

ICEVI European Newsletter
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Preface

On September 14th and 15th the Board of ICEVI-Europe gathered as formal board members for the first time. As you probably know ICEVI-Europe has had formal status as an association since the beginning of 2007. The ONCE in Sevilla was a hospitable host.

In the meeting, board members discussed ICEVI and Inclusive Education in Europe.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find an article about this. The board hopes to stimulate debate about Inclusive Education.

At the board meeting in March 2008 the theme will be on the agenda again in the expectation that the article has been an invitation for reactions and discussions.

The Target Group of ICEVI was also a subject for discussion.

As we know ICEVI originally was concerned with the education of children with visual impairment.

Many developments since, ask for further reflection.

Discussion within the board led to the conclusion that ICEVI should stand for International Council for the Rehabilitation and Education of People with Visual Impairment.

This means an association of professionals and professional organisations in the field of rehabilitation and education of people with visual impairments. Therefore an organisation which also aims to work for adults and elderly people, who need professional support.

The chairman will also introduce this theme within the EXCO of ICEVI-World.

Elsewhere in the newsletter you will find further information about the ICEVI-Europe conference 2009 in Dublin.

The Board accepted the proposals of the Programme Committee.

Those who are interested, please contact www.icevidublin2009.org

The website will also inform you about the European Conference on Early Intervention, which will take place on August 27th – 29th 2008 in Budapest.

Before the end of the year ICEVI-Europe will have a new flyer and their first Brochure.

These were some items from the board.

I wish you all happy holidays and a successful 2008.

Hans Welling, Chairman



ICEVI and inclusive education in Europe

Inclusive education

Inclusive education¹ is the overall goal in all international declarations² on the education of visually impaired students. We see this as a positive development. The purpose of this paper is to outline some important issues in the process of implementation of inclusive education for students with visually impairment.

This is essential, because many countries already have a lot of experience in this developmental process. Many of the difficulties and dangers along the path are thereby already known. This paper wants to help authorities and professionals not to make the same mistakes as others have done.

First it is important to state that inclusive education is not a question of physical integration. By being in the classroom, the student does not automatically become part of the social life of the peer group. The implementation of inclusive education is an overall cultural educational change that involves all levels in the school system: The way the teachers think of education, pedagogical praxis, learning theory and the view of human nature.

Inclusive education is somehow more demanding and challenging than education at a special school. Inclusive education demands special pedagogical knowledge and assistive technology skills, besides requiring a high degree of competency within school strategies on inclusive education.

Inclusive education cannot be restricted only to the years a student stays in school, but it must also be seen from a lifelong perspective. It is not positive to be included during the school years only if you are excluded from further education, work and social life later on.

The parents

The decision on where the child should be educated is primarily made by parents. But parents should be equally advised about the regular mainstream school system as well as the special school system or the **resource centre**. Parents have the right to the choice which is not dependent on any costs. The

¹ Definition:

Integration is mainly a physical process where the visually impaired student is educated in the unchanged regular mainstream school system.

Inclusive education is the process whereby the visually impaired student also becomes a part of the social life of the peer group. To fulfill this, the inclusive school must change it's pedagogical praxis to meet the needs of the student.

² For example the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (2004) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

decision for special schooling may in some thinly populated areas implicate that the child must move to a boarding school, or the parents must accept a special school for children with other disabilities.

Special and main stream education

The relationship between special educational systems and mainstream educational system with it's support system must not be regarded as a contradiction. Both school types should be cooperative and complementary within the field of activities for the same target group. The borders can be flexible and an exchange of information is necessary. At the same time it is important to state that the decision on the right environment for education can differ over the years. In some countries children start at a special school, where they learn basic mobility and Braille skills and then continue their education in regular mainstream school. In other countries students go to frequent courses at the special school or a resource centre. They can even take the whole part of their training (complete courses) in the special system, for example on the vocational training level. The important thing is the shift from one system to another must not be seen as a personal failure. The introduction to both the regular and special school system must be considered as a whole.

The extent of these systems may change from country to country. The numbers of students in inclusive education in Europe varies a lot. The percentage of students in inclusive education is not a goal in itself. The goal must be an educational system having professionals qualified to meet the students' needs and the parents' wishes.

Professional qualifications

The guarantee of trained professionals along with the documented result of these different types of educational praxis, must be the factors, that the sets goals for educational praxis. We therefore outline the following points:

- There is a need for centrally produced information materials that define what inclusive education is in each country. This paper must also clearly describe the responsibilities of the student, parents, teachers, headmaster, local school authorities, the resource centre and ministry of education.
- There must also be national research based material that documents the lifelong result of special services and mainstream education. This would give the parents a foundation for choosing educational system for their child. The decision as to where a child goes must always be taken by professionals and parents in cooperation, not by administrators.
- Knowledge on how to conduct inclusive education must be present at all levels at the local school. In addition, special knowledge on the education of

visually impaired students must be at hand. If the knowledge on the ground is not sufficient, access to further centralised specialist knowledge must be available from resource centres.

- The construction of such a knowledge and recourse system must not be financed by local authorities, but centrally. The education of teachers and pedagogues and the access to knowledge is in the responsibility of central/governmental authorities. It is also their task to ensure that adequate and qualified training of local teachers is available without cost to local school authorities.
- In the same way, technical aids, special teaching materials of a high standard, such as books, must be available from a central resource and production centre. These services must come without any costs to the individual or the local school authorities.

The visually impaired student, who is included in regular schools, should never be in a worse position, than the student at a special school. This is important in such aspects as the special pedagogical competence of the teachers and the quality and variety of assessable educational material and technical aids.

The quality of social interaction is also very important. The local educational system must ensure that the visually impaired student does not experience social exclusion. To prevent this, access to knowledge on how to develop social inclusive strategies is just as important as the educational resources.

If a government is unable to ensure these professional demands the promotion of inclusive education should be reconsidered and new ways of supporting should be found.

In some countries we have observed, that despite the wish to include students and the presence of the above mentioned resources, the educational system seems to become exclusive. A close analysis of the general inclusive conditions is therefore important.

National legislation should therefore:

- provide possibilities instead of limitations
- ensure continuity and coherence
- promote cross-sector responsibility and cost-sharing.

The latter is important to avoid a compartmentalised approach where individual institutions and administrations promote their own interests over those of the individual, in the distribution of funding and services.

On behalf of ICEVI Europe

Peter Rodney and Karsten Hohler
<http://www.icevi-europe.org>

Looking for RoboBraille partners

Dear all

As we are nearing the successful conclusion of the first pan-European RoboBraille project which is financially supported by the European Commission, we are looking for partners to participate in a subsequent project. In the first project, we have participants from Cyprus, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Denmark. Synscenter Refsnæs (www.refснаes.dk) is the lead partner and project coordinator, and will remain so in the subsequent project.

Although we welcome applications from all EU member states, EU candidate countries and EFTA/EEA countries, we are especially keen on partners from the following countries/regions:

- Spain
- France
- Germany
- Austria
- The Baltic Countries
- The Nordic Countries

As a RoboBraille partner, you will work on adapting the RoboBraille service to meet the needs of print impaired people (visually impaired, dyslexic, poor readers) in your country as well as on validating RoboBraille in a technical, cultural and commercial context. You will be expected to allocate and fund resources in the order of one full-time staff for the duration of the project (estimated to some 24-36 months), whereas the project is expected to cover all cash-costs (travel, hardware, software, conference participation, dissemination activities, etc) that you may incur.

We expect to submit an application under the newly created ICT Policy Support Programme (PSP) as a Type B project under the Efficient and interoperable eGovernment services Theme. The first deadline for submitting applications is October 23, 2007 with a tentative project commencement date the first quarter of 2008. You can find more information about ICT PSP at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/ict_psp/index_en.htm

Please let me know if you are interested in participating in a RoboBraille project or if you have questions about the proposed project or the RoboBraille service.

Best regards

Lars Ballieu Christensen
RoboBraille Co-ordinator

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RoboBraille

The RoboBraille service is an email-based service capable of translating documents into either synthetic speech or contracted Braille. The service is available free of charge to all non-commercial users and no registration is required.

RoboBraille attempts to solve a universal problem as it makes textual information accessible to people who would otherwise find it inaccessible due to visual impairments or reading difficulties. Originally a Danish service, a pan-European consortium is currently validating RoboBraille in Cyprus, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom with financial support from the European Commission.

The Danish part of RoboBraille has been available since 2004; In January 2007, support for British English, Italian, Portuguese and Greek was added to the service. In June 2007, support for French and Lithuanian added.

For more information about RoboBraille and how to use the service, please visit www.robobraille.org.

Dr Lars Ballieu Christensen, RoboBraille Co-ordinator

Several months after the 3rd ICEVI Balkan Conference

The readers of the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment *European Newsletter* (electronic version) Issue 33, Volume 13 number 1, March 2007 (pg. 9-17) have had the opportunity to read the article "The third Balkan conference - Transition of education and rehabilitation - new possibilities". From this they can learn more about the programme and the conclusions of the 3rd ICEVI Balkan Conference, which took place in Belgrade, Serbia, from September 30th to October 2nd 2006.

Figure 1: Opening session 3rd Balkan Conference



The programme of the conference and the high quality presentations of the participants, enabled dynamic presentations of practical and research experiences in the creation and the realization of new opportunities in special education and rehabilitation, not only of visually impaired persons with special educational needs, but also of all other persons with bio-psycho-social disorders or impairments. Many readers will certainly ask themselves what is happening now in this area? What are the real effects of this conference. Those who are more sensitive may put the question: Did the conference really bring a new light into the lives of visually impaired persons? The right questions, aren't they? Their ideological creator is Mr Hans Welling, the president of ICEVI Europe, an active participant of the Programme Council and of the conference itself. We will try to describe the situation regarding the key issues in special education and the rehabilitation of visually impaired persons in the South-East European region, half a year after the international exchange of knowledge and experience at the conference in Belgrade. The established new and the re-established old contacts made between the special educators and other specialists from the very different institutions dealing with special education and the rehabilitation of visually impaired persons are now traced more safely in the coordinates of the Balkans and Europe, as well as of the other continents. The exchange of information among the faculties of special education and rehabilitation and other faculties regarding teaching programmes, projects, conferences and seminars, work on master and doctoral dissertations etc. has been further encouraged. The exchange of teaching staff in the realisation of some special education and rehabilitation areas has been intensified as well. For example, at the Faculty for special education and rehabilitation in Tuzla, (BiH), seven teachers from the Faculty for special education and rehabilitation in Belgrade teach a significant number of subjects. The exchange of teachers and the mutual visits of students of the faculties from more Balkan countries (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, RS&MHF BiH) have a great importance in the development of research progeny. Seminars and workshops in resource centres and special schools are followed, particularly in the areas of work with visually impaired children with multiple disabilities. So, for example, in Sofia and Varna, with the help of Perkins School for the Blind and on the initiative of Mr Petar Petrov, Mr Vladimir Radulov and Mr Denis Lolly, an international seminar was held, which was dedicated to this problem and whose active participants were also teachers and co-workers of the faculty for special education and rehabilitation from Belgrade, teachers from the school for visually impaired children "Veljko Ramadanović" from Belgrade, and teachers from the school "Milan Petrović" from Novi Sad. This was preceded by the visit of Mr Lolly, who frequently participates in ICEVI conferences, to almost all institutions in Serbia dealing with the education and rehabilitation of visually impaired children with multiple disabilities. The participants from Serbia were particularly motivated to participate at the Seminar on programmes and methods of work with visually impaired children who have multiple disabilities. The high representative of ICEVI

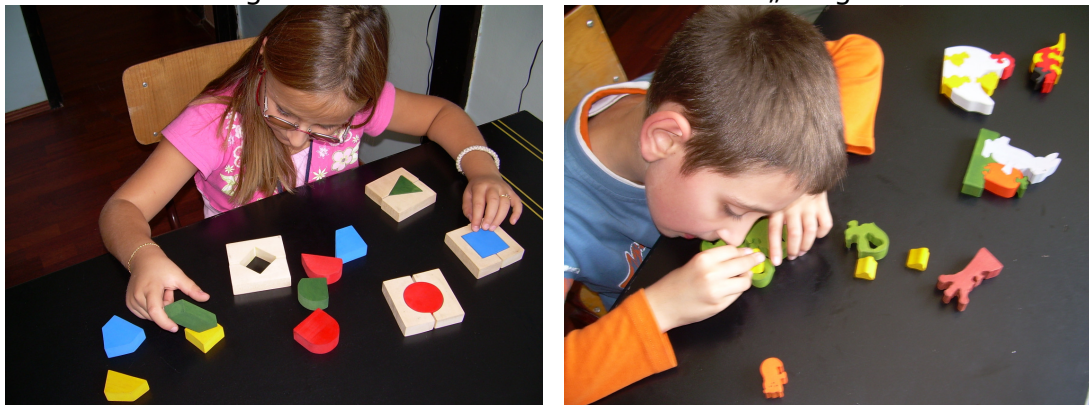
Herman Gresnigt emphasized at the plenary session of the 3rd ICEVI Balkan Conference that the education and the rehabilitation of these persons is one of the five most important directions for development at the beginning of this century, in accordance with the conclusions which were adopted at the ICEVI European Conference Krakow 2005, under the slogan "Visions and strategies in the new century".

Since the subjects of the plenary sessions, round table and parallel sessions, according to the opinion of the 3rd ICEVI Balkan Conference Programme Committee, have a very significant place in the areas of special education and rehabilitation, we will try to describe actual happenings in Serbia and in the other South-East European countries, in this context.

As far as the achievements in the development of special education and rehabilitation in the Balkans are concerned, it is evident that the creation of a flexible educational network and the opening of the society for the needs of visually impaired persons represent a common denominator. The tracing of this road also requires close cooperation in the relationship between family-school-society. Competent ministries and schools for visually impaired children are launching a project to set up an association of these children's parents. The first seminars for their education are prepared, and aim for a better understanding of the implications of visual impairment; and the mastery of skills in the stimulation of perceptive and cognitive functions, particularly in the early stages. In Novi Sad, Serbia, an interactive educational network has been created, which implies a wide accessibility, both for the needs of visually impaired persons and their families.

The reorganization of the educational system for visually impaired children puts in the foreground the need for improvement in the pedagogical approaches to these subjects. The aim is that the quality of this approach be generally accepted in the work with children without visual impairment as well. The role of ICEVI in developing these strategies is extremely important. So, for example, in May 2007 in Bratislava, Slovakia, the representatives of the Balkan countries participated at the 5th workshop for special educators working with visually impaired persons, organized by ICEVI Europe. The mastery of programmes and methods putting visually impaired children into the situation of active learning ensures a safe way to a child-centred school. The main tasks of the teaching process with these children must be correction work on overcoming possible developmental deficits. This work is being realized within the special pedagogic correction work, and unfortunately, it still receives little attention in ordinary subject teaching. This teaching must also be correctively prepared and should contribute to the overcoming of difficulties in the development of students with visual deprivation.

Figure 2: Visual training in the School for Vision Protection „Dragan Kovačević” Belgrade



As far as the pedagogical, medical and social aspects of visual impairment are concerned, it is necessary to improve the exchange of information among the experts for each area. It is necessary to modernise the work of expert teams and categorisation commissions in Serbia, in order to discover the real functional abilities and problems of visually impaired persons in the teaching process, at work, in the performing of daily living activities. We hope that the transformation of schools for visually impaired children and the implementation of special education into mainstream schools, as well as the opening of new stationary or mobile rehabilitation centres will quicken and improve this process, which represents the basis for individual development programmes. The appropriate legislation is expected to be adopted in Serbia, which should coordinate this network. We hope that this activity will be included in the rebalance of the budget, not only in Serbia, but also in the other Balkan countries having similar problems. We receive information on positive examples in this area from Greece, Cyprus, Slovenia and Croatia.

The programme of opening schools and all society to persons with developmental disorders is one of mainstreaming issues in the public media. At seminars, in professional journals and public magazines, radio and TV broadcasts, on websites, we inform ourselves on spreading out alternative opportunities for children with visual impairment throughout Serbia. Special educators and rehabilitators often put questions about how to solve some problems concerning individual work with visually impaired children, particularly on the early and pre-school stage. They are ready to attend seminars and workshops related to it at the Faculty for special education and rehabilitation at the University in Belgrade. It is a favourable circumstance that we now work at the Faculty according to the new curriculum in accordance with the Bologna declaration i.e. the European system of exchange of points in higher education. We also expect the help of colleagues from other universities in the realization of the teaching subject "Corrective and pedagogical work in mainstream schools".

It seems that the words of Mr Hans Welling at the plenary session of the Belgrade ICEVI Balkan Conference have already come true: "The schools for

visually impaired children in Serbia will soon become resource centres for development and cooperation in providing conditions for inclusive education".

There is a need for international projects in South-East Europe on prevention and early intervention to provide conditions for the development of standard procedures for epidemiological follow-up and the creation of a longitudinal early intervention programme. Anyway, it seems that the level of development of prevention and early intervention in Serbia does not comply with that of the leading countries in this area.

Educational assistive technology, which is scarcely accessible, represents a particular problem in the realisation of all key objectives of special education and rehabilitation of visually impaired persons. Unfortunately, there is no production or distribution centre in Serbia for such aids. This is the only area we did not succeed to address at the 3rd ICEVI Balkan Conference in Belgrade. We tried to organize an exhibition of such aids. We are therefore very glad that the next Balkan Conference of ICEVI will take place in Turkey in 2008 because we know that this country has a more developed network for these technical aids for visually impaired children. We are also pleased for the education of our colleagues from the Department of special education and rehabilitation of the University of Thessaly, Greece. They have developed a project relevant to environmental education for blind students via the usage of Acoustic Maps (eContentplus – digital content). This project is not only a reflection of the great interest of South-East European countries in the development of modern technology in the education and daily living of visually impaired persons, but also of the interest in improving programmes and methods in orientation and mobility for these persons.

The strengthening of the cooperation between ministries, schools, resource and rehabilitation centres, cultural institutions and the media of Balkan countries will contribute to the overall improvement of the quality of life for visually impaired persons. Mrs Betty Leotsakos, the ICEVI coordinator for the Balkans, with her great experience and activity, provides us with significant help in this regard.

Currently, there are final activities in the elaboration of a collection of works from the 3rd ICEVI Balkan Conference held in Belgrade. We kindly ask for some more patience, since, fortunately, there are many works and that we are preparing a bilingual issue.

*PhD **Branka Eškirović** and PhD **Vesna Vučinić**
Faculty of special education and rehabilitation Belgrade*

Dublin ICEVI Conference 2009

In Chemnitz it seemed that the Dublin Conference was an event for the distant future but as we come to the close of 2007 it is just around the corner! Yes, Dublin is the venue and already Hans Welling and the ICEVI committee have met on three occasions to begin the difficult task of trying to define what the conference theme will be and how can we make it an experience that enriches people's working practice while at the same time stimulating discussion and hopefully some new ideas.

ICEVI Dublin, 2009 will have as its theme: "Living in a changing Europe". As the title suggests we are being called to reflect on where we are and what are the directions of all of us into the future. This of course demands that we look at the new challenges for the Visually Impaired of Europe and their identity as well as the consequences for professions working in the field. While the framework of the conference will be similar to previous ones the number of parallel sessions will be much smaller. This will allow for a great sense of involvement between presenters and delegates. For the first time we will also have the participation of a special interest group on Batters. This will allow significant input each day of the conference for those who have an interest in this area. We would also welcome requests for other special interest groups that would enrich the content of the conference and benefit those attending.

While it is still too early to begin asking people to write papers ICEVI are already grateful to Mary Lee, Peter Rodney and Heather Mason who have agreed to assist the Scientific Committee in dealing with abstracts and posters.

In order to learn more the conference can be contacted through its address: www.icevidublin2009.org

Looking forward to seeing you all!

William Stuart, Dublin

Early Education, Literacy, Braille and Technology – an ongoing puzzle?

I believe there would be wide agreement among ICEVI members that literacy is the foundation of a successful life for any student, not only a visually-impaired student; in this context, I was interested to read the article by Perkins' Laura Matz, comparing the low-tech Perkins to the high-tech computer-based devices. Laura made some very telling points in her article; I'd now like to widen the discussion a little, and hope that ICEVI members will consider the information useful.

In her article Laura states the fundamental question as "Is it better to 'leapfrog' the low-tech tools and teach braille to young children using the high-tech tools, or is there still a need to introduce braille and early literacy on low-tech devices?".

I would argue that this isn't the fundamental question, because it does some leap-frogging itself: it disregards the device which sits squarely between the points Laura considers - the Mountbatten Brailier. This is a device designed to be used in exactly this situation, teaching Braille in Early Education, and it overcomes difficulties found at the two extremes.

Laura makes the point that "Most of the teachers interviewed believe that high-technology devices which ... have only one line of refreshable braille do not allow children who are blind to perceive spatial concepts." Our experience and feedback has been the same.

I would go a little further, and suggest that it isn't only having a formalised concept and experience of a page of text that helps with spatial concepts. The sighted child scribbles, "pretends" to write as part of their pre-writing skills and motor development – and not always with a recognised writing tool and paper; drawing in sand with a finger or a stick, finger-painting, making shapes in the frost on a window all act as stepping-stones to the formal learning stage of becoming literate.

Writing consists of both the process of writing, with the development of all the abstract concepts that entails, and the physical act of writing. These two aspects are closely inter-related and are common to all children irrespective of their level of vision. What distinguishes blind or visually impaired children is that they must always use some sort of tool for the physical act of pre-writing as well as writing. With the Mountbatten, not only do they have a tool for learning the formal, structured part of writing and reading – they have the pre-writing tool for scribbling, making shapes and getting the underpinnings, just like their sighted peers.

This isn't the rosy, romantic dream it sounds like; research projects working with young children bear out our observations over twenty years in multiple countries. Very young Braille learners benefit from using a device that is designed for them, at an age when neither of Laura's extremes are suitable; the Perkins too large and heavy, well beyond their strength, and the Pac-Mate or BrailleNote too complex and expensive, well beyond their needs and abilities.

Here's an excerpt from an article in the Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, January 2007. L. Cooper and Sharon K. Nichols describe "...the Early Braille Readers Project, which provided a Mountbatten Pro Brailier and peripheral equipment to 20 kindergarteners, first-, and second graders in Texas. The project included training and support in the form of site visits and teacher training for both teachers of students with visual impairments and classroom teachers, group workshops, and an electronic discussion group. The project had a positive impact

on the students' writing and reading skills and participation in instruction and social interaction."

"Some of the youngest children in the project were 4 years old and attending pre-kindergarten classes when they first began to use the Mountbatten. Most students had experience with a Perkins Braille. During instruction, prior to participation in the project, several teachers of students with visual impairments noted motor delays, especially in the youngest children. These were not motor impairments, but delays in development, such as limited hand and finger strength, limitations in the ability to use individual fingers separately, and limitations in the stamina of the students. These factors affected the amount of Braille that the students produced or the time they spent Braille. The advantages of using the Mountbatten for children with fine motor problems emerged as a major theme in the project's data."

Unfortunately, our own observations of the field of Braille literacy show us that in some places, people still find it acceptable that the writing experience does not begin for blind and VI children until sufficient physical strength is achieved to use the Perkins Braille, and this can often be at 6 or 7 years of age! The "developmental delay" tag would perhaps be less widely used were the children not required to use an adult-sized and adult-weight device to write.

Let's have a look at a research project from Canada. Not satisfied with anecdotes or observations, the SET-BC team ran a project beginning in 1998, to find out just what the outcomes would be. From their paper:

"Five beginning Braille readers and their vision teachers from across British Columbia were selected to participate in the research project in the fall of 1998. Positive preliminary and a demand to expand the project resulted in SET -BC accessing additional funding to add a further 11 primary-age students to the project in the fall of 1999. All the students attend their neighbourhood school and have regular support from a teacher of students with visual impairments. Eleven of the students have little or no useful vision and use Braille as their primary literacy medium. Five of the students have varying degrees of useful vision and are learning to read and write in both Braille and print. Three of these students have additional physical and/or learning disabilities."

To summarise the findings from the SET-BC project:

" 1. Impact on Literacy Development - Writing.

Teachers reported that their students made better progress in the acquisition of Braille skills because of the Mountbatten Braille. They noted that beginning Braille readers often do not have adequate finger strength to produce readable dots on a manual Braille writer. When

using the Mountbatten Braille, these children can produce well-defined, raised, Braille dots that they can tactually discriminate and read. Students were more motivated to write for longer periods of time when using the Mountbatten Braille, compared to a manual Braille writer. The speech feedback feature is not only very helpful for students who require multi-sensory feedback, but also reinforces learning new Braille contractions. It made writing more "fun" for most students.

2. Impact on Literacy Development - Reading.

The Mountbatten Braille contributed to improved progress in the development of Braille skills in 15 of the 16 students involved in the project. Students were better able to tactually discriminate and read the well-defined, consistent, raised dot output of the Mountbatten. The 'hard copy' Braille output provides immediate tactile feedback and facilitates editing on the spot. The print-to-Braille translator provides students with increased access to "on the fly" classroom teacher developed reading materials in Braille.

3. Impact on Inclusion.

Most of the vision teachers and students reported that the Mountbatten Braille provided opportunities to be included in a wider range of classroom activities. Sighted primary age classmates are drawn to the 'user friendly' appearance of the Mountbatten. Using the qwerty keyboard and the Mountbatten's print-to-Braille and print-to-print translation features, cooperative group writing projects can be composed simultaneously in Braille and print. In addition, the use of regular paper makes Braille less 'different' and more readily accepted. The print-to-print translation feature and the Braille visual display allow the regular classroom teacher to have instant access to the student's Brailled work. In some classroom settings, however, the embossing and beeper noise from the Mountbatten was found to be disruptive from time to time.

4. Impact on Development of Basic Technology Skills.

In general, teachers report that the technology-related skills their students develop while a Mountbatten Braille can serve as a foundation for learning more complex technologies, such as Braille note-takers and computers. These basic skills can be taught to young students who are still at a concrete level of reasoning, as the Mountbatten produces immediate and "real" hard copy Braille."

Just to round off the discussion, it can't be stated too often or too firmly that Braille is very, very important; that the use and teaching of Braille should be growing, not shrinking, because it is the best possible beginning in literacy for the blind or severely visually impaired child. In support, just one more excerpt from an article - "Emerging Victorious", published in the NFB Future Directions, USA, Winter/Spring 2005:

"According to one study by Ryles, Ph.D.:

- 30% (13 of 43) Braille-reading subjects obtained graduate degrees, compared to 13% (4 of 31) of [legally blind] print-reading subjects.
- 25% of Braille-reading subjects were in highest income bracket (\$25,000-\$70,000) vs. % of [legally blind] print-reading subjects; 47% of Braille-reading subjects were in lowest income bracket (\$7,000 or less) but 62% of [legally blind] print-reading subjects were. (Print and Braille readers were equally represented in middle income bracket.)
- 81% (35 of 43) Braille-reading subjects answered "yes" when asked if they could read fast and as fluently as their classmates in high school; only 29% (9 of 31) of [legally blind] print-reading subjects answered "yes."

But maybe you haven't heard the overwhelming evidence that success in learning to read the first place is greatly improved by even earlier literacy experiences. "Experiences with print (through reading and writing) give preschool children an understanding of the conventions, purpose, and function of print—understandings that have been shown to play an integral part in learning to read," write Gunn, et al., in a synthesis of emergent literacy research. Debra Johnson cites no less than six studies when she claims, "According to current research, children's literacy development begins long before children start formal instruction in elementary school (Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Clay, 1991; Hall & Moats, 1999; Holdaway, 1979; Teale & Sulzby, 1986)." The mounting research finds that experience and interaction with written material before kindergarten lays the groundwork for future literacy skills."

*Patricia Fraser, Quantum Technology
September 2007*

Sources:

"Technology and Early Braille Literacy: Using the Mountbatten Pro Brailier in Primary-grade Classrooms", L. Cooper and Sharon K. Nichols, in JVIB January 2007.

SET-BC Emerging Braille Literacy Project 2001 – 2002: www.setbc.org.

See also: "Teachers' Perceptions of Using the Mountbatten Brailier with Young Children", M. Cay Holbrook, Anne Wadsworth, and Mike Bartlett., in JVIB, October 2003

"Emerging Victorious: How Braille Reading Pals and Similar Programs Are Promoting a More Literate Generation of Blind Children", Anna Cheadle, in NFB Future Reflections, Winter/Spring 2005.

East-European Region: brief presentation of services in the field of visual impairment.

Education at school

The problems of the blind have started to be addressed in St.Petersburg at the end of the 19thC. State Boarding school N.1 is the first and the oldest school for the Blind in Russia. It was founded in St.Petersburg in 1881 by an outstanding political and public person K.Groth and firstly was working as a school for 10 blind boys. In 2000 it was named after K.Groth. Nowadays the school aims to continue to put into practice Groth's thoughts and ideas, use any pedagogical innovations, search for new ways to improve the work in modern circumstances, carry out correction of additional impairments in the development of blind children and those with partial visual impairment.

Today the school offers primary and secondary education to about 300 visually impaired and blind students aged 7-19. 120 of these students live at the school's boarding facilities, 35 of them are orphans. The school is the only educational establishment of its kind in the North Western Region of Russia and that's why it accepts the students from other cities of this region.

Within the last few years the school has started to gradually change its style of work:

- Offering more rehabilitation services instead of focusing only on education
- Integrating students into society instead of isolating them at school (strengthening O&M and ADL training, offering activities outside the school building, etc)
- Accepting children with multiple impairments.

The school management would like to increase the quality of both education and rehabilitation services as well as create access for new categories of students who don't have the opportunity to attend school at present.

The school intends to found and start a centre for multiply impaired blind/visually impaired students within the Groth School. There are 40 students (at present but this number increases every year) who have severe additional impairments or who are immobile and cannot attend school. The school would like to create the necessary conditions in order to be able to include these children into school.

There is a Music school included in the schoolhouse. Many gifted pupils participate in the International Art Festivals every year.

School has a section for sports tourism also. An unusual group of cyclists started from Berlin to St. Petersburg last summer. 10 sportsmen (with good eyesight, visually impaired and totally blind) on tandems visited school. St. Petersburg was the destination of the tandem tour and here tired but happy

cyclists were met and warmly greeted by the management, teachers and the students of the school. Friendships were cemented during the meeting. Students were really very grateful for presents: these are computers with special software and assistive Braille displays, Braille writers, mobile electronic reading devices, games and material for leisure activities as well as tandem bicycles. "We know from our own experience how important technical devices are as bridges to the integration of blind and partially sighted people", said Thomas Nikolai, journalist, who knows the problems of visually impaired people very well as he himself is partially sighted. The joint project of organization of the sports camp is coordinated now.

In St.Petersburg there is a boarding school №2 for low vision children, 300 children are trained now.

There are a correspondence school and Rehabilitation Center for v.i. adults.

East-European Region is very large. In each city there is a boarding school. Each of school tries to make steps forward into open society. The special school for v.i. children in Belarus, for example.

The New technology of "speaking" books

Since January 2007 in the special school for v.i. children, in Belarus, in history and physics lessons, electronic "speaking" textbooks are used. The technology for the creation of electronic books has nothing to compare with it in the world. There is a special "program-reader" for the electronic "speaking" literature that pupils are using. The writers have defined the goals:

1. the program should not use the display of a computer. Then the person blind since birth can use this program.
2. the program should allow the blind pupil to work with the book practically the same as a sighted person.
3. to create the technology allowing, quickly, easily, and the main thing - not expensively, the release of electronic "speaking" books for blind pupils.

The user interface of the program is constructed on the basis of the keyboard and sound system of a computer. All other devices for the input of information (the mouse, joystick) are not used. At work with the program concepts are used: "book", "contents of the book", "the text of the book", "paragraph", that is, those concepts which are used at work with the book published in Braille. This program was mastered by mdvi pupils.

With the assistance of UNESCO, the electronic "speaking" library of Russian literature is produced by this technology.

Libraries

There are libraries for the blind in many cities of EE-region. The library in Tomsk (the region of Siberia) organizes an exhibition "The child with special

needs". Practically all parents experience difficulties with the education of v.i. children. This exhibition will help parents to understand features of the perception of the world around by their children. There are some tactile books for the small blind children, produced under the project "The World on the tips of the fingers ".

Now a lot of literature is issued by different publishing houses. Kids can be acquainted with interesting fairy tales.

In the book it is possible not only to touch vegetables and fruit, but also to smell them.

By means of the book it is possible to hear sounds of the world around.

The government supports the development of special libraries. The paper analyses the state of libraries for the blind in the current economic conditions. The need to establish centers for information, education, social rehabilitation and leisure for the disadvantaged on the basis of special libraries, is justified. The information resources of the centers and perspectives on the use of the latest technologies are discussed.

Early Intervention

Medical services

Again found sight is a miracle which could not be if not for the experts of microsurgery of an eye department in St.-Petersburg Children's Clinical Hospital. Oleg Diskalenko is a branch manager and leading surgeon-ophthalmologist.

The modern techniques for the treatment of children with diseases of the vitreous body and retina are used in daily practice in the department. The advanced equipment is used.

The operations, performed by the department, enable premature infants with the diagnosis «retinal detachment at retinopathy», to avoid the fast onset of blindness.

Stimulation and training of vision

Sight is a function of the organism, susceptible to training. Babies can train their visual capacity in St.Petersburg State Consulting and Habilitation Center for Visually Impaired children. We use the exercises and recommendations of Dr Lea Hjuvarinen also.

Accompanying parents

The center provides services to parents in different forms. One of them is "mama-class" which is widely used. It is training employment for the transfer of experience of education and bringing up the child in the family.

Perceptions surround the world

Figure 3: Little blind children in the world of Dolphins.



"You know, mummy, when I am on the dolphin I feel him by my tummy. He is so elastic and salty; he wants to play with me," says little girl Nastja (photo)

"The possibilities and resources for visually impaired children are practically boundless if you have a strong desire to help them," says Elena Nasibulova - the project sponsor "Little blind children and Dolphins".

Dialogue with a dolphin gives the child positive emotions. The dolphin brightly shows interest to the child, sincerity of intentions. Children play with the dolphins with a ball, communicate with the dolphins, pat them with hands and feet.

Owing to positive emotions after the dialogue with these clever animals, children become more open and cheerful.
Let the world will be same for them!

Our addresses:

St.-Petersburg State Boarding school N.1 by K.Groth: grot-school@mail.ru

Special school for v.i. children, in Belarus: invo2@mail.belpak.by

Tomsk Special Library for the Blind: rslibanm@trecom.tomsk.ru

St.-Petersburg Children's Clinical Hospital: chil-hosp@region.sp.ru

St.Petersburg State Consulting and Habilitation Center for Visually Impairment children: plastunova@yandex.ru

Moscow Rehabilitation Center for Blind Children: nasibulova@mail.ru

**Second European Conference
on Psychology and Visual Impairment
Huizen, the Netherlands, March 10-12, 2008.**

**SECOND
EC Ψ VI
THE NETHERLANDS**

Innovations in a changing Europe

This conference is the second in a row of ICEVI European Conferences on Psychology and Visual Impairment and will take place in **Huizen, the Netherlands, March 10-12, 2008**. Next to a few plenary sessions the main focus of this conference will be on active workshops, aimed at exchanging knowledge and experience and at making international cooperation more concrete.

Main topics will be:

- **Sensorial integration** with special interest in tactile development and tactile compensation.
- **Social isolation and loneliness** with special interest in the elderly.
- **New trends in assessment** with special interest in people with multiple disabilities.

The organisation invites all psychologists working in the field of visual impairment to join in this conference and make an active contribution by presenting a paper, a poster or participation in a number of workshops.

Abstracts (max. 250 words) can be submitted till January 15, 2008 regarding many themes:

- Quality of life
- Psychotherapy
- Vocational training
- Psychogenic blindness / conversion
- Acquired brain injury
- Social isolation
- Role of the psychologist
- Care models
- Tests and assessment
- Neuropsychological aspects
- Other

On the basis of your preferences the programme committee will put together the groups for each workshop. Please indicate the four themes that you are most

interested in and indicate whether you want to focus on early intervention, school age, multiple disabilities, or adults and elderly.

Registration for the conference is starting from December 1, 2007 and will close on February 15, 2008. For registration and information look at www.visio.org for **ECPVI**.

There will be no fee for the conference. However, the organisation asks for a contribution of € 50,- for lunches and dinners during the conference, to be paid on arrival at the conference.

Every participant is expected to make his own travel arrangements and hotel booking. Hotel and travel information will also be available at www.visio.org under **ECPVI**.

The conference language will be English only.

The 2nd ECPVI is hosted by the cooperating Dutch organisations *Visio*, *Sensis* and *De Brink*, united in the VSdB Group. The conference takes place at the Visio location in Huizen, about 1 hour from Schiphol Airport and Amsterdam.

Peter Verstraten

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Conference: Do you see what I mean?

Developing communication in children and young people with complex needs and poor sight

Friday 8 February 2008 – Central London, UK

This conference is a unique opportunity to hear about the latest research and to share ideas with other practitioners in this important field.

Keynote speakers will be Professor Isabel Amaral (Lisbon) and Dr Juliet Goldbart (Manchester).

Cost: £160 per person including lunch and refreshments.

Visit www.rnib.org.uk/childconferencefeb for more details.

To register your interest or book a place contact:

Angela Cardoso, RNIB London and South East
105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE, United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)207 391 2245

Fax: +44 (0)207 391 2195

Email: RNIBLondonandSouthEast@rnib.org.uk

Events in 2008 January - March

8 February 2008 (Friday)

Conference: Do you see what I mean? Developing communication in children and young people with complex needs and poor sight. (RNIB - Central London, UK)

e-mail: [RNIBLondonandSouthEast at rnib.org.uk](mailto:RNIBLondonandSouthEast@rnib.org.uk)

website: www.rnib.org.uk/childconferencefeb

9-12 March 2008

"Step Forward" - First International Art Festival for Handicapped Children, St.Petersburg (Russia)

website: www.feststep.com

10-12 March 2008

2nd European Conference on Psychology and Visual Impairment, Huizen (The Netherlands)

e-mail: [pverstraten at sensis.nl](mailto:pverstraten@sensis.nl)

Perkins Products introduces new electric brailler!

Light Touch Electric Blue

This product is perfect for:

- Children who have limited mobility and strength in their fingers
- Students in integrated classrooms who will be able to braille more quickly to keep up with sighted classmates
- Older people who have arthritis

Product description:

The Light Touch Electric Blue enables braille writing with much less force for longer periods of time. Perfect for anyone with reduced finger strength, the Electric Perkins Brailler is approved by UL and CSA. It also has a universal power supply, and will work in most countries around the world. A felt pad is included with each new machine. Includes dust cover, felt pad and wooden eraser.

Figure 4: Light Touch Electric Blue



Light Touch Standard Perkins Brailer

Perkins Products, at Perkins School for the Blind, is the manufacturer of the Perkins Brailer®, the most widely-sold braille machine in the world.

Product description:

Available in Green, Blue & Gray
The LIGHT TOUCH Standard Perkins Brailer is specifically constructed and tuned to reduce the force required to operate the braille keys by up to 40%. It embosses lines with 42 cells on paper as large as 11" x 11 1/2". The Brailer includes a dust cover, operating instructions, and a wooden eraser.

Figure 5: Light Touch Standard Perkins Brillers



We are very enthusiastic about reaching out to the blind community in Western and Eastern Europe. We will be attending the seminar:

**Education of the Blind in the Third Millennium:
Prospects and Challenges, taking place in Prague at the Škola
Jaroslava Jezka on November 21–24, 2007.**



"The Perkins Brailer is the best tool available for teaching Braille."

*Dr. William Rowland, President,
World Blind Union*

Perkins Brillers: Grant Money is Available

Perkins Products/ Howe Press wishes to announce that grant money is available for countries classified by the World Bank as low-income, lower-middle-income or upper-middle-income. This subsidy can significantly reduce the cost of Perkins Brillers.

The eligible European countries include:

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| Belarus | Latvia | Serbia and |
| Bosnia and | Lithuania | Montenegro |
| Herzegovina | Macedonia (former Yugoslav | Slovakia |
| Bulgaria | Republic of) | Turkey |
| Croatia | Poland | Ukraine |

Please contact John Price at Perkins Products (Howe Press) at john.price@perkins.org or call +1 617-972-7584 for more information.

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Welcome to Perkins Products

The Perkins Products website sells other braille products and accessories, as well as publications and early literacy products.

www.perkinsstore.org