

The Educator



VOLUME XXII, ISSUE 2

January 2010

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



A Publication of

The International Council for Education of
People with Visual Impairment

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AWARDS COMMITTEE INVITES NOMINATIONS

Lucía Piccione, Regional Chairperson of ICEVI Latin America and a recipient of ICEVI's International Excellence Award in 2002 has been appointed by the Executive Committee to chair the 2010 Nominations Committee. Lord Colin Low (England), Nandini Rawal (India) and Hans Welling (The Netherlands) are the other members of the Awards Committee.

The Awards Committee has been charged with selecting a maximum of three (3) persons to be the quadrennial recipients of its International Excellence Award. The award will be presented at the 13th World Conference in Jomtien – Thailand in August 2010.

Each ICEVI Region is invited to submit to the Awards Committee the nominees who meet the following criteria:

1. have made a significant and lasting contribution to the field of education of blind and low vision persons that has had impact beyond their own school or organization and
2. have made a significant and long lasting contribution to ICEVI.

Nominations should be prepared in an abstract that does not exceed two single space typewritten A4 pages. This document should explain how the person meets these criteria and why they would be a worthy recipient.

Nomination papers must be forwarded by fax or e-mail to the ICEVI Secretariat sgicevi@vsnl.net - Fax number: 91-422-2693414 with a copy to Lucia Piccione lpiccione@arnet.com.ar - Fax number 54-351-4710661, not later than 31st March 2010. The Secretariat will consolidate the list for the Award Committee shortly after the nominations deadline.



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JOMTIEN, THAILAND

THE VENUE OF THE 13TH WORLD CONFERENCE OF ICEVI

We are pleased to announce that the 13th world conference of ICEVI will be held in **Jomtien, Thailand** from **9 to 13 August 2010**. The Education For All movement originated at a meeting of Ministers of Education convened by UNESCO, UNICEF and The World Bank in Jomtien in 1990. It is quite symbolic that ICEVI will hold its 13th World Conference at the same location some 20 years later to draw the attention of the world to the educational needs of all children with visual impairment.



The Thai Host Committee, consisting of organisations of the Thai Blind Union and voluntary organizations, is headed by Pecharat Techavachara, President, Foundation for the Employment Promotion of the Blind in Thailand. The conference will be held at the **Hotel Ambassador City**, Jomtien, which has excellent facilities at a beautiful seaside location. Do mark your calendar to join your colleagues from around the world and be prepared for an excellent conference and a relaxed time.

For registration, log on to ICEVI Website www.icevi.org

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Guest Editors : Steve McCall and Paul Lynch



Message from the President

January 4, 2010

Dear Colleagues:

Let me begin by wishing all of you a very happy, healthy and productive year ahead.

The fourth and final year of ICEVI's current quadrennium is underway and in just over 8 months I look forward to welcoming many of you to our 13th World Conference and General Assembly in Jomtien, Thailand.

We have chosen this venue for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that Jomtien is where Ministers of Education from throughout the world gathered in 1990 to declare the goal of "Education for All" by 2015; an objective that has since become one of the eight (8) UN Millennium Development Goals.

Twenty years later we will gather in the same location to celebrate the progress that has been achieved but to also ask why this progress has reached so few children with disabilities and what we as a community can do to significantly accelerate progress toward the achievement of educational equity for all visually impaired children.

They tell me that the older you get the faster time seems to pass. Well, I guess that I am really aging quickly because it hardly seems possible that three and half years have passed since we launched our Global Campaign on "Education for All Children with Visual Impairment" at our 12th World Conference in July, 2006.

When I addressed those assembled in Kuala Lumpur at the launch of the Global Campaign I likened

what we were about to undertake as a marathon race. I warned that while marathons end after 26 miles we would not reach our finish line until all children with visual impairment had equal access to education.

The race got off to a quick start in 2006 and 2007. However as we moved through 2008 a steep hill loomed on the horizon in the form of the global economic downturn. We knew from the outset that the race course would not always be level and well paved. However, I must confess this steep incline was not anticipated so early in the race.

The incline we confronted in late 2008 and throughout 2009 has resulted in sore leg muscles and has slowed our pace slightly but only strengthened our resolve to reach the finish line by assuring educational equity for all visually impaired children.

To my mind, a major factor that has contributed to our success in getting through this difficult portion of the racecourse can be found on the inside cover of *The Educator*. There you will find the names of our nine International Partner Members who share a common vision, who agreed to work together to achieve that vision and who have been true to their word even in these difficult economic times. I hope all of you join me in saluting them for their vision and for the commitment to ICEVI.

Looking forward to seeing many of you in Thailand in August, I remain,

As always,

Larry Campbell
President



Message from the Editor

The Educator has for a long time been a multilingual journal. For several years our colleagues in Latin America have translated the text written in English into Spanish – El Educador is a well recognized source of information among educators of the visually impaired in Latin America.

Thanks to volunteers in Japan a number of issues have also been made available to our colleagues in Japan in their native language.

The publication of thematic issues on topics like low vision, independence and literacy has been well received around the world. Some of these articles are of such importance that some ICEVI regional or national representatives would like to have them translated into other languages.

When dealing with these request we found that ICEVI has no official policy with regard to translation. An author is submitting an article in English without being aware of the fact that this contribution in due time can be available in a number of other languages.

When the Executive Committee met in December 2009, there was on the agenda a resolution prepared by the Publications Committee on translation of The Educator. The resolution was adopted by the Executive Committee.

Effective from January 1, 2010, ICEVI has a firm translation policy.

A regional or national group wishing to translate the whole content of The Educator can be granted permission by decision of the Principal Officers. The translated version of The Educator must be sent to the office of ICEVI Secretary General for publication on our website.

Permission for translation of a single article can be given by the editor of The Educator under the following conditions:

- ✂ The source, i.e. The Educator, must be clearly referenced on the front page and each subsequent page of the article.
- ✂ The name of the person responsible for the translation must be clearly stated as a footnote on the first page.
- ✂ A copy of the translated article must be sent to the editor of The Educator.

With the assistance of the Francophone Blind Union we soon hope to be able to present a French version of The Educator. We will use a computerized translation tool to create a French draft, which will proofread in France and returned to us for publication on our website. At the same time a Braille embosser will start working in France to produce the necessary copies in French Braille. I'm happy to say that The Educator is close to become a true multi-lingual journal.

I would like to thank Steve McCall and Paul Lynch, the Guest Editors of this issue, for their excellent work in collecting articles dealing with inclusion in various parts of the world. Inclusion is on the agenda in many countries. Therefore our plan is to continue with more articles on this topic in the next issue of The Educator, which will be published in July, 2010.

We record our thanks for the hard work of the Guest Editors, all the authors and our friends who have engaged professionals to translate The Educator into languages other than English for the benefit of a larger audience.

Sincerely,

Harry Svensson
Editor



Message from the Guest Editors

In most countries in the developing world the promotion of the inclusion of children with visual impairment in local schools reflects a practical necessity and not a policy choice. For most of these children, the local school represents their only chance of receiving any education – all other considerations aside there are nowhere near enough places in specialist schools to cater for the huge numbers currently outside education. To a child with no access to education, the debate about whether it is best provided in special or mainstream schools must seem like a nonsensical sideshow.

Of course children with visual impairment should have access to their local school. But access to school does not equate to inclusion. If you can't learn to read and write because there are no suitable books and no teachers who understand how to help you and if, as a result, you have to repeat the same year over and over again in a class with children who may be half your age, then sooner or later you will become disheartened and drop out of school – no matter how capable you are.

In this edition of the Educator we have asked colleagues from around the world to reflect on the development of inclusion for children with visual impairment in their own country. We are grateful to contributors from Ireland, Japan, Malawi, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam for giving up their valuable time to share their thoughts about how their country is meeting the remarkable challenge of providing education for all children with VI by 2015.

In Japan Hisae Miyauchi provides us with an insightful overview of the emergence of a system where special schools are key players in promoting inclusive practice through partnerships with schools in their locality. The fact that there are many special schools for children with VI in Japan means that most children and their families now have a choice of educational options. Ireland in contrast, has only one special school for the visually impaired and Eileen Beechinor, a visiting teacher herself, describes how regionally based itinerant services have emerged to perform the function of supporting children's inclusion in their local schools and she articulates the challenges they face.

In Pakistan we learn from Sumrana Yasmin and co-authors that there are an estimated 45,000 children with severe visual impairment but only 10% of these children attend special schools, for the rest it is either the local school or no school. Thankfully there are now a range of initiatives

to promote the inclusion of children in local schools, for example the government, in collaboration with international partners, has launched a pilot inclusive education programme in 16 schools in Islamabad capital territory, however these inclusion initiatives are currently limited to the major cities and private sector.

In Sri Lanka, we learn from Sunil Fernando that while literacy and primary school enrolment rates are among the highest in the developing world, inclusion is still in its infancy. While some children with VI do receive their education in local schools, it is often the result of personal efforts of administrators and teachers rather than concerted inclusion policies. The 13 residential schools in the country remain the main providers of educational opportunities.

Thailand and Vietnam provide interesting accounts of approaches to inclusion. In Thailand, the home of the Education for All declaration, the Ministry of Education has established 2,000 mainstream schools as models of inclusive practice and the majority of children with VI receive their secondary education in mainstream schools. In Vietnam, as a result of EFA-VI initiatives, approximately, 70% children with visual impairment attend school but the enrolment rates for children with multiple needs are still very low.

In Malawi a recent research initiative has focussed on the educational inclusion of children who use braille in local schools. In Malawi, as in many African countries, residential settings are seen as the default placements for children who use braille, and while there are some braille users in local schools supported by Itinerant Teachers, the research has revealed huge barriers to their progress.

Given the range of countries contributing to this edition, there is a remarkable consistency in their perceptions of what is needed to provide children with visual impairment the opportunity to succeed in their local school. Again and again authors identify a range of need: access to the appropriate learning resources and equipment; support from well trained teachers; a coordinated administrative system that works across education and health at national, regional and local levels to ensure the identification and assessment of children and the efficient distribution of resources; local schools that welcome children with disabilities and recognise their right to the same quality of education as their classmates. In most of these countries the educational opportunities for children with VI still reside predominantly in residential special schools and resource bases, but we see from the accounts of our authors that these specialist settings have a key role in promoting and facilitating the changes that inclusive practice requires. Ironically special schools are key players in promoting the inclusion of children with visual impairment in local schools, and releasing their expertise is their great challenge.

- Steve McCall & Paul Lynch

ICEVI STRATEGIC UPDATE

The Executive Committee (EXCO) Meeting of ICEVI was held at the CBM Head Office, Bensheim, Germany in December 2009. Below is the strategic update of the meeting for the constituency of ICEVI.

1. The Executive committee of ICEVI accepted the resolution of the Global Task Force (GTF) of the EFA-VI Global Campaign that the GTF be dissolved with immediate effect and the activities of the GTF are carried out by the following four committees:

- Advocacy and Global Networking
- Media and Materials
- Finance
- Programme Review

The Terms of Reference for these committees are being developed.

2. The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), ICEVI and the World Blind Union (WBU) developed a Joint Letter of Agreement to work together at the global, regional and country levels under the banner of Vision Alliance (VA). The VA Network will be put into action in Vietnam, Mozambique, and Nepal to begin with and then expanded to other countries. The Vision Alliance will also form an appropriate committee to address the issue of "Rehabilitation" of persons with visual impairment.
3. The EXCO thanked the Nippon Foundation for supporting the higher education project in Indonesia, The Philippines and Vietnam and endorsed a fresh proposal for extension in 2010-11.
4. The EXCO resolved that participants from low, lower-middle and upper-middle income countries (as per World Bank Data) alone will be eligible to receive sponsorship to attend the 13th World Conference to be held in Jomtien, Thailand in August 2010. The EXCO authorised the Regional Committees to recommend candidates for sponsorship from their respective regions as per the criteria suggested by ICEVI.
5. The EXCO appointed the following Nominations Committee to come up with a slate of Principal Officers:

Chair : Dr. Bhushan Punani

Members : Frances Gentle, Wilfred Maina, Monika Brenes, and Arnt Holte

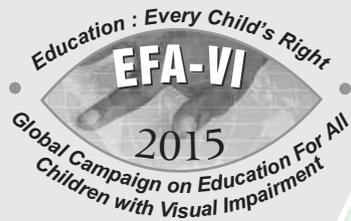
The Nominations Committee will do a search for potential Principal Officers and suggest a tentative list at the General Assembly of ICEVI to be held on 13th August 2010

6. The EXCO resolved to appoint the following Awards Committee to select ICEVI Awardees for the Quadrennium:

Chair : Lucia Piccione

Members : Lord Colin Low, Hans Welling, Nandini Rawal

The Awards Committee will submit a list of Awardees to the Secretariat by end July 2010.



EFA-VI Updates

The Education for All Children with Visual Impairment (EFA-VI) Global Campaign was launched in July 2006 and the Global Task Force (GTF) suggested that the campaign should be underway in 14 focus countries by the end of the Quadrennium 2006-2010.

The campaign started in three focus countries, viz., Vietnam, Paraguay and the Dominican Republic in 2007 and the lessons learned are being applied in other countries where the Campaign begun in 2008 and 2009. At present the campaign activities are being implemented in 12 countries in five regions of ICEVI as per the following details:

Africa	: Ethiopia and Mozambique
East Asia	: Vietnam and China
Latin America	: Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and the Dominican Republic
Pacific	: Fiji
West Asia	: Nepal and Pakistan

Expected Parameters of Success:

The EFA-VI campaign set out principles such as creation of demand for education, embedding the EFA-VI campaign within the overall EFA initiatives of the countries, ensuring provision of support services, creating alternative approaches where necessary, etc., and listed increased enrolment of children with visual impairment, reduction in dropout rate, availability of support services, and performance on par with non-disabled children as the broad parameters of success.

Global Impact of the Campaign:

At the global level the following impact of the EFA-VI Campaign is evident.

1. The EFA-VI Campaign is recognised as the first jointly organised initiative to lobby for the education of children with visual impairment at the national and international levels.
2. Realising the need to work together in this initiative, more international organisations have come on board to promote the campaign.
3. The campaign is recognised by the UNESCO and UNICEF.
4. UNESCO's Flagship Programme on Inclusion recognised that the EFA-VI campaign has potential for replication in developing countries and in other areas of disabilities too.
5. The World Bank has evinced interest to work with the EFA-VI Campaign.
6. Awareness about education of children with visual impairment is growing world over and the EFA-VI campaign also has its significant effect on this as a result of dissemination of information, especially through its publications, EFA-VI literature and website.
7. The enrolment of children with visual impairment is certainly increasing as is evident from the focus countries.
8. EFA-VI campaign has been declared as an official programme of the African Decade providing a special impetus to work in the African countries.
9. The Campaign has resulted in the formation of a Vision Alliance of the three umbrella organisations, viz., the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), ICEVI, and the World Blind Union.

Areas requiring fine tuning

Though the global impact is positive, certain areas still require hard work especially at the implementation level. Some are listed as follows:

1. It takes time to convince Governments to integrate education of children with disabilities in general and visual impairment in particular within the Government plans.
2. In some cases, EFA-VI campaign was initially viewed as another project of international organisations and it took considerable time to change this perspective.
3. Networking with ICEVI and WBU at the national level is yet to be strengthened in most of the regions.
4. In the case of Fast Track countries of the World Bank, the Governments must be apprised to include components of disability in the national plans.
5. Collecting national data, particularly with respect to enrolment, dropout, performance, etc., requires considerable time as we have to depend on Government machinery to get this information.

EFA-VI in action in Focus Countries

The EFA-VI activities and their impact in the focus countries are enumerated below:

AFRICA

- In January 2009, Mr. Bernard Mogesa took over as the Regional Coordinator of the EFA-VI Global Campaign for the Africa region. The Regional Secretariat has been established at the premises of the Africa Union of the Blind, Nairobi, Kenya.

Ethiopia

- A Needs Assessment Survey has been carried out.
- A national workshop on EFA-VI was conducted in July 2009 wherein a National Task Force was formed involving local governments, organisations of persons with visual impairment,

national NGOs, and International Non-Government Developmental Organisations.

- A National Plan for implementation is being prepared

Mozambique

- The Regional Coordinator visited with the Government officials in Mozambique and apprised them the EFA-VI Campaign.
- The Mozambique Association of the Blind (ACAMO) took lead role in organising a national workshop on EFA-VI in September 2009 which was attended by officials from various ministries, national NGOs, and International Non-Government Developmental Organisations.
- A National Task Force was formed, which has already prepared a draft national plan.

EAST ASIA

Vietnam

- The campaign was started in late 2007.
- A National Technical Task Force (NTTF) under the Chairpersonship of the Vice-Minister of Education was formed.
- The target of this NTTF is to enroll at least 100,000 children with visual impairment by 2010/11 and to include 100% by the end of 2015.
- At the beginning of the academic year 2009, 13,745 additional children with visual impairment were enrolled in general schools.
- 3,832 general classroom teachers were trained in the last two years.
- An interim evaluation of the implementation of the EFA-VI Global Campaign in Vietnam was conducted in May 2009.
- Braille books are prepared and distributed as a part of the EFA-VI campaign
- Preliminary work has been completed for the creation of a full-fledged Braille Printing facility at the Vietnam Blind Association

China

- A national level research to investigate factors contributing to the successful inclusion of children with visual impairment is underway.
- The China National Institute of Educational Research (CNIER) is involved in this research.
- Based on the findings of the research by the middle of 2010, EFA-VI campaign activities will be expanded.

LATIN AMERICA

- All focus countries in the Latin America region have pledged to increase the access to education of children with visual impairment by at least 70% by the end of 2010/11.

The Dominican Republic

- The campaign was launched in late 2007 but the activities commenced from early 2008.
- Nearly 2500 children with visual impairment are in need of educational services.
- A National Task Force was constituted represented by voluntary organisations and government bodies
- The expected outcome of the EFA-VI Campaign by the end of the quadrennium is that about 1750 children with visual impairment will be enrolled in the general education system.
- 70 additional children with visual impairment were admitted to schools during 2008/09. Further data on enrolment is awaited.

Paraguay

- The campaign was started in late 2007 and the activities commenced in early 2008.
- Nearly 6,000 children with visual impairment require educational services in Paraguay
- National Task Force was formed under the aegis of the Global Campaign during the end of 2007.
- 249 additional children with visual impairment got access to education in regular schools during 2008 -2009.

- As per the national plan, nearly 3000 children with visual impairment will be enrolled before 2010/11.

Nicaragua

- The campaign was launched in late 2008
- The Campaign has proposed to cover at least 70% population of children with visual impairment before 2012.
- The enrolment data will be available by the end of 2010.

Ecuador

- The campaign was launched in 2008.
- Workshops for special teachers, supervisors, nurses, etc., were conducted on various topics such as inclusion, children with multidisabilities, low vision, orientation and mobility, early intervention, etc. 304 persons underwent these training activities.
- A total of 368 additional students with visual impairment were enrolled in schools during January to June 2009.

Honduras

- The campaign was launched in 2009.
- A national task force was formed, which prepared a national plan for implementation
- Data on enrolment of children, capacity building of teachers, etc., are being gathered.

PACIFIC

Fiji

- The campaign was commenced in 2009.
- The EFA-VI Fiji Forum was organised in Suva, Fiji in October 2008, which was represented by the Fiji Ministry of Education, ICEVI, WBU, Pacific Disability Forum, and a number of voluntary organisations.
- The Government of the Republic of the Fiji Islands and Fiji Society for the Blind have signed a

Memorandum of Understanding with ICEVI to implement the EFA-VI Global Campaign in Fiji.

- Capacity building programmes are being arranged for teachers in Fiji
- Braille book production facilities are being created to provide accessible materials to children with visual impairment.
- Enrolment data will be available at the end of the year.

WEST ASIA

Nepal

- The campaign was launched in late 2008.
- It has been estimated that there are about 30 thousand blind children requiring educational services. The persons with low vision are estimated to be about 200,000.
- The National Task Force is headed by the Director of Education and consists of Government departments, NGOs, organisations of persons with visual impairment and universities. The Ankur Foundation for Inclusive Education is the nodal agency for the campaign.
- The expected outcome by the end of the quadrennium is that about 2000 to 2500

additional children with visual impairment will be enrolled in schools.

- A national workshop on EFA-VI was organised in Kathmandu in July 2009 which worked out a strategy plan to implement the proposals of the National Implementation Plan.

Pakistan

- The EFA-VI campaign was launched in early 2009.
- A National Task Force (NTF) consisting of representatives of the concerned Ministries / Departments of the federal government and provincial governments, educators at special education departments at university level, NGOs, international agencies and experienced visually impaired persons was formed.
- Awareness activities were conducted in 2009 and additional tasks are being planned for 2010.

The implementation of the campaign over two years has revealed that unique issues have to be addressed in each focus country and therefore, common strategy map for all countries does not work. ICEVI is in the process of documenting good practices of inclusion that may be of use for other countries.

Policy of ICEVI with regard to Translation of Articles into other Languages

The Executive Committee of ICEVI approved the following guidelines with regard to the translation of The Educator or its articles into other languages:

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The above guidelines will be in operation from January 2010.

Vietnam : The education of people with visual impairment (2007-2015)

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Educational policy for children with visual Impairment

In 2005 the Vietnamese Government made universal primary education a national priority as part of its commitment to EFA. All children aged between 6 and 14 years now have the right to primary level education. Furthermore, the Government has emphasized that children with special educational needs must have access to school regardless of origin, nationality or religious beliefs. Vietnam introduced legislation (decision No 23/QĐ-BGD&ĐT) decreeing the right to inclusive education for disabled people. It has also produced a document providing guidance on how to implement universal education for disabled children including children with visual impairment. These documents have had a positive impact on helping these children towards high quality education.

Background to education of children with visual impairment

There are about 31 million children of school age (about 36% of the population) in Vietnam. In the school year 2007-2008, about 96% of children were enrolled in primary schools in 55 out of 63 provinces. Recently, the education of children with visual impairment in Vietnam has increased thanks to educational legislation. According to the Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences (VNIES), about 42,000 disabled children went to school in 1996, but by 2006 this

number had increased to 269,000 and to more than 300,000 in 2008. There are more than 1 million disabled children (4% of the school aged population) and 150,000 of these have visual impairment. About 40% of children with visual impairment were enrolled in school in 2008-2009. However most children who have a visual impairment and an additional disability do not go to school. The dropout rate of children with visual impairment is high at around 33%.

Children with visual impairment usually go to national mainstream schools or special schools / centers established by individuals or NGOs. For this reason, we still have not achieved a unified management structure for the education of children with visual impairment.



Achieving quality education

The quality of educational provision for children with visual impairment depends on various factors such as the learning environment, the educational organisation and the level of cooperation between individuals and service providers. There has been considerable improvement in advocacy and awareness raising in schools, families and civil society, on the right to education for all children as well as a thrust towards universal primary level education. However, much more needs to be done to convince the public that children with visual impairment can learn at mainstream schools with sighted children. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding on how children with visual impairment learn. Teachers only have basic knowledge and skills on how to teach these children and there is insufficient documentation to help teachers, parents and the community. Mainstream schools lack basic learning materials such as curriculum materials in Braille, books in large print, digital talking books, Braille paper, tactile drawing kits, etc.

Despite a drive towards inclusive education for all disabled children, few children who are visually impaired are ready to start school at the age of five. This is because they have not been sufficiently prepared to participate in early school activities with their sighted peers.

Similarly, high schools and secondary schools are often not prepared to welcome children with visual impairment from lower levels. Sadly, many are unable to find a job after graduating although some take up employment as masseurs, singers or as teachers. A high proportion of adults who are blind still earn a living making handicraft products or become completely dependent on their family. Unfortunately, there is a lack of information and support for individuals and organisations that provide career guidance on vocational training and helping graduates to find a job.

EFA-VI in Vietnam 2007-2009

The Ministry of Education and Technology (MoET) recognises the challenges it faces in ensuring children with visual impairment go to school and has asked VNIES to carry out research into setting up a strategy on developing education for Vietnamese disabled children till 2015. VNIES, MOET and Vietnam Blind Association (VBA) worked collectively to devise a national plan on the education of children with visual impairment for 2015. A national steering committee was established to advise on how best to educate Vietnamese people with visual impairment. At the same time, the ICEVI and the WBU started a programme to ensure equal education for all children with visual impairment in the world (EFA-VI Global Campaign). Vietnam has aligned its own campaign on education with the same objectives as those of the ICEVI to become one of first focus countries in East Asia to implement EFA-VI.

Some activities of EFA-VI in Vietnam

EFA-VI in Vietnam has developed implementation plans for 2007-2011 and 2011-2015. We have established a target that all children with visual impairment in Vietnam should not only go to school but also receive high quality education. The EFA-VI program has set up a priority list for each region relating to the target. During 2007-2009 we have been able to implement EFA-VI in 12 provinces/cities. During 2008-2009 we have been able to expand it to another 24 provinces/cities. In 2010, we plan to work in a total of 36/63 provinces/cities in Vietnam.

We carried out a baseline survey to identify the number of children with visual impairment in the whole country. We also plan to establish their needs and seek to increase school enrolment to one hundred per cent. We were able to collect data (age, sex, visual impairment level, educational situation) on a total of 14,000 children with visual impairment. Analysis of the data revealed that the

number of children with visual impairment enrolled at school has increased to over 70% and the number of children dropping out has decreased. Unfortunately, we still have not been able to establish specific criteria on how to identify children with additional needs and are in the process of receiving guidance from VNIES. Clearly many children with visual impairment are not captured on the list due to the lack of cooperation between medical organisations and the educational system.

We provided training to 95 'key' teachers over a 12 day period and 2,609 teachers who work directly with children with visual impairment between 2-4 days. Although the training courses were short, teachers were able to learn more about how to teach children with visual impairment in their localities. There is a study unit on 'inclusive education for disabled children' as part of the primary teachers' training programme, but few educational centres actually focus on its content. Many graduate students complete the course without any idea about how to teach disabled children.

EFA-VI has supported the publication of 115 sets of curriculum books in Braille for primary schools. MoET also printed and supported the production of 440 sets of Braille books in Grade 1 and 2 for blind children in Vietnam. All blind students have received frames and stylus. We have also produced a model for tactile drawing kits and have organised a training course on helping teachers to make materials from simple resources. Most of our budget for training teachers, teaching and learning materials and equipment comes from donations by individuals, and from international organizations.

Many families who have children with visual impairment often do not recognise the importance of sending their children to school. For this reason, we have also published a book on the education of children with visual impairment and documents to increase teachers' skills and give information to

parents on how best to support their children at home.

We also organised two workshops: one was to give advice to school leavers on how to find a job and a second one for professionals to share their experiences of the education of children with visual impairment. As a result of these initiatives, cooperation between individuals, organizations on education for children with visual impairment has been improved.

Planned activities for 2010–2015

The current programme will expand to ensure that all children with visual impairment go to school by 2015. We plan to identify as many children as we can to participate in early intervention programmes. We will also develop human resources to help the inclusion of the visually impaired by supporting teachers who work directly with children in kindergarten and primary schools. We will supply documents on early intervention for children with visual impairment and for schools who have children with visual impairment. We will also increase the distribution of information documents for parents to help them to take care and educate children with visual impairment. We are also in the process of piloting electronic books and are transcribing printed books into Braille for blind students. We wish all children with visual impairment to have access to their own books by 2015 and are also exploring the production of teaching materials for low vision students and children with visual impairment who have additional disabilities.

Finally, we plan to set up a consultation network to locate children with visual impairment in Vietnam and increase the cooperation of stakeholders in implementing activities to ensure that all children can go to school. We hope, through all of these measures, to achieve our target of providing universal primary education for all children with visual impairment in Vietnam by 2015.

The education of students with visual impairment in Thailand

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Background

The education of children with visual impairment formally started with the setting up of the first school for the blind (Bangkok School for the Blind) by an American blind woman, Ms. Genevieve Caulfield, in 1939. Several other schools for the blind were then set up by both private and public sectors to cover all regions of Thailand (Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand, undated).

Historically, education for Thai persons with disabilities was considered more as charity than a human right. The National Primary Education Act B.E. 2523 (1980) Section 8 (1) stated that children who were physically or 'mentally' impaired could be exempted from formal schooling (Ministry of Education, 1980) and stakeholders used this clause to legally deny children with disabilities the right to access education. However children with visual impairment could receive education through schools for the blind. A system for integrating students with visual impairment into mainstream schools was started in 1956 when students were first sent to selected 'collaborating' mainstream schools in the same areas as each special school for their secondary and higher education.

During the 1990s, educators worldwide witnessed the two major international events that paved the way to recognising education as a human right. These were the 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education for All and the proclamation of the Salamanca Statement in 1994. These events directly influenced Thailand's educational policies for persons with disabilities.

A remarkable turning point in the education of Thai persons with disabilities was the promulgation of the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) and Amendments (Second National Education Act B.E. 2545 (2002)). This Act entitled persons with disabilities to basic education without any exception.

Section 10 in the Act states:

*"In the provision of education, all individuals shall have equal rights and opportunities to receive **basic education** provided by the State for the duration of at least **12 years**. Such education, provided on a nationwide basis, shall be of quality and free of charge. Persons with physical, mental, intellectual, emotional, social, communication and learning deficiencies; those with physical disabilities; or cripples; or those unable to support themselves; or those destitute or disadvantaged; shall have the rights and opportunities to receive **basic education specially provided**. Education for the disabled in the second paragraph shall be provided free of charge at birth or at first diagnosis...."* (Ministry of Education, 2002)

This National Education Act was considered to be a major piece of legislation for Thai education. It provided a broad picture of how Thai education, from early years to higher education, shall be provided to Thai citizens both disabled and non-disabled. It was very much in line with "Education for All". Nonetheless, it was considered necessary

to have legislation specifically dealing with learners with the special educational needs. At the beginning of 2008, Thailand passed the first Education for Disabilities Act B.E. 2551. This national law governs how public agencies provide special education and related services to children with disabilities. It addresses the educational needs of children with disabilities from birth or when they are first diagnosed. The Act was considered not only to be a civil rights law which aimed to protect the rights of persons with disabilities to education in accordance with their rights under the 1999 National Education Act (Ministry of Education, 2008a), but also as a device for promoting inclusive Education for a range of students in public schools.

Achievements

Two decades after the World Conference on 'Education for All' in Jomtien, access to education by persons with disabilities in Thailand has transitioned from a charity-based to a rights-based system. Seventy-six Special Education Centres (one in each province), which are under the supervision of the Bureau of Special Education Administration, Ministry of Education, were established. These Centres are responsible for finding children with disabilities, providing them with early intervention, and transferring them to either special or mainstream schools in their local communities. Having said this, the educational path for children with visual impairment is often different.

Presently, Thailand has 12 schools for the blind nationwide. Out of these 12, two schools (one in the north and one in the south) are administered by the Royal Thai government. The rest belong to charitable or non-government organisations. Two major charitable foundations for the blind in Thailand are considered to be the main providers of education to Thai students with visual impairment mainly through special schools for the blind. They are able to study in these schools for

several years before they are transferred to neighbouring collaborated mainstream school.

Wider School Choices

Previously, students with visual impairment had little choice of school apart from schools for the blind. In recent years, as part of its commitment to 'Education for All', the Ministry of Education has been trying to implement inclusive education by initiating model schools. In 2004 the project started with 390 model inclusive schools nationwide. This number rose to 2,000 schools the following year. (Office of Basic Education Commission, 2005) During 2009-2010 academic year the number is expected to increase to 5,000 schools, serving over 33,000 students with disabilities. (Ministry of Education, 2008b). Although this number represents students with disabilities in all categories, we expect an increase in the number of so-called "inclusive schools" for students with visual impairment.

Teaching science

Science was traditionally considered an impossible subject for students with visual impairment to learn but this has changed over recent years thanks to a new collaboration between the Thailand's Association of the Blind, the National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre, the Ministry of Education, the foundations for the blind in Thailand and mainstream schools.

Although this project is still at an early stage, a designated private school for the blind was chosen in 2007 to focus on preparing students with visual impairment to become scientists. Science camps for students with visual impairment were organised and the first generation of students with visual impairment were included into a small number of mainstream schools – both in the capital and the provinces. These students were given extra tuition and specialised learning materials. Mainstream science teachers were also trained on how to

produce and use media to support their students. In the last academic year (2008-2009), the first two students with visual impairment in the country enrolled to do computer science at one of Thailand's leading universities.

Opportunities for students with MDVI

As entitlement to education is a human right, an increased number of MDVI children have been enrolled into schools for the blind. Incidentally, children with MDVI were not being transferred into mainstream schools unlike their peers with visual impairment. Rather, they remained in the schools for the blind to receive non-formal education. Students with MDVI whose age exceeded formal schooling age were sent back home. As a result of this trend, an initiative between the Hilton/Perkins International Programme and the Northern School for the Blind in Chiang-Mai Province have been piloting a 'Half-way Home' Project. A house has been rented for MDVI students to develop daily living skills and independent life skills. Students with MDVI have been able to develop essential skills as a result of their project leading to much happier and more independent lives.

Challenges

Thailand has been successful in increasing the number of students with visual impairment to mainstream education. In secondary level, the majority of students are able to attend mainstream schools (excluding those with MDVI). Nonetheless, the quality of education students with visual impairment receive in mainstream schools is hindered by the lack of training opportunities for teachers working with children with visual impairment. Furthermore, there is also a lack of resources to adequately meet the specific needs of these students. Many Thai stakeholders in the mainstream still equate 'integration' with 'inclusion'. Students with visual impairment are expected to fit into existing provision (mainstream schools) rather than schools and teachers making the schools more inclusive regardless of their

condition. Mainstream stakeholders view "sameness" and not "differentiation" as the key to equality without taking students' individual needs into consideration.

The situation in Thailand is similar to that of other developing countries where resources are mostly only available centrally in the urban areas (Eleweke and Rodda, 2002). Regardless of Thailand's existing policies which encourage students with disabilities to be educated in the school in their local home communities, the majority of students with visual impairment still remain at schools for the blind as residents and attend mainstream schools during the day.

Although the Ministry of Education has issued a regulation (Ministry of Education 2007) outlining the criteria and procedures for disabled people to receive the facilities, media, services and other educational aids for disabled students in line with Section 10, paragraph 3 in the National Education Act 1999, the provision is still inadequate. Thus, schools for the blind have to provide each collaborating mainstream school with a resource teacher, specialised equipment such as Braille embossers and screen-reading software, alternative learning materials such as Braille/audio textbooks. Special schools are now acting as preparation and support centres for the inclusion of VI students into mainstream (Bangkok School for the Blind, 1999).

The future

We are witnessing changes in the quantity of children with visual impairment attending schools in Thailand but we still face the main challenge of achieving quality education. Increasing the enrolment rate of students with visual impairment to education is only the first indicator of success in the EFA-VI global campaign (ICEVI, 2006). A rights-based approach to the education of the children does not only emphasise enrolling as

many students into schools as possible, but it also focuses on the quality of the children's educational experience (UNICEF/UNESCO, 2007). Thailand now needs to pay more attention to the learning experiences of students with visual impairment and not just see educational placement as the only action. It is vital that they receive appropriate and adequate support ensuring a level playing field with their non-disabled counterparts (ICEVI, 2006). This, however, cannot be achieved by NGOs alone, but through more collaboration between the Thai Government and mainstream society.

Effective inclusion is a group effort; it involves establishing community based collaboration

among educators, other professionals, students, families, and community agencies. Therefore, people must work cooperatively and reflectively by establishing communities and sharing resources, skills, and advocacy to the benefit of all disabled students. In addition, adequate budgets must be provided to support these resources.

Yet, although inclusive education is being encouraged internationally as a key to achieving Education for All (UNESCO, 1994), we consider it to be best embedded within the context of a continuum of placement choices (from special schools to mainstream schools).

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Policy and Practice in the Educational Inclusion of Children and Young People with Visual Impairment in Sri Lanka and Pakistan

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Although most governments are in agreement with the concept of Education for All (EFA), inclusion in its fullest context remains far from a practical reality or priority for a number of countries who are struggling with more fundamental issues of trying to stretch minimal resources to reach maximum numbers of children. In light of this, often it is the children with disabilities who end up without basic education and this is reflective of the fact that 90% of the children with disabilities in the developing countries remain out of school.

According to a joint report by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF published in 2006, *Children out of School – Measuring Exclusion from Primary Education*, 115 million children of primary school age are not in school and 40 million (35%) of these are children who do not attend school because of a disability/impairment. Disabled female children are less likely to attend school in comparison with disabled male children. Meeting the Millennium Development Goals depends on reaching vulnerable children throughout the developing world. Children with disabilities are amongst the most stigmatized and excluded of all the world's children and that has significant implication for key targets and commitments within the international development agenda, in particular the Millennium Development Goals, Education for All and Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This paper is a review of the current operating environment in education for children with vision

impairment in Sri Lanka and Pakistan and highlights some of the successes of, and challenges to, educational inclusion in light of the relevant policy frameworks.

Prevalence of Childhood Blindness and Low Vision in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the prevalence of childhood blindness is 0.3/1,000 (Gilbert, 2008) and based on the current childhood population of 5,087,817, there are approximately 1,500 children who are blind or have severe visual impairment (VA <6/60 - NPL). There are an additional 3,000 children who have low vision. Based on these numbers, there are 3,500 children (5 – 15 years) who require educational support. Of these, 250 require non-sighted educational interventions while the remaining are low vision and require varying degrees of educational support.

Operating Environment – Sri Lanka

With a literacy rate of 92%, and with 83% of the total population having had secondary education (UNICEF, 2005) Sri Lanka has one of the most literate populations amongst developing nations (*Gunawardene, 2004*). An education system which dictates 9 years of Compulsory Schooling for every child is in place, with 99% of the children entering the first grade. In 1942, a special education committee proposed extensive reforms to establish an efficient and quality education system for the people. A free education system was initiated in

1945 (De Silva, 1981) by Dr. C. W. W. Kannangara, a former minister of education. However, in the 1980s changes to this system saw the separation of the administration of schools between the central government and the provincial government.

Currently, there are three approaches available for education of children with disabilities i.e. special schools, special education units and mainstream schools. Special schools are non-government schools that are assisted by government grants. Special units were introduced as an interim measure, to prepare children and include them in the mainstream; however, mainstreaming of children in these units appears to take place rarely. In reality, children tend to remain in these units until the age of 13-14 years when their education usually comes to an end; however, there are a number of examples where children have been included successfully in mainstream education. These have generally been on an ad-hoc basis and largely through the personal efforts of education officers and teachers.

The Special Education Centre was established at the National Institute of Education (NIE) in 1988 and was raised to the status of a Department in 1991. In 1992, NIE started a course leading to a degree of Bachelors of Education for teachers of special education. In 1994, there were 157 teachers specially trained to teach the children with visual impairment, which has grown to 238. These teachers not only teach at the school for the blind but also make home visits and give home counseling to families and children with visual impairment (Gunawardana and Dhanapala, 2000).

In the last 5 years, primary school teachers have received 5 days training on inclusive education. This training focuses on providing basic knowledge on identifying a child with special educational needs. It has been more of an awareness raising programme and the intention has been to bring a change in attitudes of teachers towards children

with disabilities. One day orientation sessions have also been conducted for the school administrators to sensitise them regarding educational inclusion.

Presently, Sri Lanka has 13 residential schools for children with visual impairment with total student population of nearly 500 and 101 teachers (Gunawardana and Dhanapala, 2000). These statistics do not include children with low vision who attend mainstream education. Also this data doesn't indicate the accurate number of children with low vision out of the total number of students enrolled in these institutions. Special schools are generally better equipped with necessary teaching and learning materials. The majority of schools have tactile material including Braille books, slates etc. However, the availability is inadequate and often there is a lag in getting the current curriculum available in Braille. Low vision devices are becoming more available through the network of low vision clinics which provide all the essential low vision devices and spectacles free to children with low vision. The children with visual impairment sit for Government examinations; however, slight amendments are made in Science and Mathematics question papers.

Sri Lanka is an EFA focus country and the Ministry of Education (MoE) has developed a national plan for EFA and inclusive education falls within the EFA plan. With regards to inclusive education, the EFA action plan draws special attention to the marginalization of children and to the need to broaden and improve early childhood security and provision of educational opportunities. For the implementation of the plan, EFA committees are being established at national, provincial, zonal, divisional and school levels.

Strategies for improving the quality of education have been developed through primary education reforms; however, these need to translate into concrete action to support children with disabilities. National policy on disability and the proposed

general education policy provide the necessary framework for inclusive education and will need to be implemented so that children with disabilities can access their right to education.

As part of Pakistan's National Eye Health Plan a network of low vision clinics under the National Low Vision Programme have been established across the country. These clinics provide comprehensive low vision assessment, prescribe and provide optical and non-optical low vision devices and advise on education and rehabilitation aspects. There are 24 low vision clinics at tertiary and secondary level and 8 low vision assessment centres in the special education system offering services to approximately 10,000 clients annually; of these, one third are children with low vision who are either out of school or struggling to manage in schools and very often give up education. These clinics and assessment centres offer low vision assessment and provision of low vision devices and training and refer the children to mainstream education with advice on class room management and a level of additional support. The clinics, then, provide on-going support to the child, family, and teachers to ensure participation and access to educational opportunities. This programme facilitated in building the inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral consensus and developed the necessary linkages/networks amongst key stakeholders. The whole process served to dispel certain apprehensions of various stakeholders and positively impacted on the policymakers to recognise the effectiveness of educational inclusion. This experience has clearly demonstrated that by adopting an innovative approach it is possible to mainstream children with visual impairment into the education system.

Prevalence of Childhood Blindness and Low Vision in Pakistan

The prevalence of childhood blindness in Pakistan is 0.7/1,000 and based on the current childhood population of 64,727,742, there are approximately 45,000 children who are blind or have severe visual impairment (VA <6/60 - NPL). There are additional 95,000 children who have low vision. Based on these numbers, there are 100,000 children (5 – 15 years) who require educational support. Of these, 7,500 require similar education intervention as in Sri Lanka.

Operating Environment – Pakistan

The Constitution of Pakistan recognises that education is a fundamental right of every citizen. Thus, it is the responsibility of the Government of Pakistan (GoP) to provide education to its entire populace. Despite this fact, Pakistan is struggling to increase the current literacy rate of 56.20% (Choudhry, 2005) and primary school enrollment of 84% (MoE, 2008). The education sector in Pakistan has been experiencing problems in terms of access as well as quality during the past decades. Being cognisant of this fact, Ministry of Education (MoE) has placed a special emphasis on increasing access and raising the quality of education in the post-Dakar Agreement. To streamline these issues, MoE developed a ten year Perspective Plan (2001-11) to provide a broader outline for the development of the country's education sector. Moreover, a comprehensive Education Sector Reforms Programme (ESR) and National Plan of Action (NPA) for EFA were developed and implemented to achieve EFA goals by the year 2015.

In Pakistan, education is considered to be a provincial responsibility and has been devolved to district level under the recent devolution plan. The Ministry of Special Education and Social Welfare at the federal level provide policy and strategy guidelines to the provinces. There are two systems providing education to children with disabilities; special education and mainstream education. The

special education system comprises both residential and day schools. The special education of children with visual impairment is provided through a network of 63 schools for the visually impaired run by the Federal and Provincial Governments, and NGOs. In the last five years, one of the provinces, Punjab, has launched an initiative of starting 114 schools for children with disabilities including children with visual impairment. These schools are at sub-district level and provide transport facilities as well as all teaching and learning material, school uniforms, mid-day meals and a monthly stipend.

Currently, there are approximately 3,000 children enrolled in the schools for the visually impaired while approximately another 1,300 attend schools for other disabilities. The estimates of children with low vision in mainstream education are not available; however, due to relatively good coverage of low vision services, we know that a significant proportion attends mainstream education. The concept of inclusive education is not new in Pakistan and children with visual impairment have historically been taught alongside sighted children in the religious schools (madrassas) where they were taught theology and the memorisation of the Holy Quran and later often took up employment as Imams in mosques. However, the concept of IE in its current form is relatively new and most of the centres offering IE are in major cities and in the private sector. Recently, the Federal Directorate of Education, Ministry of Education in collaboration with international aid partners - Sightsavers International and IDP Norway have launched a pilot IE programme in 16 schools in Islamabad capital territory. Other organisations like Light for the World, Handicap International, Civil Society Human and Institutional Development (CHIP), CHEF International have also initiated a number of inclusive education projects in various parts of the country including Skardu, Jehlum, Peshawar and Muzaffarabad.

In Pakistan, three universities offer a Masters Degree programme in special education while one of the teacher training colleges offers a specialised Masters programme in teaching children with visual impairment. The National Institute of Special Education (NISE), established in 1987, offers on the job training for various cadres. This institute focuses on providing training to both special educators as well as mainstream teachers in inclusive education strategies. There are 8,000 teachers trained in special education working in both special as well as mainstream schools. There are three Braille presses producing teaching materials and a number of institutions produce their own teaching materials on a smaller scale. Assistive technology is becoming more available, particularly to the small proportion of students in higher education.

In 2000-01, GoP initiated a comprehensive Education Sector Reforms Programme (2001-06) in line with the National Education Policy 1998 – 2010 with a particular focus on EFA. The Pakistan EFA Mid Decade Assessment Report 2008 commends considerable progress on a number of EFA indicators. However, many challenges still remain and efforts must be intensified if the EFA goals are to be met by 2015. Pakistan is also an EFA-VI focus country and work has started to develop a national plan in consultation with key stakeholders. The new national education policy framework and strategies approved in September 2009 for the next decade reiterates the Government's commitment towards the promotion of an inclusive and child friendly education system.

Discussion

Inclusive education for children with visual impairment is still in its infancy in both Sri Lanka and Pakistan and the main source of education for these children still remains within special education. Coverage still remains low and the majority of children with visual impairment are still out of school. However, it is essential to understand the

factors that impact adversely on children's school enrolment. Poverty, disability, conflict and a lack of supporting policy frameworks are some of the key contributing factors to exclusion. At an operational level; inadequate infrastructure and limited learning materials and teaching skills coupled with insufficient clinical service support exacerbate exclusion.

The current education situation in both Sri Lanka and Pakistan is diverse and is reflected in the respective national strategies and implementation plans. While the literacy and primary school enrolment in Sri Lanka is one of the highest in the developing world the same cannot be said for Pakistan which is struggling to meet its EFA targets. Having said this, both Governments and Ministries of Education are struggling with competing priorities with limited resources, inadequate availability of trained teachers and weak management systems.

Since Pakistan is struggling to meet the quantitative targets of EFA, it is less likely to be receptive to a broader scaling up of an inclusive education programme as a priority and therefore interventions will need to be more pragmatic, focusing on support for programme policy, developing scalable approaches and engaging with other stakeholders to ensure that the maximum numbers of children with disabilities are included in education programmes. Considering the realities on the ground, in the short term special education seems to be a viable option until the wider education system until infrastructure allows for broader educational inclusion.

Conclusion

The educational inclusion of children with disabilities as well as children with visual impairment cannot be undertaken on its own by any one stakeholder. Contributions from key stakeholders such as Governments, non-state actors, and communities are essential to combat exclusion. The partnerships need to be fostered at various levels to address the concerns of policy, planning and its implementation which should lead to an increased co-ordination of effort. A cross-sectoral collaborative approach among health, education, and rehabilitation can play a pivotal role in promoting a more cohesive environment for quality inclusive education.

The introduction of Inclusive education has led to improvements in educational outcomes for all children. This cannot be achieved without addressing the limited access to infrastructure, knowledge, assistive technology, learning media and assessment systems. This access can be achieved through the provision of supporting policy frameworks, operational research and resources to build the capacity for implementation at all levels. Out of the box thinking around new and innovative partnerships between state and non-state actors like NGOs, Parents Teachers Associations, Media, Professional Associations etc. need to be established to provide a comprehensive framework for the development and strengthening of inclusive systems in education that promote equity and equality.

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Pedro Zurita Honoured

Pedro Zurita was bestowed the title of Honorary President of the Italian Braille Club during a simple and warm ceremony on 18 September 2009 at the head office of the Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted (UIC). The ceremony was attended by UIC Board members and staff. The title acknowledges Pedro Zurita's lifelong activities serving blind people all over the world and promoting braille.

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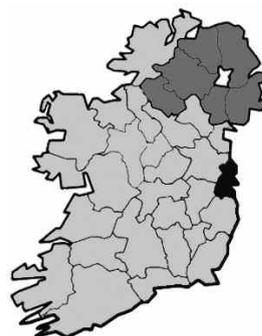
Juliet Pro 60

Educational Inclusion for Children with Visual Impairment in Ireland

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Ireland has a population of approximately 4.5 million people of which 1.2 million live in the capital, Dublin. The population of children with visual impairment (VI) in Ireland (0 – 17 yrs) as recorded by the National Council for the Blind (NCBI) is 1016 (November 2009) and many of them live outside Dublin which houses the only special school for children with VI in Ireland.



■ Northern Ireland
 ■ Republic of Ireland
 ■ Dublin - capital of Ireland

General Educational Policies

The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) 1993 was the first comprehensive review of special education provision in Ireland dealing with all categories of disability. Grounded in the Education Act 1998 and subsequent legislation, the present policy and provision of inclusive education has developed systematically in the intervening period. Children with special needs have *'the right to appropriate education in an inclusive setting with a focus on achieving outcomes.'*¹ Helping to ensure that this right is met, the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 aims *'to ensure that each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education.'*²

Provision in mainstream schooling

Most children with VI in Ireland are educated in mainstream schools, with some choosing to attend

special school. Those not able to attend school, for health reasons, may be entitled to receive hours of education at home, funded by the state.

Parents/guardians of a child who is blind/VI, with or without additional learning difficulties, approach their mainstream school³ to enrol their child. The board of management of the school decide on the application in the context of its enrolment policy. In the rare cases of refusal to enrol a child with VI, a parent/guardian may appeal against the board's decision under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

Additional teaching and other supports for VI children in mainstream education is the responsibility of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOS) employed by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). Supports recommended by a SENOS are ultimately sanctioned by the Department of Education and Science.

¹ National Council for Special Education. *Implementation Report: Plan for Phased Implementation of the Education for Persons with Educational Needs (EPSN) Act 2004 (as submitted to the Minister for Education & Science on 1st October 2006, pg 92).*

² Education (Welfare) Act 2000, 10.(1).

³ Catchment areas for primary schools are generally defined by parish boundaries; enrolment criteria in general must satisfy tests of fairness, equity and transparency. At second level, parental choice of school is a stronger factor.

Special School provision	No. of pupils attending
Primary school for VI, Dublin	37
Resource unit for VI children attached to mainstream secondary school, Dublin	26

Children attending the special school/unit should live in the greater Dublin area for ease of transport. Accommodation is provided, in residences close to the school, for those children whose homes are outside the greater Dublin area and for whom transport is a problem. Staff in the residences help to develop the children's independent living skills, mobility skills, typing and also help with homework. After-school activities are organised, including sports activities and trips.

St. Joseph's Support Centre, on the special school campus, provides occupational therapy (OT), speech therapy, physiotherapy and mobility skill development to children attending the special school. Such services are also available to children with VI not attending the special school, but only on an assessment basis. Children in mainstream education must approach the local health office (LHO)⁴ for such therapies, but there may be very long waiting lists.

Case one:

A girl of 5 yrs, blind, attending her local school, has physical difficulties with her left hand. She needs to learn Braille and it is important for her visiting teacher (VT) to establish if her hand, with some therapy, will allow her to be a one or two-handed braille user. On application to the LHO for occupational therapy, her mother was informed that, in her area, there was a minimum waiting period of two years. Luckily, this child has been able to avail of some private funding for therapy.

Initial Referral⁵

Initial referrals to the Visiting Teacher service for Children with Visual Impairment (VTVI) come from many sources with the National Council for the Blind (NCBI)⁶ being the primary referral agency. The community resource worker (CRW) employed by NCBI will visit the home and advise parents / guardian of appropriate support services, including the VTVI service. An NCBI mobility officer may provide training in cane skills to a school-going child and may also work in the home to encourage and teach independence skills. NCBI has Low Vision Aid clinics and provides assessments and training in Assistive Technology (AT). However, training in mobility and independence skills for children from 5 – 18 yrs is an area which needs additional personnel.

Case two:

A young boy (aged 10), blind and attending mainstream school, has learned Braille, is currently acquiring skills in JAWS (screen-reading software) and is a touch typist. However, he has difficulty putting on his coat, tying his laces, etc. When the teacher asked him "Is a box of cornflakes kept in the fridge?", he didn't know. His cereal is put in his bowl every morning and so he has no knowledge of where food is kept in the kitchen. While the VT had discussed independence training with the parents, she asked the CRW to visit the home, talk to the parents further on the need for independence skills. However, success depends on parents taking these issues on board.

Visiting Teachers for Children with Visual Impairment

Fourteen visiting teachers for children with visual impairment (VTVIs) work with VI children at pre-school level, and in first and second level mainstream education throughout the country.

⁴ The Health Service Executive is the national health authority, organised in regional offices.

⁵ A referral to the VTVI service must be accompanied by an Ophthalmologist report.

⁶ The National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) is a not-for-profit charitable organisation which provides support and services to people experiencing sight loss in Ireland.

They also advise / support students at third level. The VTVIs are employed by the Department of Education & Science. Each VT is responsible for a particular geographically defined caseload allocation. The VT supports children, parents / guardians, schools, teachers and other professionals involved with the child.

As the majority of children with VI are educated in their local schools, the nature and frequency of contact with the child at school will depend on a range of factors, including the severity of the impairment, the individual learning needs of the child and the current support in the school.

On home visits, the VT talks to the parents / guardians, assesses and advises on the child's functional vision, and gives advice on issues related to the child's education.

The VTs work with pre-school children at home where they model appropriate teaching approaches for parents and advise them on the management of their child's special educational needs.

VTVIs advise and train teachers on how to adapt the curriculum to make it accessible to the child who is VI/blind. The VT also gives specialised tuition to the child and school staff - for example, in Braille and on the use of specialised technology. Some additional training to VTs and class teachers is provided by the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and by St. Joseph's Support Centre.

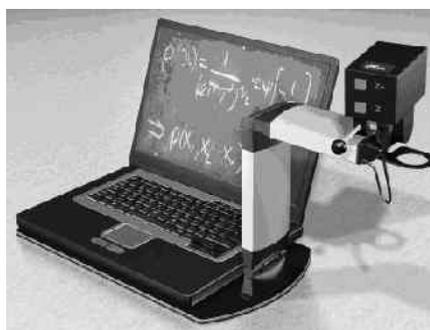
In order to ensure accessibility to the curriculum, the VT may recommend a number of resources for the child, including:

1. Additional teaching hours – a child with an assessed VI is entitled to 3.5 hrs of additional tuition
2. A Special Needs Assistant (SNA) – if there are issues of safety for the child with VI, or if the child has specific care needs, the employment of an SNA may be sanctioned to assist the child in

school. This assistance may be full or part-time. The SNA is not a teaching assistant.

3. Equipment – the child with VI may be given low vision aids (LVAs), e.g. a telescope (monocular) for distance vision and/or magnifier (varying types) for near vision.

If LVAs are insufficient to assist the child in accessing the curriculum, special technology may be provided, including: close circuit television (CCTV), computer with magnification (e.g. Zoomtext / Lunar) or screen-reading software (e.g. JAWS / Supernova), laptops, distance cameras to see the blackboard, Braille machines, embossers, tactile graphic machines, talking calculators, talking dictionaries, talking equipment for cooking, etc. Children are also encouraged to use a book stand to rest written materials, assisting both vision and posture.



Laptop with distance camera

Use of specialised assistive technology (AT) can be a tremendous asset in the classroom but must be used effectively to support inclusion and not become a barrier. The proximity or otherwise of electrical sockets for AT, must not prevent the child from being placed alongside his/her peers.

4. Typing tuition – 20 hours of typing tuition may be funded by the DES.
5. Reasonable accommodations provided for VI students taking state examinations include: additional time (10 mins per hour per examination paper), enlarged/modified/braille papers, use of laptop, a reader to read questions, a scribe to write answers, use of a separate centre, and use of low vision aids/AT, as required.

6. Alternative formats of print material - e.g. books in large print, Braille, text format - are provided by the National Braille Production Centre. Applications for books in alternative formats are required in November of the previous school year to guarantee availability for the following September. This can be difficult to achieve as many schools do not choose their books until the Spring.

State funding for school-based equipment is generous. However, currently there is no fund to repair equipment. Such repairs are funded by school authorities and some schools find this unsatisfactory as the equipment generally moves with the child on leaving the school. While a piece of equipment is being repaired, there is no facility for acquiring a replacement during this period.

Responsibility for funding similar equipment in the home lies with the HSE. The NCBI accesses these funds and the VT can request that some of this funding be used to provide equipment in the home.

Social Inclusion

When a child with VI attends a school for the first time, the VTI ensures that other children are aware of his/her needs. Training may also be given to staff in the school, especially in the case of a child who is blind. Useful training activities include blindfolding, feeling Braille and the use of tactile diagrams. This gives staff/children some idea of how difficult it can be to learn without sight. It is also useful to invite an adult who is blind to talk to the children/adults.

In relation to one child who was blind and attended her local school, the teacher (with the parent and child's permission) asked the class to suggest ways of including her in activities. The teacher felt that since the ideas came from the class, they were more likely to be implemented. As a result, this child was most successfully included in all aspects of the life of the class/school.

The use of class games (tactile snakes and ladders, ludo, cards with Braille, etc) by both sighted and blind children is important for leisure time in school. Developing the talents of the child who is blind/VI and emphasising to the class what the child **can do** rather than what he/she **can't do**, leads to more successful integration.

Successes and improvements in recent years

a) Assistive Technology: There have been very significant advances in technology which have helped to make inclusion a success in recent years. Technology now exists to allow access to such distance vision as blackboard, experiments, etc. This equipment is now portable which is beneficial in secondary school, where many children move from class to class. (Some schools, when approached, will create a 'base' room for the class which has a child with VI, to reduce constant movement).

AT also allows Braille to be converted to print and vice versa, so the class teacher can understand what the child has written, and can create Braille for the child, even if she/he does not have an understanding of Braille.

Dictaphones allow children to record their homework immediately. Memory sticks allow students to bring work between school and home more easily.

b) Greater access to Visiting Teacher support: The availability of mobile phones has allowed parents, teachers and children to have contact with their VTI during work hours. Such access is of tremendous benefit to those concerned.

c) Inclusion and integration: The widespread enrolment of VI children in mainstream education has ensured that both staff and pupils have a better understanding of disability and in many cases see the child rather than the impairment.

d) Internet: Parents are more aware now of the needs of their children and can access information on their child's eye condition and

their rights to education, etc. It also allows children to access information on school-related topics, using magnification/screen-reading software.

- e) **Resource hours:** Children with VI can have additional tuition to help them in difficult and challenging areas of learning.
- f) **Special Needs Assistants:** SNAs can now access general training courses and the VT can train them in specific skills required for working with children who are VI/blind. While most SNAs are willing to assist the child with braille work, making tactile diagrams and general adaptation of materials, this is not part of their defined care role.
- g) **Parents** can become involved in their child's education and meet with the class and resource teacher to discuss their child's Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- h) **Examinations:** modifications in subjects for State examinations have improved in recent years. Where previously a student was permitted to omit the map question in Geography, this reduced the choice of questions. Now, there are alternate questions posed, which are in words

rather than diagrams or maps. Science has similar modifications.

- i) **Third level colleges** now have access/disability officers who assist students with VI. A special entry requirement is available in many colleges. Applications for technology, personal assistance, transport are all offered on registration. As more students with VI attend third level, the understanding of their needs will increase.

Conclusion

While Ireland currently is in deep economic recession, education remains a priority funding area, and special education particularly so. As numbers of children with VI grow, there will be increased demands on various resources and on support structures such as the Visiting Teacher service which must adapt service models accordingly.

There is open communication and increased mission coherence among those who serve children with VI in mainstream education, be that in a State-funded or voluntary capacity. It is hoped that the service to these children will be further enhanced in the years ahead.

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National Council for Special Education. Implement-ation Report: Plan for Phased Implementation of the Education for Persons with Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 (as submitted to the Minister for Education & Science on 1st October 2006, pg 92)

Conference on Multimodal Learning Processes

The Swedish Braille Authority in cooperation with Mälardalen University (Sweden) invites to a conference on Multimodal learning processes – Understanding the world through eyes, ears and touch. The conference will be held in Eskilstuna, Sweden, on April 21–22, 2010.

For more information see: <http://www.punktskriftsnamnden.se/english/conference/>

Impact of Educational Inclusion on Children with Visual Impairment in Malawi

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Introduction

This article provides a snapshot of some of the implications of inclusion for children with visual impairment in South-Eastern Africa. It forms part of a wider collaborative study investigating the educational inclusion of children with visual impairment in Malawi¹. We briefly discuss some of the challenges policy makers face when deciding on how best to educate children who are blind in mainstream schools.

Malawi has witnessed a substantial increase in enrolment following the introduction of free primary education in 1994. This has led to high pupil-teacher ratios (average 70:1) leading to large class sizes (200+ in some rural primary schools), resource shortages and difficulties in providing sufficient adequately trained teachers. These factors are associated with low achievement and low school completion rates (UNESCO, 2008). Further, because of high repetition rates, it takes an average of 12 years for a child to complete the eight-year primary school cycle. As a result, as few as 10% of Malawian children in Standard 6 reach the 'desirable' level of reading literacy (UNESCO, 2008). Levels of successful primary completion (i.e. to the end of Standard 8) have dropped as low as 40% with many children dropping out of school before Standard 5 (MOES, 2000).

Special schools and resource centres

Formal education for children with visual impairment started in 1950 with the establishment of Chilanga School of the Blind in Kasungu by the Dutch Reformed Church and Lulwe School for the Blind in Nsanje by the African Evangelical Fellowship. Formal courses to train specialist teachers of children with visual impairment were established in 1965 at Montfort College with the support of Dutch Brothers of the Immaculate Conception, and at about the same time a resource base for children with visual impairment was established in a mainstream demonstration school attached to the College. Subsequently the Ministry of Education established resources centres for learners with visual impairment in 13 primary schools, 15 secondary schools and 7 tertiary institutes across the country and these resource centres continue to play an important function in the education of children who are blind. Children identified as blind are usually placed as full time boarders in a resource centre attached to a primary school, however many of these centres are over-subscribed, having excessively high pupil-teacher ratios (often as many as 40:2) and are in urgent need of repair and renovation (Lynch and McCall, 2007). The centres attached to secondary schools have electricity and generally have more material resources and greater access to equipment and

¹ The study was commissioned and facilitated by Sightsavers International Malawi Country Office and involved the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR) in the School of Education, University of Birmingham, UK, Montfort special Needs Education College and Malawi Institute of Education.

some have resources such as computers, assistive technology (screen-reading software) and braille embossers.

A response to including children with visual impairment into mainstream schools

A Government response to the practice of sending children with visual impairment to special schools, many of which are far from their homes, was to increase the number of children with visual impairment to be educated at their local mainstream schools. In the 1980's a new system of delivery, the Malawi Integrated Education Programme (MIEP) was established to promote the 'integration' of children with visual impairment into local primary schools and so reduce the over-crowding in special schools and resource centres. This programme was developed by the Dutch Brothers and supported by the Ministry of Education and later by Sightsavers International.

The main rationale for this programme was to provide specialist teaching and support to children attending local mainstream schools. MIEP currently operates in nine education districts and is administered by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) and managed through The Centre for the Education of Blind Children at Montfort Special Needs Education College. The MIEP was initially conceived as a 'demonstration' model with a view to disseminating good practice in educational provision for children with visual impairment and operates in selected districts, mainly rural, around the country. The Itinerant Teachers (ITs) or visiting teachers are employed and paid by the Ministry, while Sightsavers International provides additional financial support for travel (a small agreed allowance), transport (bicycle) and some equipment costs. The ITs are trained class teachers who receive a further one-year of intensive training in the education of children with visual impairment. Itinerant teachers are expected to complete a course in Braille as part of their training. ITs usually travel around local

mainstream schools and communities in a designated zone to offer advice to class teachers and teaching intervention to children with visual impairment. Recent research in Kenya and Uganda (Lynch and McCall, 2007, 2008a, 2008b) revealed that ITs faced particularly difficult challenges in supporting children who are braille users in local mainstream schools in part because of limited knowledge of how to introduce literacy through braille.

Overall responsibility for running the itinerant teaching programme falls under the Special Needs Education Section at the MoEST in Lilongwe, but the actual day-to-day management of the ITs is now the responsibility of the District Education Manager (DEM) and the Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) who supervise the delivery of the school curriculum and the management of staffing of schools at a zonal level. The District Education Managers have been given some flexibility in how ITs are managed within their own district. The programme works with a range of stakeholders supporting education for learners with VI e.g. Malawi Union of the Blind (advocacy), the Ministries of Education and Health (habilitation and rehabilitation), the Malawi National Examinations Board (access to national examinations) and charities working in the field of ICT and VI (e.g. the 'Making Wonders Project').

Training of ITs

Montfort Special Needs Education College trains about 30 specialist teachers every year through a certificate course in visual impairment. The trainee teachers receive lectures on inclusive education and the adaptation of the curriculum, and training in orientation and mobility, basic visual assessment, activities of daily living, the Braille code, and maintenance of Perkins Braille. The trainees undertake a six week teaching practice, normally in a primary school resource centre for the visually impaired. On successful completion of the course,

teachers are posted by MoEST to either a resource centre, a tertiary education institute or to the MIEP to work full time as a teacher of children with visual impairment. Until recently ITs worked under the supervision of coordinating itinerant teachers (CITs). These are experienced ITs responsible for supporting ITs within a zone within a district, however this level of line management was removed in 2009 and ITs are now directly answerable to District Education Managers (DEMs) and the Primary Education Advisors (PEAs).

The MoEST organises in-service training courses once a year for itinerant teachers which are financed by Sightsavers International. These INSET courses (more recently referred to as continual professional development) are designed to refresh/update learning areas covered in the original specialist teacher training. These refresher training courses are not available to those teachers who have been posted to resource centres or special schools.

Staff at Montfort College and the Special Needs Education Section are reviewing their teacher education programme and wish to 'upgrade' their current certificate programme to diploma and degree levels to be in line with neighboring country systems in Eastern and Central Africa (e.g. Kenya and Uganda). The Policy Investment Framework (2000) and the Malawi Education for All (2002) documents recognise that this will require additional staff development for lecturers involved in the areas of disability and special educational needs. This could involve lecturers travelling to other teacher training institutions in partner countries to share expertise and knowledge.

At mainstream schools level, all primary class teachers receive some basic awareness training on special needs education (usually one module) as part of a pre-service training course. Class teachers receive some instruction on how to work with children with low vision e.g. placing a child near the

front of the room or near a window, etc. but they rely on the itinerant teacher to give tuition in reading and writing to children who are blind. A recent joint initiative has been set up by MoEST and VSO to produce and distribute a 'Disability Toolkit' to all primary schools in the country. This 'Toolkit' gives general advice on how to better accommodate children with disabilities in mainstream classes. It also suggests some general teaching strategies for children with low vision but no guidance on how to work with children who are blind.

Supporting children who use Braille

One of the biggest challenges for mainstream schools is to ensure children who are blind receive curriculum materials in tactile form at the same time as their sighted class peers. This is a particular challenge for schools in rural areas where there is little access to learning materials. These children require intensive and high-quality instruction in literacy by a visiting teacher who has good knowledge of braille and a knowledge of how to teach reading and writing to attain an adequate level of basic literacy skills during primary school years. One way of helping to develop braille literacy skills is to make sure children have access to a graded reading scheme in their local language. Such a graded reading scheme was not in place before the recent research study.

There are three main types of equipment and learning materials that blind children need to learn: writing equipment, curriculum books in braille and additional reading books in braille. Currently, few of these resources reach mainstream schools resulting in children having to learn along side their sighted peers without the required books. This is frustrating at three levels: firstly, for classteachers who are expected to teach the curriculum to all children, secondly for the ITs who are expected to provide individual braille tuition and most importantly for the blind children who are unable to fully participate in the learning process.

The production of Braille versions of all the Malawi curriculum textbooks is the responsibility of Montfort College which houses a small braille press. Sightsavers International has supported the Braille Press by providing training for a technician at the African Braille Centre (ABC) in Nairobi, Kenya. Sightsavers International has funded the installation of new computerised braille equipment such as a braille embosser and a laptop equipped with software to convert print into the braille code. The Press only has capacity to produce small numbers of books in braille at a time. Much of its current production relies on funding from multilateral (UNICEF) and bilateral (Canadian International Development Agency) partners. The Centre manages the production of books in braille for special schools and resource centres at primary, secondary and tertiary schools. The current level of production is not meeting the demand from resource centres and primary schools and so a large part of production has to be outsourced to a larger braille press in South Africa. The production of braille books at Montfort College has been dogged by prolonged electricity supply problems and, as a result, the braille press has been relocated to premises near to the centre of the campus.

Cost of producing curriculum materials

The cost of the materials fall into three main areas: the provision of writing equipment (primary education packs, Perkins Brailers, braille paper), new primary curriculum books and additional reading books. All children on the MIEP should receive a primary education pack (PEP) which contains a handframe and stylus and braille paper (unit cost - \$30). More senior children in higher standard classes (Stds. 5 – 8) would probably require a Perkins Brailier (unit cost - \$450) to complete written course work and exams.

The New Primary Education Curriculum has a set number of printed text books that need to be transcribed into braille. Some of the lower standard textbooks often have a large number of tactile

pictures and diagrams and so need to be produced in a more durable format using brailon (a plastic-like paper developed specifically for use with our Thermoform machines). Other subject textbooks with no pictures or diagrams can be produced on computer paper. The small Braille Press produces all curriculum books for children who are blind. The unit cost of a book in brailon (containing on average 50 pages) is about \$30 whereas the unit cost of a book using computer paper (containing on average 30 pages) is \$15. These unit costs would potentially be reduced if they were produced in bulk at a larger Braille Press. Another reason for using brailon for younger standards is because it is more durable and should normally last longer than one academic year. The quality of the dots and tactile pictures would be able to withstand repeated use. The level of durability of dot height in books made out of computer paper would be shorter particularly for emerging readers who backtrack or repeat use. The books in computer paper also soil and tear more easily than books in brailon.

Further braille reading materials would still need to be developed to supplement the curriculum books, but these could be developed in collaboration with the ITs and the children using Brailers or handframes and simple binding techniques (e.g. clips) to help reduce costs. It would also be important to develop children's emerging reading skills by giving children reading books that were composed by the teacher who taught them. Children could also write stories for each other to read and enjoy. Vacation braille schools for children and their teachers would provide a good opportunity for helping children to develop and refine their Braille skills and for developing additional reading materials.

Final comments

Although there is support for the concept of inclusion there is an assumption that children who require education through Braille in Malawi should attend special schools or residential resource

centres attached to mainstream schools. It seems that children who are blind and who are found in mainstream schools are there as a result of lack of places in resource centres rather than because of any belief that this is an appropriate setting for meeting their learning needs. The decision about whether to actively seek to support children who require Braille in local schools needs to be taken centrally. Many decisions will also need to be taken about the level of support schools should receive if they are educating children with visual impairment. Some ideas for improving provision for these children are listed below:

- More support to school staff working with children with visual impairment through basic INSET training programmes on how to include children with visual impairment (e.g. use of language, preparing reading and writing materials).
- Develop learning and teaching strategies (whole class activities and peer-to-peer teaching) that benefit all children in the class.
- Develop graded reading schemes for children who are blind and suitably graded readers.
- Encourage ITs to work closely with class teachers in developing learning resources and teaching techniques such as basic braille.
- Explore the use of vacation Braille schools or intensive short term placements at special schools/resource centres to support Braille learning for children in mainstream.
- Identify 'Braille Champions' among ITs who could share their expertise with less experienced colleagues.

One of the most difficult challenges facing African education services for children with visual impairment is the educational inclusion of children who are blind in local schools, especially in rural areas where transport and the distribution of equipment and materials are major challenges. Children who are blind are particularly educationally vulnerable, they are more likely to begin school late, repeat years and drop out early. The chief reasons for this are the lack of sufficiently regular support from specialist Braille teachers, lack of access to appropriate learning materials and effective systems for identification and monitoring.

Education for all children with visual impairment remains a dream in Africa, and the benefits of the EFAVI campaign is yet to be felt in Malawi. The local school offers many children who are blind the only hope of receiving education, but simply placing the child who is blind into their local school is not enough. These children need the support of teachers who understand their needs, access to appropriate learning materials and a carefully conceived and executed inclusion plans.

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The next issue of The Educator is devoted to the topic **INCLUSION**, and the topic is viewed from the perspectives of students and teachers. Those interested in making contributions to this issue are requested to contact the editor Harry Svensson (harry.svensson@spsm.se), the guest editors Steve McCall (s.mccall@bham.ac.uk), Paul Lynch (p.lynch@bham.ac.uk) or the associate editor M.N.G. Mani (sgicevi@vsnl.net) for details.

Education of children with visual Impairments in Japan: Current conditions and issues

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Introduction

This paper reviews some of the issues of educating children with visual impairment in Japan and discusses some of the new approaches that are being implemented in the country to overcome these problems.

Different education systems for children with visual impairment

The education of children with visual impairment has a comparatively long history with the setting up of the first school for the blind in 1875. Today there are five types of education for children with visual impairment:

- special schools for the blind
- special schools for other disabilities
- special classes attached to mainstream schools
- itinerant teaching support for children in mainstream schools
- mainstream schools with no specialist provision

There are a total of 70 schools for the blind (at least one in each of the 47 prefectures), 280 special classes set in mainstream schools, and itinerant teaching support is provided in 17 prefectures (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology, 2009).

Children who have a visual impairment and additional disabilities are usually educated at schools for the blind or special schools for other disabilities. Currently, there are no children who are exempted from school education as a result of

profound or multiple disabilities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology, 2009).

Access to the curriculum

The purpose of education for all children with disabilities is defined in Article 72 of the School Education Act. It states that schools must provide equal access to the curriculum in subject areas including literacy and mathematics as well as, science, music and art. In addition, schools must provide independence and life skills. To make this possible, all the national curriculum text books are available in large print and braille for children who are visually impaired. Also, ideas for delivering the curriculum have been developed by obtaining ideas from other countries like the U.K. For example in the mid 1950s, A. Wexler's book "Experimental Science for the Blind" (1961), was welcomed in Japan, and encouraged the teaching of maths and science to children who were blind (Toriyama, 2007). Teachers at schools for the blind are expected to obtain a specialist qualification in visual impairment in addition to a basic teaching diploma.

Transition to post-primary schools and employment opportunities

Most of the 70 schools for the blind have upper secondary divisions which provide courses in general education and a 'technical' course. The general education course follows the same curriculum as the high schools whereas the technical course prepares learners for the national

examination which is mandatory for those seeking a career in therapeutic work such as massage and acupuncture. The technical course is open to any persons with visual impairment who have a high school diploma. Japan has about 800 trainees in these training courses who go on to take the national examination. Although the number of pupils enrolled in the primary and secondary

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In 2007 Japan moved from a system of formal 'special education' to "special support education" which aims to strengthen the support given in the mainstream schools. With this change, the government requires existing special schools to actively be involved in expanding and enhancing their outreach services.

Difficulties faced by schools for the blind in expanding/enhancing outreach services

1. The changing population

The number of children with VI attending school for the blind reached a peak in the 1960s (5,000 children) with the sudden increase of retinopathy of prematurity (RoP). The prevalence rate has since dropped considerably as a result of a decline in the nation's birthrate and the advance of medicine. The number of children attending schools for the blind fell to 1,164 in 2007. However the number of children with multiple disabilities is increasing and the percentage of children with complex needs enrolled in school for the blind rose from 27% in the 1980s to about 45% in 2000. Consequently, the needs of pupils enrolled in schools for the blind have increased dramatically and teachers have had to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate for these children's needs.

2. The teacher transfer system and the difficulty in maintaining specialist knowledge

All prefectures in Japan have adopted a teacher transfer system to help preserve the overall quality of the national school system. Teachers are normally moved to a new school every 3 to 6 years and this has a negative impact on the level of specialised knowledge generated in the school. Moreover, many prefectures transfer teachers regardless of their experience and knowledge of the field. Thirty five out of forty seven prefectures have one school for the blind, and teachers of the blind are very likely to be

transferred to a mainstream school. As a result, the teacher transfer system could actually imperil the accumulated expertise in schools for the blind and is jeopardising the survival of these schools as the centre of the educational support system.

3. Network schools and regions

In recent years, many schools for the blind have started to hold summer schools which are usually open for children with visual impairment who are enrolled in the mainstream school. Summer schools have been organised to give these children extra tuition from experienced teachers. If we wish to address the problems facing education of the visually impaired in Japan, these efforts should be expanded to both regional and national levels.

Jump to Science Project

A recent national initiative - "Jump to Science", was set up in 2008 as a response to the lack of national projects. "Jump to Science" was organised for children with visual impairment to 1) enjoy science 2) develop skills and acquire information required to specialise in the fields of science and technology in higher education, and 3) meet peers who share common interests and adults with visual impairment who actively work in the field. A first nationwide 3 day summer session was held in Tokyo 2008 where 18 children with visual impairment and their parents were invited to participate and enjoy science. This project has received funding for 3 years from the Japan Science and Technology Agency. It is expanding by involving people with visual impairment who are already in the fields of science and technology. It encourages already retired teachers who used to work at schools for the blind and recently transferred teachers to mainstream schools to participate, thus evolving the project and cultivating a supra-regional network of education specialists in teaching children with visual impairment. Constructing such a network which covers schools

and regions will be a key to blind schools continuation as educational centres. We therefore look forward to further development of such approaches.

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News from Deafblind International

Eileen Boothroyd, DbI Information Officer

Dear Friends,

Our DbI Council met during September in the wonderful Italian town of Senigallia facing the Adriatic Sea. Its Roman origins were on show everywhere, expressed in stunning buildings and street design. DbI, like ICEVI, is in the habit of attaching our business meetings to a larger gathering of members and this time we were having our 7th European Conference.

The theme of "Tides Waves and Currents in research and action" was interpreted across the life span by key notes speakers from Europe and worldwide and we had workshops that followed up these themes – ensuring there was material to meet the interests of all participants.

We had a pre-conference event run by our Communications Network who delivered a course based on the work they have been developing over a number of years. The network, made up of distinguished practitioners, led almost 100 people for 2 days to discuss practice and successful approaches to developing communication with congenitally deafblind people. For those of you who would like to know more about this work, and are possibly meeting deafblind people in your work, the group has distilled the essence into

4 booklets with DVD examples to illustrate their ideas. (viataalshop@viataal.nl)

As an organisation we are working on further developing our Networks as they provide the chance for individual members with particular interests to talk together across the world about the work they are doing and, use this exchange, to solve some of the challenges they are meeting. In such a low incidence field, we know we must work together to pool and test our understanding. To support this endeavour we are going to invest in our website to make it a really useful point of contact for both members and those who want to know about deafblindness.

Our work to ensure that we are at the forefront of global policy development continues and we are aiming to be able to offer quality advice and support to countries where there are few services or none at the moment.

We continue to support and admire the work that ICEVI members have done to further its "Education for All" programme. As you know we are committed partners in this work and we are delighted, impressed and not a little amazed, to find how much has been achieved in spite of the economic problems faced everywhere you are working. Congratulations!



Update from the World Blind Union

The year 2009 has marked two significant milestones in the history of the WBU - the 200th anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille and the 25th anniversary of the formation of the WBU. We have discussed in previous issues of the Educator the importance of the Louis Braille Bicentenary. This article then, will focus on the WBU itself and will provide a summary of some of its key accomplishments during its brief history.

The WBU was formed in 1984 through the union of the International Federation of the Blind (IFB) and the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind (WCWB). However, the WBU represents over a century of global co-operation on blindness issues - dating back to the first international conference on the subject in 1873 in Vienna.

Through the leadership of the WBU and the development of its constitution, one of its achievements to date has been to provide a forum where blind and low vision people established the right to speak for themselves. While the prominence of organizations of the blind is clearly embedded in the WBU structures, the World Blind Union has also been able to embrace the partnership of both service and consumer organizations. While in 1984, about 60 countries were members of the WBU, today more than 170 countries are members.

Since it was founded in 1984, the WBU has made significant progress towards its objectives in all areas of its work. The following are some of the most outstanding achievements:

- Establishment of the Institutional Development Program (IDP). With the support of Sight Savers International and the Hilton/Perkins Programme in the USA, the programme continues to undertake leadership training and organisational development work in many countries, particularly throughout Africa;
- Organisation of world forums on such issues as rehabilitation (Thailand, 1994), literacy (Uruguay, 1996) and human rights (Uruguay, 1998), as well as for blind and low vision women in 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 and a children's congress (Spain 2008);
- Retention of free post system for the blind. Had it not been for WBU intervention before the Universal Postal Union, this benefit would almost certainly have been withdrawn;
- Abolition of laser weapons as weapons of war, through the intervention of our human rights committee which was able to bring forward evidence of vision loss caused by laser weapons;
- Participation by WBU representatives in the drafting of a declaration including the aspirations and concerns of people with disabilities at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS);
- Instrumental in the World Health Organisation (WHO) and International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) initiative to set up the Vision2020 programme, which is currently operating in many countries as well as globally and has already led to a reduction in avoidable blindness in the most vulnerable parts of the world;
- A key contributor to the development and monitoring of the Standard Rules for Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disability;

- As an international non-governmental organisation (INGO), the WBU was a key contributor to the development of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, lobbying for many articles to include protection for people who are blind or have low vision;
- Capacity building, and in particular supporting the development of well structured and strongly functioning organisations of the blind and low vision – bearing in mind at all times that “only blind and low vision persons can speak for blind and low vision persons”
- A voice in many areas of life as they affect people who are blind or low vision. The work undertaken by committees in many fields such as employment, human rights, literacy, education and women are examples of how these have been reflected;
- Special groupings that deal with pertinent issues that arise from time to time – services for the elderly (best practice), indigenous persons and sports and recreation (links with the International Blind Sports Federation - IBSA) are just three examples;
- A partner in the Education for All Visually Impaired Children (EFA-VI) Campaign in partnership with the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI);
- Provider of scholarships through the WBU Hermoine Grant Calhoun and Pedro Zurita programmes;
- Working with UNICEF to ensure that the needs of blind and low vision children are addressed within their programmes and through the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Undertaking leadership development programmes for blind and low vision women at regional and national level to ensure they enjoy the opportunity for growth, self-determination and involvement in the organisation that represents them at all levels. This has included policy and constitutional changes to ensure gender equity within the WBU organisation itself;
- Urging developers of technology and everyday household goods to include requirements for people who are blind or have low vision at the design stage rather than looking to adapt what is already available;
- Physically support the maintenance and preservation of the Louis Braille Museum and activities to lobby the French Government and UNESCO to declare the birthplace a world heritage site;
- In partnership with the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), and other international partners, advocating with the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) to ensure that accessible format books can be shared among countries, thus providing improved access to information for people who are blind or low vision.

These achievements over the past 25 years have laid the foundation for the continuation of our work in our three strategic priority areas of: representation, capacity building and resource sharing. The specific objectives envisioned in the fulfilment of these priorities were articulated in an earlier article of the Educator and so will not be repeated here.

In undertaking our initiatives and fulfilling the objectives in our Strategic Plan, the World Blind Union remains committed to optimizing opportunities for cooperation and collaboration with UN Departments and Agencies with which we are involved and other international partners, such as the ICEVI. We believe that our partnerships and opportunities for collaboration have been key to our success during the first 25 years of our organization and that they will be equally important as we move forward in changing what it means to be blind.



News from **International Blind Sport Federation**

The Importance of Physical Education and Play for Children and Youth who are blind

"The right to play is the child's first claim on the community. Play is nature's training for life. No community can infringe that right without doing deep and enduring harm to the bodies and minds of citizens."

(David Lloyd George, 1893 – 1945, former British Prime Minister)

Encouraging and assisting children to play and to learn how to be physically active can lead to a number of skills which will be useful for a lifetime. Children sitting in a circle and rolling a ball back and forth to each other are developing not only physical skills but also skills in social interaction and sharing. Assisting children who are blind to find physical activities which they enjoy - and assisting them to try a variety of physical activities is beneficial for their overall development.

"Play is unstructured and child-directed" (UNICEF, 1998).

There are many benefits to involvement in play, physical activity and physical education for children and youth who are blind or visually impaired. Muscle and bone development is enhanced, heart-rate, blood pressure, and body chemistry are optimized, and there are opportunities for social interaction and benefits to self esteem and self confidence.

Physical Activity provides an opportunity for stress release and is also something to look forward to. There is an overall health benefit for children, and the fitness gives them one more tool to be successful in life.

Children who are blind or visually impaired often require more energy than children who are sighted, just to navigate around in the world and to manage everyday life. When a child begins to develop physical literacy, there are benefits to their balance, body awareness, motor skills, endurance, coordination, posture and overall health. It also gives them a sense of acceptance and accomplishment. It facilitates them to interact with new people and make friends.

Movement in a variety of different environments will facilitate physical literacy. This could be exposure to moving and exploring in water, moving on sand or stones - and on a variety of different terrain.

Since children who are visually impaired tend to move less, and can't easily observe how other people move their bodies, they often don't develop the very basic physical skills other children develop naturally. It's never too early or too late to help children or youth who are blind to learn to move more. Lots of repetition and practice may be required for children or youth to develop physical activity skills. Having fun and making the experience enjoyable is essential to the development of physical literacy.

Physical literacy involves having the skills to enjoy physical activities throughout life. It means having the basic physical and social skills, and knowing the process of learning and improving physical skills. Children and youth should learn:

- ✍ How they move and basic movement terms,
- ✍ How to move with flow, confidence and control,
- ✍ How to move in different physical environments, such as on rocks or in water,
- ✍ How they learn physical activity best; and
- ✍ The social aspects of physical activity.

Enjoyable activities can include learning to run, dance, move to music, climb, jump, hop, roll, tumble, skip, and kick, throw and catch a ball.

Modified from resources, BC Blind Sports and Recreation Association

Email: info@bcblindsports.bc.ca

www.bcblindsports.bc.ca

World Braille Council Meeting

The first meeting of the World Braille Council (WBC) as reconstituted by the World Blind Union (WBU) was hosted by ONCE in its office in Madrid, Spain on November 5th and 6th, 2009. ICEVI appointed **Dr Diane P. Wormsley** as its representative in the council.

The following are some of the tasks which the WBC set forth for itself at this meeting and for which working committees were established:

- ✍ to examine the differences between the representations of mathematics and science in various countries.
- ✍ to develop a comprehensive database of existing international braille research and teaching materials which can be available to future researchers and teachers.
- ✍ to develop guidelines for the development of braille authorities for use by countries which do not currently have a body overseeing braille.
- ✍ to establish an international conference on braille to be held in Germany in 2011.

The database will focus on the following areas:

1. Braille production
2. Teaching of Braille
 - a. Philosophy and methodology; b. Curriculum materials
3. Specific research activities completed in the above areas

With regard to teaching of Braille, WBC is looking for material primarily concerning the following groups:

- ✍ Young blind children
- ✍ Late blind adults
- ✍ Multiply disabled blind children

If you are aware of any institutions / organizations / universities that might produce or collect such materials, please forward any contact information by e-mail to Peter Brass, pbrass@t-online.de

13th WORLD CONFERENCE UPDATE

Work is underway to organise the 13th World Conference of ICEVI in Jomtien, Thailand from 9 to 13 August 2010. Here is an update:

- ✍ More than 450 abstracts have been received, which are being reviewed by the Programme Committee of the conference.
- ✍ Decision regarding the selection of abstracts will be informed to the authors by the end of January or early February 2010.
- ✍ Limited sponsorship is available for persons from developing countries. Selection of abstract for presentation is one of the criteria for sponsorship. The Regional Chairperson of the specific region may be contacted for sponsorship details.
- ✍ The early bird registration ends on March 10, 2010. You can pay your registration fee by credit card too.
- ✍ Log on to the ICEVI website www.icevi.org to know more about the conference.