paralympic Games.

Just like with Nathalie, I am so proud of this achievement David, at a time where I am concerned about the role and status of the specialist teacher of learners with visual impairment, you go and highlight the importance of the role and the work that TVI's do on a global and international stage. Absolutely outstanding and I hope you can also hear all of our congratulations to you and to your school. Well done David – Magnificent.



We will hear more about David's achievement and his journey through this award process early next year.

Building a Bridge Between the Field and the Theory: Dissemination Activities of ErISFaVIA project from Turkey



By Emine Ayyıldız, ICEVI Europe National Representative of Turkey

ErISFaVIA (*Early Intervention Services for Families with Children with Vision Impairment and Additional Disabilities*)-2019-1-EL01-KA201-062886 is a project which is supported by the Erasmus+ Programme (Key Action 2). It started on 1st of September, 2019 and it will end on 31st of July, 2022. The project involves a consortium of ten organizations from six countries. Three of them are universities [University of Thessaly-UTH (coordinating organization)/Greece, University Babes-Bolyai-BBU/Romania, and Istanbul Medeniyet University-IMU/Turkey], two of them are special schools for students with vision impairment (Liceul Special pentru Deficienti de Vedere/Romania and St. Barnabas School for the Blind/Cyprus), and five of them are non-profit non-governmental organizations (Amimoni/Greece, Syzoi/Greece, Ayse Nurtac Sozbir Gunebakan-ANSGA/Turkey, Blindeninstitut Munchen/Germany and Mali dom/Croatia). The project managers and researchers/trainers of ErISFaVIA project are academics and practitioners who combine knowledge and experience regarding early intervention and education for children with vision impairment and additional disabilities. For more information about the project visit (<http://erisfavia.sed.uth.gr/>).

The main objectives of the ErISFaVIA project are: to develop an enriched and updated training manual and teaching materials for professionals who work in early intervention programs, to promote the collaboration between universities, schools, institutions and associations of families who have children with vision impairment and additional disabilities, and to highlight best practices and guidelines for the development of effective early intervention services for those children and their families. It is expected that the outcomes of this project will contribute to developing effective early intervention services, enhancing professionals' skills and supporting families and children with vision impairment and additional disabilities. In addition, many of the tangible products of the ErISFaVIA project will be uploaded onto the project's portal as Open Educational Resources. In this way, professionals, stakeholders as well as policy makers will be able to access and use them to improve their educational policies, practices, methods and techniques. So far, the scoping, the literature review and the needs assessment study have been completed (Leading Organization: BBU). The Training Material Manual (Leading Organization: Mali Dom), the reflective logs and the questionnaires (Leading Organization: UTH) have also been developed. At the moment, we are collating the case studies and research evidence

(Leading Organization: UTH) from all partner organizations and will soon be developing the Best Practices Guide (Leading Organization: Amimoni). The final step will be to release the Policy Recommendations and Guidelines Report (Leading Organization: IMU).

All the partners from the project are also involved in carrying out some dissemination activities. In this paper I will mention about the IMU's dissemination activities with the collaboration of ANSGA. Between 30th of January 2020 and 25th of June 2020, 20 weeks of infant and parent support and training were carried out. The first 7 weeks of training were held face-to-face and were center-based, but, due to the pandemic, the other weeks of training were conducted online. In total six parents and their young children with MDVI participated in this program and 10 volunteer students* from two universities (IMU and Maltepe University) (from Department of Early Childhood Education and Department of Special Education) were also involved.



Picture 1. The first EI infant-parent support group

The second round of infant and parent support training sessions was held between the 6th of February and the 20th of June with the participation of 14 families. The training lasted for 20 weeks and was also online and there were participants (mostly mothers) from all over Turkey.



Picture 2: The second EI infant-parent support group

On 29th of May 2021, The Early Intervention Services Conference for Little Children with MDVI and Their Families (MDVI-EI Conference 2021) organized by IMU, IMU Child

Education Science, Application and Research Center (CESARC) and ANSGA was held as a dissemination activity of the ErISFaVIA Project. The focus of the conference was Early Intervention Services for young children age between 0-6 with visual impairment and additional disabilities and their families.

MDVI-EI Conference 2021-May 29, 2021

'Dünya parmaklarımın ucunda/The World Right Under My Hands'



At the opening ceremony Emine Ayyıldız, PhD-ErISFaVIA project IMU manager, Handan Gürtekin (ErISFaVIA project ANSGA manager and a parent of a child with MDVI), Darija Udovicic (Mahmuljin-Perkins International Europe & Eurasia Regional Director), Vassilis Argyropoulos, PhD (ErISFaVIA Project main coordinator/THU), Halil İbrahim Sağlam, PhD (The dean of IMU Faculty of Educational Sciences) and Yaşar Bülbül, PhD (Vice Rector of IMU) all spoke.



Picture 3. Opening Ceremony of MDVI-EI Conference 2021

Then a panel session was held called 'Early intervention and early childhood special education services for children with MDVI and their families: From yesterday to today'. The panelists were the parents who received early intervention services 15-18 years ago, and parents who are receiving EI services online supported by the ErISFaVIA project.

After the break, three parallel workshops were conducted for the parents and the professionals as well as university students from the related fields.

Workshop 1: 'Sexual Development and Education for Individuals with MDVI from Infancy to Adulthood'- Özlem Çelik, PhD/Okan University, Faculty of Education, Department of Special Education

Workshop 2: 'Communicating Effectively with Children with Visual Impairment and Additional Disabilities: Methods, Materials'-Special Education Teacher C. Özlem Can/Üsküdar Barbaros Primary School for Special Education

Workshop 3: 'The Use of Music for the Development of Children with MDVI'-Music Teacher Şafak Tunalioğlu, PhD/Üsküdar Türkan Sabancı Secondary School for the Blind, Adjunct lecturer of IMU and Okan University.



Picture 4. Workshop 1

Picture 5. Workshop 2

Picture 6. Workshop 3

Before the closing ceremony there were some discussions about the whole program. Ziver Derin, MA, Psyc./Tibet's mother, gave a speech with the title of 'Looking at the Importance of the Early Years from the Perspective of a Mother who has a Child with MDVI'.

* This conference was organized with the support of the students of 'Community Service Practices' course given by Assist. Prof. Dr. Emine Ayyıldız, forming a part of the Early Childhood Education Program at Istanbul Medeniyet University, and its secretariat is run by the students of this course named below: Afra Hacışerifoğlu, Elif Alkız, Hatice Merve Memiş, Havva Sena Yılmaz, Oğuzhan Ökten, Sümeyranur Aydın, Şevval Kamacı.



Picture 7. Meeting of MDVI-EI Conference 2021 secretariat

Lastly, I would like to share with the readers of ICEVI Europe Newsletter, a poem of a mother of 4 years old child with MDVI. Mrs. Yaylacı was also a parent from the second online EI infant-parent support group.

..Black became my favourite color

Black became my favourite color

I could not see the snow on the mountains

I could not see the branch on the tree

I could not see, I just heard, I just felt

.

Black became my favourite color

I could not see that the green in your eyes is actually the grass on the ground

The brown in your hair, I could not see...

I did not see you my dear, but I could hear, I could feel.

.

Black became my favourite color

They said there is a white light at the end of the road

I could not see, I moved forward on this expatriate pathway

If I were to be right in the middle of the desert because of this

I would say, again;

"Oh world,

I didn't see you, but I heard, I felt.

Şahsine Büşra Yaylacı

Emine Ayyıldız

ICEVI Europe National Representative of Turkey

Report on an Orientation and mobility competition in the School for the Blind, Budapest

By Éva Szemerei and Ágnes Somorjai

The aim of teaching orientation and mobility is to develop safe, independent mobility skills which create opportunities for independent living and full social integration.

Since 2004, the Budapest School for the Blind has been organizing an annual mobility competition for its students in cooperation with the Budapest Police Headquarters and Budapest Transportation Company.

This is the largest such program in our school, approximately 50-60 children take part and 40 adults (colleagues and volunteers) help with the event every year.

From the kindergarten to the end of the 8th grade, our students learn O&M as a school subject for 2 hours a week. The students in the vocational training course have the opportunity to continue their learning, depending on their needs.

We teach in one-to-one sessions, and the lessons are based on an individual, personalized development plan. The goal is to achieve as much independence as possible and develop the ability to move safely and independently.

In addition to the "challenge" nature and excitement of the competition, the annual O&M competition, which is held on the International White Cane Day, also provides an opportunity for students, teachers and parents (parents are invited to the event, they have the opportunity to observe their child), to reflect on what level the student has reached and in what traffic situations they can now perform safely and independently.

In addition, this competition has a further important role in forming and changing attitudes. With 50 visually impaired children moving around the streets of the local area with a white cane, pedestrians can see that a blind child can also be independent, and can get a sample of how best to help people who are blind.

Several radio and TV companies report on the event, and interviews are taken with students and professionals, showing that our school and the visually impaired children can be the focus of interest not on their needs, but on their abilities and their independent performance.

In the theory part of the competition, the knowledge of regular traffic and the basic concepts of orientation and mobility are tested. In the practical part, students have to walk a specific route. Students are given different theoretical and practical tasks at different levels of difficulty corresponding to their knowledge and practical skills.

Pupils have to face street crossings and solve different traffic situations in and around the school area. Older ones get on vehicles in a real traffic situation. Younger competitors must get on and get off from a bus in a parking lot.

Simultaneously, we also organize a play competition for pre-schoolers. They get tasks in the school yard and around the block. WE also offer parents the opportunity to walk the

same route under blindfold or in simulation glasses similar to their child's visual performance.

Most of our children in our kindergarten today have severely multiple disabilities and this particular part of the program is difficult for them to access so we are working on adapting it in future.

Children with CVI: Opportunities and Challenges in Early Intervention



Halka Tytykalová, Raná starostlivosť
(www.ranastarostlivost.sk)



Our story

We are witnessing a fundamental change. More families than ever before are coming to us with children who have vision impairment and additional difficulties. Their number is growing. Many of these children were born prematurely.

Parents who come to us often only know that their child does not see and that this state is related to the brain. They have been told by a doctor that they need to stimulate their child's vision.

Many of these children may behave as though they are totally blind. We observe them staring at a light. Children are concerned about the busy environment. Parents often say that their child responds visually to some stimuli, but not always.

We know from our experience that families with visually impaired children need support as soon as possible.

We feel the urgency of the situation, and, therefore, we have begun to look intensively for ways to help children with CVI and their parents. We see the solution in a thorough diagnosis of the child's visual behavior and targeted aftercare.

Who we are



At Raná starostlivosť, n.o., we specialize in early intervention in families with children with visual impairment and multiple disabilities under the age of seven.

The early intervention service is a family-centered service. It covers social prevention activities, counseling, social rehabilitation, comprehensive support for the child's development, and community rehabilitation. We provide services mainly in the family's own household.

Our internal team

Our internal team comprises a specialist in counseling (social law), psychologists, special education teachers and a Physical therapist.

We focus on activities including:

- supporting the family in gathering information about the child's diagnosis,
- support for parental competencies,
- providing information on the specifics of the child's observed reactions,
- supporting the family in identifying functional needs,
- helping the family to set up a stimulating environment for the child,
- **supporting active participation of the child in the daily routines of the family.**

Our challenges

We aim to:

1. Recognize as soon as possible the specific visual and behavioral characteristics of children with CVI.
2. Provide targeted intervention.
3. Find or create collaborative teams of experts – including both internal and external collaborators.
4. Develop a partnership with the family and create the Individualized family plan (IFP).
5. Encourage the family to realize its goals and the child to stay active and at the same time develop its vision.
6. Create a support group for parents.
7. Share our experience with other child care providers with CVI.

We currently work with approximately 25 families with children with CVI - some as part of an early intervention service, others through an educational or a support group for parents.

We most often work with children in I. or II. phase CVI.

Often these are children with complex needs, movement, and communication issues.

Sometimes CVI coexists with ocular forms of visual impairment.

When planning an intervention with the family, we use the functional vision assessment *The CVI Range* (Roman-Lantzy, 2007; rev. 2018).

- ✓ It allows the assessment of the youngest children, including children with multiple disabilities.
- ✓ It emphasizes the importance of information from parents (from their observation of the child).
- ✓ Targeted intervention is part of daily routines to support the active participation of the child.
- ✓ The information obtained from the CVI Range and the CVI Progress Chart can be directly applied to the development of goals.
- ✓ It is easy to share results in teams (including families).

However, we also use other options, for example, using the pediatric tests Lea symbols. We also get useful information from projects TEACHCVI, CVI Scotland, and so on.

Our young friends – two examples

1. Dominika

The goal of our intervention is to integrate vision into functioning. We adjust the conditions to Dominika to succeed and respect that she cannot functionally use the vision continuously.

Our team: parents, a key worker and specialist in Video interactions guidance, special education teacher for visually impaired children, Physical Therapist, psychologist (Routine based interview - RBI), the teacher for visually impaired children in kindergarten (an external worker).

Examples of recommendations for IFP:

Play/Floor Time

We will prepare a one-color carpet for Dominika. We place it by a one-color wall.

Dominika is actively discovering items using the Pegboard book (can be borrowed or made).

Meal Time

We use a one-color plate or placemat.

We smell the food before we touch it.

We will reduce the number of other stimuli.

Bed Time - Reading Book

First, we tell a part of the story (for example, about a propeller from an adapted book). Then we look at the photos (encourage Dominika verbally, give her enough time to process the visual perception). Then praise Dominika and talk about what she saw.

Limit sensory input at bedtime (no music, no toys).

What Dominika's mother says:

"The findings from the functional vision assessment were especially useful for me. We found out what is difficult for Dominika and what environments do not allow her to use vision."

What Miroslava (key worker and a specialist in Video interactions guidance) says

"I have seen in my family that when a parent or I try to attract a child's attention we often do not meet each other in this situation. CVI Range helped us in modifying the environment, objects, and toys that Dominika uses. Also, to understand better what helps Dominika - for example, movement, light or color preference. We linked this to interaction support through Video interactions guidance. The physiotherapist has found a way to make it easier for Dominika to move."



The combination of support via VTG and CVI Range and further support helps Dominika perceive the stimuli from the environment more and get involved in everyday events."

2. Jakub

For Jakub, vision is the most important sense through which he explores the world. Other senses continue to play an important role compared to children without visual impairment. Jakub is visually curious in a familiar environment. The challenge is to enable him to engage with 2D images and the use of symbols. We support Jakub in comparative thought and getting to know new objects with the help of Salient Features.

Our team: parents, a key worker and specialist in Video interactions guidance (in training), special education teacher for visually impaired children, Physical Therapist, psychologist (Routine based interview - RBI), the teacher for visually impaired children in kindergarten, and special education teacher (external workers).

Examples from IFP

Play/Floor Time

Goal: to support independent choice

Strategy: At least once during the day, we will integrate the Play/Floor Time according to Jakub's own choice.

Based on what they see and hear from Jakub, the parents describe and develop the play's theme so that Jakub can continue and develop it.

We adjust the environment - we store toys in one-color boxes, containers, we reduce the sounds from the surroundings.

Dressing

Goal: Jakub is more active in dressing

Strategy: Mom marks the place where briefs, socks, pajamas are stored - a combination of color mylar foil and photos of the type of clothes that are inside. In the morning, Jakub and his mother choose what to wear from the marked drawers. Mom helps only when Jakub needs it.

Jakub helps to store the clothes in the drawers ("These are my socks, briefs/These are father's"). For Jakub to recognize the front and back of the T-shirt and pants, his mother marks the back of the clothes with a deep colored dot on a black background.

What Jakub's mother says:

"The functional vision assessment helped me to clarify my observations of how Jakub uses vision and, most importantly, how to help him. With our special education teacher, physiotherapist, speech therapist, and kindergarten teacher, we were able to modify some of the activities.

We realized the difficulty with the complexity - we started using simpler images on a monochrome background. We use a tablet - backlighting helps Jakub to use his vision. We recognize visual salient features. We are not doing well yet, we use little comparative language, but we are making progress.

We use a blackboard on the wall for difficulties with perception in the lower part of the visual field.

I better understand that Jakub's loss of concentration in a busy environment is not his decision. I try to be more understanding and patient."



What did Andrea (key worker and a specialist in Video interactions guidance in training) says:

"The most useful for me was understanding how to support the vision and learning of a child with CVI, which is in II. to III. phase. Also, that it is important to support the vision and build a visual vocabulary. And working with images through salient features, too. It was also helpful to realize how to work with images."

Our first experience: The most difficult challenges for parents

- Adapting the environment (not to be too complex).
- Positioning the child so that he/she can, for example, engage vision and reach a spoon while eating.
- Requiring the active involvement of the child.
- Providing sufficient time for the active involvement of the child.
- Respecting the difficulties of engaging the vision and at the same time hearing or touching.
- The need for a gradual transition from 3D to 2D.
- Confusion of Visual Fatigue with: "Not interested."
- Understanding the difficulties with new visual targets.

- Understanding the need for predictability and routine - use of Calendar systems to build context, memory, and expectation to support perception and understanding.
- Respecting the specifics of independent movement. The child moves at home with confidence, but on the street or in a busy environment he/she stops using his/hervvision.

How did the parents changes have parents noticed? (some examples)

Parents say:

"My son is more perceptive. He registers me when I come to him."

"My daughter is more engaged with coloring books. She doesn't look so hard at the window anymore."

"The son started watching the movement of the toy car on the tablet. He started catching some objects."

"My daughter no longer needs a lighted spoon to find it with her eyes."

"She grabs its hand even though the spoon is yellow (no light)."

"The son is more attentive; he doesn't sleep so much during the day. He looks nicely at the stars on the app when he uses CVI Den. His father made this aid for him."

"Our son is in the Little room watching his favorite ball. He catches the mylar foil with his hands."

"The daughter feels safer, and she is happier when we offer her an available visual stimulus during physiotherapy."

"The son is happier when we offer him Light Aide or a slinky with lighting during tummy time."

Photos – RANA STAROSTLIVOST

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Reimagining the abacus: the indispensable computing device and the computing brain

By Tsao, Pei-Ling, President of the British Abacus Association

The abacus is generally regarded by some special educators as the best all-around computing device available to students with visual impairments in East Asia and the United States. It has been used widely in their education systems. Meanwhile, the current evidence shows the abacus training may be applicable in both educational and clinical settings to benefit persons who are visually impaired, persons with different types of disability and the elderly with or without cognitive impairment.

We visited the Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles (INJA) and the IMPRO Valentin HAUY, Association Valentin Haüy (AVH) (Avec les aveugles et les malvoyants) in 2019 and there discovered no abacus training was available in either institute. The visits however, led us to seek the brain science behind this learning. Abacus learning is not just limited to numeracy but is also founded on the coordination and interrelationship of the brain and the hands in what is referred to as the abacus-based mental calculation (AMC). The AMC is shaped by computing the abacus, students have an imaginary abacus in mind to perform fast and accurate calculations without physical abacus with appropriate instruction. Furthermore, the coordination and interrelationship may also be the key to benefit persons with disabilities. Previous studies indicate that the abacus training can induce specific changes in the brain. It also may improve executive functions, working memory and intelligence quotient (IQ).

“The abacus is the best computing device for students with visual impairments to learn arithmetic” Dr. Lin, Ching-Jen said, the Director of the Center of Education and Rehabilitation for the Visually Impaired, National University of Tainan in Taiwan. The abacus is the indispensable computing device for the students with visual impairments, a wide range of mathematical topics can be computed by the abacus, not only arithmetic but square roots, *factorization*, calculation of time.....etc.



An advanced level student computes the abacus.

A variety of abacuses and instructional methods were taught in East Asia and the United States. Those methods have not been discussed thoroughly and there is a dearth of studies regarding the AMC ability of students who are visually impaired. To collect more data for research, we visited Taiwan, one of the regions in East Asia where is the global hub of the abacus with a long-standing history. [Our report](#) presents the insights from organizations and experts with a pilot test in Taiwan. It covers an abacus training workshop implemented by the Center of Education and Rehabilitation for the Visually Impaired, National University of Tainan (NUTN), a visit to the abacus group class in the Taipei Parents' Association for the Visually Impaired (PAVI), the abacus experts' insights from the Taiwan Chamber of Commerce (TCOC) and the short-term abacus teaching to a diversity of people with disability in the An Kang - the centre for persons with disabilities.

A variety of abacuses and instructional methods, and the abacus' application across the range of the disability will also be discussed with the experts. Additionally, [a pilot test](#) verified that students with visual impairments may acquire both abacus and AMC abilities through distance learning coupled with appropriate instruction. After learning physical abacus, students with visual impairments could use touch to get a sense of space to acquire the AMC skill. Mathematics can be a roadblock for those students, the AMC ability could unlock the potential of computing brain as a lifelong skill.

Special thanks for the advice from Ms. Marie-Renée HECTOR, the Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP), Mr. Joe FitzPatrick and Ms. Sue Parsons at Dundee and Angus College. There will be a set of new abacus learning resources available in Europe for educators and students in the future through an innovative solution and digital transformation.

We are conducting [the survey](#) of the current teaching aids of teaching arithmetic to students with visual impairments and the implementation of abacus instruction in Europe. Your responses will help us to explore the answers.

UK Specialist VI Curriculum Framework (SVICF) Project Update (Nov. 21)

One year in and we are getting closer to the creation of a UK wide unified framework for Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment (CYPVI).

This joint project between Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), The professional association of the Vision Impairment Education Workforce (VIEW), Vision Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR) at University of Birmingham, and Thomas Pocklington Trust (TPT), aims to establish a UK wide specialist VI framework for children and young people with vision impairment (VI).

The new framework will clarify and define the elements of specialist skill development, interventions and best practice support that are essential for children and young people with vision impairment. The 2-year project, funded by RNIB, is now entering the final stage of the consultation with key organisations across the UK to confirm and finalise the key outcome areas, draw together case studies as well as finalise the name of the framework itself.

The VI Curriculum Framework will be accompanied by the development of an online resource hub to support the sharing of professional resources used by Qualified Teachers of children with Vision Impairment (QTVIs) and Habilitation Specialists across the sector.

With the framework due to be finalised early in 2022 a further update and article providing more details will follow, including the work that will come next to embed the framework into best practice across VI education in the UK.

Blended Learning Approaches in Erasmus+ Projects



Because of covid-19, many learning events across the world over the last two years took place online and we have come to realise that a combination of both online and face-to-face learning offers many opportunities for learners to reflect and learn in depth at their own pace. It seems that this blended approach combining the best elements of online and face-to-face learning will become the prevailing model in the future of learning and teaching

We had the opportunity to adopt this learning model in the Erasmus+ project, entitled "**ErISFaVIA (Early Intervention Services for Families with Children with Vision Impairment and Additional Disabilities)-2019-1-EL01-KA201-062886**". This 3-year project was approved by the Erasmus+ Programme (Key Action 2), commenced its activities on the 1st of September 2019 and the project consortium consists of 10 organizations from six countries; that is, University of Thessaly-UTH (coordinating organization)/Greece, University Babes-Bolyai-BBU/Romania, Istanbul Medeniyet University-IMU/Turkey, Liceul Special pentru Deficienti de Vedere/Romania, St. Barnabas School for the Blind/Cyprus), Amimoni/Greece, Syzoi/Greece, Ayse Nurtac Sozbir Gunebakan-ANSGA/Turkey, Blindeninstitut Munchen/Germany, and Mali dom/Croatia.

The main objective of this project was on developing early intervention programs (i.e. best practices, different early intervention models, enhancing professionals' skills and providing support for families and children with vision impairment and additional disabilities).

The training events were organized using a blended structure: the first phase started with online workshops and the second phase was delivered through a face-to-face training event which took place in two early intervention centers (i. e. Blindeninstitut Munchen/Germany, and Mali dom/Croatia).

The program for the online (distant) learning events was organized as follows:

Phase 1: on-line training events

Dates	Workshops
February 19, 2021	No1, Mali dom,
February 26, 2021	No2, Blindeninstitut
March 4, 2021	No3, Mali dom
March 12, 2021	No4, Blindeninstitut
May 14, 2021	No5, Mali dom
May 21, 2021	No6, Blindeninstitut

WORKSHOP 1



“Motor Learning Strategies for Children with Visual Impairments and Additional Conditions”

Date: February 19, 2021

Timetable	Topic	Trainers
10.00 – 11.00	Quantity and quality of stimulation in motor learning of MDVI children from 0-3	It will be combination of theory and video analysis by: Jelena Špionjak, Master of Physiotherapy (MPhty) Jasminka Gagula, Master of Physiotherapy (MPhty)
11.00 – 11.30	Break	
11.30 – 12.30	Observing, recognizing and combining developmental skills of MDVI child age 0-3	

WORKSHOP 2



“Promoting Vision Part I: Functional Vision Assessment Essential Elements in Early Intervention - a video case study”

Date: February 26, 2021

Timetable	Topic	Trainers
10.00 – 12.00	Functional Vision Assessment for Children with Visual Impairments and Additional Conditions	Petral Rösl, Psychologist and Andrea Meisinger, Orthoptist
12.00-13.00	Break	
13.00 – 14.00/14.30	Early Intervention in concrete terms: Video case study of a child with visual impairments and additional conditions	Simone Prantl, Psychologist and Elisabeth Hahnreich, Early Interventionist

WORKSHOP 3



"Components of Individual Support Model, Creating Goals and Creating Functional Activities"

Date: March 4, 2021

Timetable	Topic	Trainers
10.00 – 11.00	Individual Family Service Plan and it's components Individual Education Plan and it's components Functional goals	It will be combination of theory and video analysis by: Marijana Konkoli Zdešić, Spec, Ed,, EI specialist Martina Celizic , Spec. Ed.Teacher
11.00 – 11.30	Break	
11.30 – 12.30	Workshop – Video analysis and defining goals and objectives Creating goal oriented activities Implementation of goals and objectives in context of everyday routines	

WORKSHOP 4



"Promoting Early Communication

Promoting Vision II: Interventions, Strategies and Considerations"

Date: March 12, 2021

Timetable	Topic	Trainers
10.00 – 12.00	Promoting Early Communication and Language Development	Sylvia Lechner-Pires, Psychologist
12.00-13.00	Break	
13.00 – 14.00/14.30	Promoting Vision: Interventions, Strategies, and Considerations	Simone Prantl, Psychologist

WORKSHOP 5



“Building Professional Capacity to Strengthen Parent/ Professional Relationships in Early Intervention”

Date: May 14, 2021

Timetable	Topic	Trainers
10.00 – 11.00	Role of expert in Early childhood intervention - professional development	It will be combination of theory and video analysis by: Ana Validžić Požgaj, Spec, Ed, EI specialist Marijana Konkoli Zdešić, Spec, Ed, EI specialist
11.00 – 11.30	Break	
11.30 – 12.30	Development of Team in Early Childhood Intervention	

WORKSHOP 6



“Promoting Early Communication
Promoting Vision II: Interventions, Strategies and Considerations”

Date: May 21, 2021

Timetable	Topic	Trainers
10.00 – 12.00	The importance of vision for early childhood development	Simone Prantl, Psychologist Sylvia Lechner-Pires, Psychologist
12.00-13.00	Break	
13.00 – 14.00/14.30	Early childhood development of blind children	Simone Prantl, Psychologist

Phase 2: Face-to-face training events

The two on-site learning events took place in Blindeninstitut München/Germany, and Mali dom/Croatia, respectively. The first event took place from the **4th of October to the 7th of October** 2021, in Blindeninstitut München and the second training event took place in Mali dom from **the 8th of November to the 12th of November**.

The trainees participated in many workshops and had the chance to become familiarized with the structure of the training centers as well as with their early intervention programs.

The main thematic areas which were discussed throughout the two training events were:

The logo consists of a stylized blue eye with a white pupil and a black outline, set within a white circle. Below the eye, the text "anders sehen" is written in a blue, sans-serif font, and "Blindeninstitutsstiftung" is written below that in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font.
"Developments in the cooperation with parents in early intervention for blind and visually impaired children",
Workshop: „Holistic view of the eating situation for children with special needs – How can we make a difference between „just a meal“ and a „joyful dinner for queens and kings“, Case studies regarding early intervention programs: Supervision and reflections“, „Brainstorming and video analyses“

The logo features a stylized blue house with a green eye in the center of its roof. Below the house, the text "mali dom" is written in a green, sans-serif font.
"Observation of assessment (streaming)", "Early intervention organizational model at Mali dom-Zagreb", "Experience groups", "Partnerships with families", "Team around child", Case studies", IO5 Reflective logs", "The Halliwick concept of swimming in early intervention", "Collaboration with Croatian institute for brain research"

Finally,

Both the face-to-face training events were intensive and all the trainees managed to reflect on their experience and on their own case studies recalling their acquired knowledge from the online workshops and the training material (intellectual output 3 of the ErisFavia project).

In total the training/learning phase started on the 19th of February 2021 and integrated its activities on the 12th of November. The challenge was huge but the will of the trainers and trainees was strong and everything ended up with a great success and big smiles.

Brief Report of French speaking ICEVI-Europe Conference on Visual Impairment and Inclusive Education

By: Nathalie Lewi-Dumont, INSHEA

On May 10 and 11th, 2021, the Higher Institute for Training and Research on Special Needs Education (INSHEA) located in Suresnes, near Paris, together with ICEVI-Europe and Inja (National Institute for the Blind, Paris) organized a two-day conference at INSHEA, taking place as an ICEVI-Europe French speaking conference:

“Visual impairment and inclusive education: What’s new? Learning from all senses”.

Around 70 people, which was the maximum allowed due to the pandemic, attended this face-to-face conference -mainly teachers, but also researchers, parents, transcribers, other professionals and students. They mainly came from all around France, and a few from Belgium. People from Switzerland had trouble traveling at that time. Two speakers from Toulouse had to give their lecture on Zoom. The two days combined plenary sessions, workshops and exhibitions. As this authorized event took place just when the Covid 19 situation was still severe, all the sanitary measures were strictly respected: mandatory masks, safe distance, flow directions, regular cleaning, use of hydro-alcoholic gel. Although, during the workshops, participants touched some materials, fortunately, nobody got sick after the event. It was the only conference INSHEA organized during that academic year and participants, although coffee breaks and eating inside were not permitted, were really happy to get together.

Researchers as well as practitioners presented their work and shared experiences.

Although two presentations were specifically about partial vision (use of Adobe and characteristics of the new Luciole Font for partially sighted people), most presentations dealt with profound visual impairment or blindness

Many presentations focused on braille (e.g. Adaptation in French of the braille method I-M-ABLE and presentation of a braille curriculum by Raphaëlle Bertrand and Valérie Melloul (from Lausanne, Switzerland) ; research on braille users from different generations by Nathalie Lewi-Dumont and her colleagues from INSHEA; the braille teachers from Inja presented the way they taught braille in this school and how they introduced ICT. We had also a presentation on different ways of using the body before teaching braille to young learners by Marc Angelier and Marie Oddoux, a TVI and occupational therapist in a peripatetic service in Grenoble.

A second theme was adaptation in arts, with a presentation of a participative Design by Sophie Blain (Les Doigts qui Rêvent, Dreaming fingers Publisher), adaptation in 3D by Alexandre Ilic from Inja and Caroline Treffé, a former secondary teacher at Inja who now is a teacher trainer at INSHEA. Together with her colleague Florence Bernard, they decided to adapt pedagogical material for History and Art lessons in inclusive settings, using raised images and audio illustration, to facilitate learning for students with VI. This material will be downloadable on the INSHEA website from 2021-2022. Gabrielle Sauvillers met great success with her "tactile interpretations" of famous art works you can see here:

<https://www.facebook.com/interpretationstactiles/photos/pcb.1963768917123074/1963767243789908/?type=3&theater>

The third theme was specific access to books: two doctoral students presented their work on access to books for children with VI, raised pictures (Carolane Masclé) and audio books (Julie Mulet). The publisher Mes mains en or (My golden hands, in English) presented their research project about an accessible digital book for young children. In a workshop, Pilar Rodriguez, the mother of a young blind boy, explained how she conceived a beautiful tactile and audio book so that her son, like his schoolmates could have a souvenir of his preschool class activities.

<https://hizy.org/fr/fabliflife/album-souvenirs-multi-sensoriel>

Almost all the adaptations use both touch and sound, and the role of language is always very important in the interaction. All the people in the audience were convinced that it is a right for all people with disabilities to have access to art and literature. In the same state of mind, Laetitia Dumont-Lewi, assistant professor in Lyon, explained how she trains her performing art Masters students to audiodescription, and how, when the students describe for adults or children, it improves the inclusive sensitivity of the sighted audience.

On the third day, Marc Angelier and Marie Oddoux, who are now representatives of the Lego foundation for the pedagogical use of Lego braille bricks, proposed a workshop on this matter. It was the first time during that year 2020-2021 they could do it face to face.

In 2022, this French speaking day will take place at INSHEA on Friday, June 10th, about access to culture. You can write to Nathalie Lewi-Dumont (nathalielewi@gmail.com) if you need more information.