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The International Council for Education of
People with Visual Impairment

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PRESS STOP

HKI Headquarters Destroyed

We know that all of our readers join us in offering our best wishes to our colleagues at Helen Keller International whose New York headquarters was destroyed in the September 11th incident in the USA.

All employees were safely evacuated from the office on West Street before the World Trade Center buildings across the street collapsed and destroyed the building where HKI was located.

HKI has moved to 352 Park Avenue South, Suite 1200, New York, NY 10010.
Please check www.hki.org for regular updates.

International Council for Education
of People with Visual Impairment

World Conference
27 July - 2 August 2002

Put these dates in your diary now

11th ICEVI 50th Anniversary World Conference

New Vision: Moving toward an Inclusive Community

27 July - 2 August 2002

**Leeuwenhorst Congress Centre
Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands**

ICEVI and the Dutch Host Committee invite you to celebrate their 50th Anniversary
by participating in this conference.



See www.icevi.org for the latest information



Lawrence F. Campbell
President of ICEVI

Dear Colleagues,

It is a special pleasure for me to write to you through this issue of *The Educator*. As I compose this letter, my desk calendar reminds me that in less than a year many of us will gather at the Leeuwenhorst Congress Centre, Noordwijkerhout, the Netherlands to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of ICEVI.

“New Visions: Moving Toward an Inclusive Community” is our conference theme and it promises to be a very memorable occasion. Heather Mason, Chairperson, Program Committee reports that the program is coming together well. By the time this reaches you, I hope many more of you will have submitted abstracts for the consideration of the Program Committee. Under the leadership of Hans Welling, Chairperson of the Host Committee a warm and very well planned Dutch welcome is being prepared.

Grace Chan, ICEVI Regional Chairperson, East Asia has agreed to head the sponsorship committee and is working hard to assist members from developing countries to participate in this historic meeting. All requests for sponsorship must go through regional committees. Please review the criteria that the Sponsorship Committee has developed and if you feel that you might qualify for some form of support direct your inquiries to your Regional Chairperson or Deputy Regional Chairperson. The Sponsorship Committee will not accept applications which have do not come through the of-

fice of the Regional Chairperson or his/her Deputy.

We hope that many of our readers will be with us in the Netherlands from July 27-August 2, 2002 to help us celebrate a half century of ICEVI work on behalf of blind and low vision persons throughout the world. Further details regarding the 11th World Conference may be found on the ICEVI website www.icevi.org or by e-mailing or faxing the Conference Secretariat in the Netherlands: E-Mail: icevi2002@congres.net
Fax: +31 24 3601159.

Preparations for our world conference tend to dominate our thinking and our work as we near the end of each quinquennium. However, I want you to know that the ICEVI Executive Committee has been working hard on a number of fronts to move our organization forward in the spirit of the policy document we adopted in Sao Paulo.

The first of those efforts is in your hand at this moment. *The Educator* has moved into a new generation with each issue focused on a specific theme; the first being Literacy. It has taken a great deal of work by many people to bring you what I hope you will agree is a new and improved ICEVI publication. Top on the list of persons to be thanked for this effort is our hard working Vice President, Harry Svensson, who assumed the publication portfolio when he re-

cently became Vice President. Working alongside Harry in bringing you this “new Educator” are Ken Stuckey, Editor, Susan Spungin, Thematic Editor, our Secretariat in India, our Spanish language issue coordinators in Uruguay, Dr. M.N.G. Mani who will produce the Braille English language edition and all the members of the Publications Committee whose names you will find listed on the masthead. A real team effort. Thanks to all for your hard work.

For the past year your Principal Officers have devoted much of their energy to two major priorities; -improving the financial health of ICEVI and improving communications. I am pleased to report to you that while there still remains much to be done, we have made very significant progress.

Thanks to the loyalty and support of our INGO Partners: the Asian Foundation for Blindness Prevention, Aurora Ministries, Christoffel Blindenmission, Foundation Dark and Light Blind Care, Helen Keller International, Perkins School for the Blind, Sight Savers International and the Spanish National Organization of the Blind funding for our core budget, as well as support for many regionally based projects, has increased substantially over the past year.

At the suggestion of Richard Porter, a member of the Executive Committee a special ICEVI/ INGO Cooperation Fund was established and is now supporting a number of ICEVI

projects in Africa, Asia, East Asia and Latin America. One of the best ways we can make ICEVI “real” to our members is to support efforts which improve their ability to serve the children with whom they work. The ICEVI/INGO Cooperation Fund is an excellent way of making this happen. Please contact your Regional Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson for further details on the application process, if you feel you have a small project that will benefit educators in your country.

Improving communications with the members of our International Consultative Committee (ICC) and our partner organizations was another priority of the Principal Officers set in March, 2000. With the energy and support of our Secretary, Mrs. Nandini Rawal, the ICEVI Newline (an electronic newsletter) has been created. As I prepare this letter for The Educator, Nandini is putting the final touches on the 3rd issue of Newline. Although this communication was primarily established as a vehicle for ICC communication, we are happy to place any of you with e-mail access on the distribution list. If you would like to receive Newline write to Nandini at bpaiacevi@ad1.vsnl.net.in.

The ICEVI website <www.icevi.org> is also a place that I encourage those of you with internet access to visit frequently. Harry Svensson and Victor Tsaran (ICEVI Webmaster) welcome your suggestions and contributions. Spreading the

word about ICEVI in our respective countries is a responsibility we all share. Introduce the ICEVI website to your friends and colleagues. For those without internet access, ICEVI has a new brochure that you may request from our Secretariat in India.

At the heart of our new policy has been an effort to build our regional units and I am pleased to say that we have made a good deal of progress. Over the past year, there have been well attended ICEVI regional conferences in Asia, East Asia, Europe and Latin America. I have had the privilege of participating in all of these meetings. Both the “esprit de corps” and the high level of the papers presented made me feel very proud. Our regions are on the move and that, to me, is the best news of all.

As most of you will now know both the World Blind Union (WBU) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) have new Presidents; Mrs. Kicki Nordstrom (WBU) and Dr. Hannah Faahl (IAPB). Both Kicki and Hannah bring to their positions a spirit of cooperation and collaboration. ICEVI is happy to be working closely with both organizations in the pursuit of goals of mutual interest. I urge each of you to do all that you can to reach out to these organizations in your country. Together we can speak with a stronger voice on behalf of those we serve.

Let me end this letter by

reviewing with you some of the major decisions reached at our Executive Committee meeting in Chihuahua, Mexico in May.

The Finance Committee, under the leadership of Carla Herrera, Treasurer presented a plan which calls for increasing the financial base of ICEVI through continued strengthening of the ICEVI/INGO Cooperation Fund, a scheme for organizational membership subscriptions and an effort to secure support from at least one major foundation during the coming year.

At our 10th World Conference in Sao Paulo a decision was made to bring about the necessary revisions in our current constitution to allow us to move from the status of Stifting (Foundation) to that of Association, under the laws of the Netherlands, where ICEVI is legally registered. The committee working on revising the constitution is headed by Mr. Colin Low. The revised constitution is designed to allow ICEVI to legally gain recognition as an "association" under Dutch law. The suggested revisions presented by Colin were received favorably by the Executive Committee. At this time, Colin Low, Bill Brohier and Nandini Rawal are incorporating suggestions that arose in discussion in a final document.

This revised constitution and by-laws will allow us to accomplish a regional realignment that has been under discussion for almost three years. Under the new constitution and by-laws ICEVI will have seven rather than eight re-

gions. In effect, this will allow the current Middle East region and the Asian countries of the former USSR to become part of what is now the Asia region which will in the future be known as West Asia. There are never any easy or perfect answers to questions regarding regional realignment. However, the Executive Committee agreed that these changes will address both the need expressed by our current Middle East region and allow six of our seven regions to be fully aligned with the new WBU regions. We hope such realignment will foster greater cooperation with WBU. ICEVI's current Pacific region will be maintained.

We hope to soon adopt this revised constitution and by-laws, allowing us to change our legal status under Dutch law. The revised constitution and by-laws will be printed in the next issue of The Educator.

As the Executive Committee looked to the future there was unanimous agreement that ICEVI has within it much untapped potential to serve as an international advocate for equalizing educational access for all blind and low vision persons. Many excellent suggestions related to future directions and programs were raised. The Executive Committee agreed that this is the right time for ICEVI to engage in a formal strategic planning process, with the objective of presenting a plan for future directions to the delegates gathered at the 11th World Conference in the Netherlands. A

Strategic Planning Work Group has been formed and you can expect to hear more about developments in this area in future issues of The Educator and the ICEVI Newsline.

As you can see, it has been a busy but very gratifying year. For me this would not have been possible without the tremendous support of my organization, the Overbrook School for the Blind. In closing this letter I want to acknowledge the very special contribution that that Overbrook is making to ICEVI. My thanks are extended to Board of Managers, Dr. Bernadette Kappen, Director and my hard working assistant Ms. Wenru Niu.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our 11th World Conference and to communicating with you personally or through The Educator and Newsline between now and then.

Sincerely,

Lawrence F. Campbell
President

Letter from the Vice President



Harry Svensson
Vice President of ICEVI

Dear Colleagues,

In July 2000 I was invited to attend a meeting with the members of the publications committee present at the European ICEVI regional conference in Cracow, Poland. We were discussing the Tech Talk column I had promised to take care of.

Leaving the meeting I had no idea that I four months later would be deeply involved in *The Educator*. When I accepted to step in on the vacant position as the vice president of ICEVI I found that ICEVI publications were one of the duties.

Where to start as a newcomer? I knew that that ICEVI no longer could expect Kevin Lessard and Perkins School for the Blind to do the hard work – Kevin and his crew had passed the torch after many years of dedicated work. A new production line had to be built up.

When I entered the ICEVI ship in November 2000 I was lucky to have Ken Stuckey as an editor, Susan Spungin as responsible for the thematic articles, and a publications committee. I soon realized that more people were needed in creating the new journal. Let me only acknowledge a few of them who have made this possible.

As the new vice president of ICEVI I wrote to Ernesto Uria at the international department of ONCE in Spain, asking for assistance. Through Ernesto I came in contact with Alfredo Carreras, the head of the Design Department of ONCE. Alfredo and his

team made a number of templates for the layout of *The (“new”) Educator*. This issue is a simplified version of one of his templates. I will forward all his ideas to the team in India who will do the layout in the future.

India will play an important role in the production of *The Educator*. Nandini Rawal, the secretary of ICEVI, has set up a team ready for layout work and printing of the English version of *The Educator*. Dr M.N.G. Mani, the ICEVI chairperson in Asia, will produce the braille version of the journal.

On the other side of the globe Judith Varsavsky in Uruguay will translate *The Educator* into Spanish and Fundacion Braille del Uruguay will produce and distribute the Spanish version in print and braille.

Talking about distribution, Victor and Kara Tsaran and Wenru Niu must not be forgotten. Working hard in Philadelphia they put together a mailing list. However, this mailing list is only temporary.

If you want to receive *The Educator* in the future you have to sign up as a subscriber using the form published in this issue.

The Educator is a real global enterprise. I hope you will join us as a reader and future contributor.

Sincerely,

Harry Svenssen
Vice President



Ken Stuckey
Editor of The Educator

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the new generation ICEVI journal, *The Educator*. This is the first issue since the winter 2000 issue that was published by the Perkins School for the Blind.

A special thanks to former editor, Kevin Lessard who over the past years has been the guiding light of *The Educator*. And to all the Perkins Public Relations staff who worked so hard in producing *The Educator*. I know from personal experience how much time and hard effort they put into the journal.

I hope you like our new format. Each issue, as president Larry Campbell has stated, will have a theme, featuring new articles on that specific theme by leaders in the field, who have been asked to write them. In addition to the major articles it will also include summaries of articles which may be of special interest to you. These will be in areas which are not being covered by *The Educator* at this time. The full articles will be available by contacting the authors.

The journal will be your window on the activities of the ICEVI family in all regions of the world. In the information age, it

will help you to be better informed about what is going on in the field of education of the blind.

Kevin Lessard said the torch has been passed, but that torch can only be kept burning by the fuel you provide. All the sections of *The Educator* need input from you, the educators of the visually impaired, other professionals and parents.

I look forward to hearing from you. I know a number of you from my work as Research Librarian at Perkins School for the Blind, 1965-1998, others from visits you may have made to the Tomtebodav Resource Centre in Stockholm, Sweden, since I retired from Perkins and from conferences. I look forward to hearing from you and others that I do not know. Hope to see you at the 50th Anniversary of ICEVI next year in The Netherlands.

Keep up the good work. And let me hear from you by regular mail, e-mail, fax, phone or even better in person.

Yours truly,
Ken Stuckey
The Editor

**To receive *The Educator* in the future
you have to submit your name and address.**

**Please use the form on the back cover
or the on-line form on www.icevi.org**



Susan J. Spungin, Ed.D.
Thematic Editor

Braille represents information and education, the currency of the future. All of us recognize that being able to manage and manipulate information is vital to our success economically as well as to our dignity and perceived self-worth. It is therefore important that whatever educational system we have, we ensure that there is choice in learning and in access to information now and in the future.

Braille always has been and always will be more than a tool or means of literacy for those blind individuals who use it. Fred Schroeder, former United States Commissioner of Rehabilitation, points out, "Braille for some represents competency, independence, and equality." Unfortunately, for some blind people, issues of self-identity, such as the desire not to be considered or "look" blind, rather than actual need, affect their decision on whether to use braille. Therefore, the "braille problem"- the fact that it is not as widely used as it should be-is not only a literacy issue, but also a reflection of society's attitudes toward blindness.

The importance of braille has become a symbol for much more than literacy; it is a symbol for the freedom to reach one's potential as an equal, contributing member of society, which is the right of all children.

Achievement in school and work are as inextricably linked to literacy for blind and visually impaired people as for the general population. For children to achieve high levels of literacy or

to maintain literacy skills after vision loss, there must be teachers of the visually impaired who are knowledgeable, skilled, and trained in the most promising instructional practices. Yet currently, many children who are blind have limited access to well-trained instructors.

The scope of the problem is amply illustrated in the article by Holbrook and Koenig, when they cite as a major issue the lack of qualified personnel to educate children who are visually impaired resulting in the frequent misuse of the para-educator. They discuss the need for further research to address issues such as when to introduce braille, in which form (grade one or two) and when and if braille should be taught in combination with print.

Gale refers the reader to the development of the Unified English Braille Code and ways in which Australia hopes to prevent blind and visually impaired children from "falling off the literacy agenda".

Fellenius discusses how a blind child's reading ability and competence develop as an outgrowth of a rich learning environment that has meaning for the student.

These three articles from the United States, Australia, and Sweden respectively validate that the issues regarding braille literacy for blind and visually impaired children are global in nature. A variety of strategies and research needs are articulated suggesting for the reader possible solutions for the future.

The Challenge of Providing Appropriate Literacy Instruction for Students with Visual Impairments

M. Cay Holbrook, Ph.D., University of British Columbia, CANADA
Alan J. Koenig, Ed.D, Texas Tech University, USA

Educators who work with students with visual impairments must address several unique challenges when providing literacy instruction. The challenges are magnified in some areas of the world, especially those in which educational services are provided in remote or rural settings or areas with severe economic hardships. These challenges are remarkably the same regardless of the educational setting. This article will explore some common challenges and issues and offer some suggestions for meeting these challenges. We will discuss the need for qualified individuals to provide literacy instruction, issues related to teaching contracted and uncontracted braille, instruction in both print and braille (dual media), and providing instruction to students with additional disabilities.

Qualified personnel

Students with visual impairments in North America generally receive direct instruction from a qualified teacher of students with visual impairments. Qualifications typically include certification as a general or special education teacher, as well as certification as a specialist in visual impairment. Recently, however, there has been a disturbing increase in the amount of direct

service provided by para-educators (individuals without a teaching certificate). The requirements and qualifications for paraeducators vary greatly. In some school districts, para-educators have little training and experience beyond a high school diploma. Yet, in some cases, they are given primary responsibility for providing instruction in literacy skills for braille reading students.

The reliance of some school districts on paraeducators instead of qualified teachers of students with visual impairments may have occurred for a number of reasons. First, the field of special education has embraced the use of paraeducators to support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Students with cognitive or physical disabilities may need the on-going and continuous support of an adult in order to be successfully included in a general education classroom. This may be an acceptable practice for students with cognitive or severe physical disabilities who may be expected to require a level of assistance in order to function in adult life. However, it is a questionable practice for students who are blind or visually impaired since they should be learning, from a very early age, to complete tasks independently.

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Second, the itinerant teaching model is used most commonly to provide services to students who are blind or visually impaired in public school programs. Students with minimal needs for specialized instruction benefit most from an itinerant model. However, the current use of itinerant services sometimes provides indiscriminate use of this model, even when students may need more intense services. When such students have difficulty in class, a school district may conclude that the students need ongoing support of a para-educator to succeed, when the real answer lies in more intense instruction by a qualified teacher. This will help assure that students learn specialized compensatory skills and progress toward an independent adult life.

Itinerant teachers who have large, unmanageable caseloads generally provide limited services to their students. While an accomplished student in high school might be appropriately supported by an itinerant teacher, a child who is beginning to learn to read and write in braille may have more intense needs that cannot be met by an itinerant teacher with a large caseload.

Third, there is a critical shortage of qualified teachers of students with visual impairments. University programs are not able to keep up with the demand for qualified personnel. Therefore, school districts may not be able to recruit and hire specialized teachers. In these cases, unqualified teachers are often hired to meet the needs of students who are visually impaired.

Professionals involved in the education of students with visual impairments must work together to advocate for qualified teachers. It is important that we continue to engage in extensive professional discussion to determine the standards for qualification of teachers working with students who are blind or visually impaired. Also, university programs must seek new and innovative ways to prepare additional numbers of teachers. Many universities are exploring the use of distance education, which provides more opportunities for interested persons to receive training in or near their home communities.

Beginning literacy instruction

The common practice in North America in teaching young students who are blind to read braille is to use contracted braille from the beginning of instruction. In this approach, students learn literacy skills while at the same time being introduced systematically to the 189 contractions and short-form words that comprise English Braille American Edition. The Patterns series was designed specifically for integrating the teaching of literacy skills with the teaching of braille code skills. When other approaches are used, such as a standard basal reading series or a holistic literature approach, then the specialist is responsible for providing supplementary instruction in recognition and use of braille contractions.

Teachers currently are exploring the issues and practices related

to providing instruction in uncontracted braille for young students. In this approach, students are taught the braille alphabet as part of early braille literacy experiences. This allows students to benefit from a wide range of early literacy activities and to concentrate on developing literacy skills. Then, after a period of initial instruction, students would begin the transition to contracted braille.

There are several issues related to the use of uncontracted braille in initial instruction that teachers are now examining. First, almost all braille books are transcribed in fully contracted braille by transcribing agencies in North America. Therefore, most or all materials for young readers must be transcribed in uncontracted braille by local school districts. This places considerable demands on the teacher and the school in which the student is enrolled. However, to provide a rich literacy environment, the teacher of students with visual impairments must assure that a variety of braille materials are readily available in the environment, both for instructional purposes and for leisure reading.

Second, there are no guidelines available for helping the teacher plan the transition from uncontracted to contracted braille. Teachers who decide to introduce students to uncontracted braille at the beginning of literacy instruction will need to make reasoned judgments about when and how to transition to contracted braille. Anecdotal reports from teachers suggest that this process occurs

somewhat naturally, at least at first, since students inevitably encounter contracted braille and are curious about the meaning of the unknown signs. However, after this initial period of informal introduction, more systematic instruction likely will be needed. A related issue is the lack of instructional materials specifically designed for this purpose. As teachers continue to examine this issue, new instructional materials should be developed.

Third, there is a great need for research to explore the effectiveness of early literacy instruction. The issue of instruction in contracted and uncontracted braille as well as other issues such as instructional approach, availability of leisure materials, service delivery and intensity of instruction need to be examined in order to inform our practice.

Professionals will continue to debate the issues related to initial teaching of uncontracted braille, and researchers will investigate the various factors that influence the process of literacy development. In the meantime, teachers and other team members will need to use their common sense and professional judgment to design, deliver, and evaluate early literacy programs in uncontracted braille. We encourage team members to carefully consider the assessed, individual needs of each student and consider the advantages and disadvantages of introducing uncontracted braille before making a decision.

Teaching in dual media

The typical approach to literacy instruction for students who are blind or visually impaired has been to select one medium (print or braille) and emphasize instruction in that single medium. This practice is being challenged now, and teachers in North America are showing more acceptance of teaching in dual media (that is, print and braille) for some students with low vision. In general, these are students who have the capacity to learn print reading, but their eye condition, level of fluency, or potential efficiency are at question. By providing instruction in dual media, students who develop proficiency in both print and braille are able to select a specific medium for a specific task, thereby allowing a greater capacity for gaining access to information.

The major issues that surround teaching literacy skills in dual media overlap, in part, are similar to those related to instruction in uncontracted braille. First, there are no specific guidelines, instructional approaches, or materials for such instruction. Therefore, designing the literacy instructional program must be guided by the skills and creativity of the teacher of students with visual impairments. Instruction in dual media, however, does not mean that the amount of time and effort must be doubled. The key is to address the unique aspects of teaching print and of teaching braille, while capitalizing on the shared processes of reading and writing, which are the same regardless of the medium. For example, strate-

gies for increasing a student's reading vocabulary are the same in print or braille, though strategies for recognizing the words are somewhat different. However, some aspects of word recognition, such as phonics and structural analysis, are more similar than different.

Students who read and write in print typically receive instruction from a general classroom teacher, students who read and write in braille typically receive instruction from the specialist in visual impairment. The question of who will provide instruction for the student who is learning to read and write in both braille and print is critical. If the teacher of students with visual impairments teaches literacy skills in both print and braille, then he or she can capitalize on the similarities between the two media.

However, if the braille program is taught by the specialist in visual impairment and the print program is taught by a general classroom teacher, then steps must be taken to carefully coordinate instruction between these two professionals. The various ways that can be used to provide such coordination are under the control of the creative and collaborative educational team.

Research is needed to determine the impact of teaching in dual media on the current and future development of literacy skills. Some argue that it will take much longer to teach a student to read in both print and braille. One could argue that with a skillfully interwoven program,

learning to read and write in dual media would not add substantial time to the instructional process, though this must be addressed through research. Also, research should address the advantages and disadvantages of learning in dual media, as well as the factors that correlate with later success in both school and adult life.

Literacy skills for students with additional disabilities

The literacy needs of students with additional disabilities should be examined and addressed with the same care and commitment as those of students with only visual impairment. Because students with additional disabilities are often provided only consultation services by a qualified teacher of students with visual impairments, it will take special effort to make sure that the examination of literacy needs occurs.

Students with cognitive disabilities in addition to their visual impairment may need instruction in the use of a functional literacy system. Functional literacy for sighted students with cognitive disabilities has been quite well defined and includes environmental signs, food labels, and labels used for daily living activities. Functional literacy for students with cognitive disabilities and visual impairment will include only those symbols that can be accessed without vision. For example, functional literacy for sighted students who have cognitive disabilities might include learning to read E-X-I-T as Exit and understand that the

word indicates where the door to the outside is located. The same skill would not be seen as functional for a student who is visually impaired since the Exit sign generally is not tactilely accessible. Therefore, it is important to clearly define functional literacy based on individual students' daily activities and encourage parents and educators to think creatively in order to include literacy in the lives of students with visual impairments and cognitive disabilities.

The literacy needs of students with physical disabilities and blindness should also receive careful attention by qualified teachers of students with visual impairments. While there are many adaptive devices that can be used for reading and writing by students with physical disabilities and visual impairments, there must be a high level of instruction in order for students to be successful. Creative teachers and parents should encourage students with physical disabilities to explore unconventional ways to read and write using braille and print. For example, students with physical disabilities might use fingers other than their index finger to read, or use their wrists and side of their hand to push the keys of the braille-writer. Exploring a wide

variety of adaptations for reading and writing allows students with visual impairments and additional disabilities the opportunity to include literacy in their lives.

Conclusion

The importance of solid literacy skills for all students, including those with visual impairments, cannot be overstated. While arguments can be made for and against many of the instructional methods that are used to reach the goal of literacy, the underlying goal for students to develop literacy skills that allow them to compete on an equal footing in adult life with people who are sighted. Issues that continue to challenge teachers and parents relate to the need for qualified personnel, instruction in contracted and uncontracted braille, instruction in both print and braille, and providing literacy instruction for students with additional disabilities. Questions related to each of these issues continue to be debated through professional literature and dialog. However, while the debates continue, students are progressing through school and must receive the most comprehensive, cohesive literacy instructional programs possible in order to develop the strong literacy skills necessary for a productive adult life.

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In Australia: Braille Literacy Matters

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Over the past two decades there has been growing concern throughout the English speaking countries over a perceived decline in braille literacy skills (Australian Braille Authority, 1999; Rex, Koenig, Wormsley, & Baker, 1994; Allman & Holbrook, 1999). For example, in the USA, when reviewing the status of braille in the previous decade, Spungin (1996), identified eight obstacles to the acquisition of literacy in the population of people who are blind. The majority of the issues she identified are relevant to educators in Australia today. There exists currently in Australia, an increasing anxiety in the professional education sector, as well as in the adult braille reading community about the decline in the use of braille. The purpose of this paper is to present and discuss several of the most important challenges currently facing the Australian education policy sector in attempting to safeguard braille as a viable medium.

The Literature

In several developed countries there has been for some years a heightened awareness of difficulties in the area of promoting braille literacy, these have resulted in many creative initiatives. One of the results of this awareness that we in Australia have greatly welcomed, is the abundance of excellent literature about the teaching of braille that

has proliferated in the last several years. This literature is reflected in such American publications as: *Foundations of Braille Literacy* (Rex, Koenig, Wormsley, & Baker, 1994), the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 90(3) special issue on braille literacy (Brookshire, 1996), *The bridge to braille* (Castellano & Kosman, 1997), *Instructional strategies for braille literacy* (Wormsley & D'Andrea, 1997), *Beginning braille* (Swenson, 1999), and *Braille literacy curriculum* (Wormsley, 2000). In Australia publications have included: *Fingerprints* (Lamb, 1995), *Communication*, (Lamb, 1998a), *Dots for tots* (Lamb, 1998b) and *Switched on braille* (Lamb & Gale, 2000). This wealth of information on braille literacy has helped highlight its importance, develop greater awareness of best teaching practice, stimulate discussion and it is hoped will result in greater teacher understanding and competence.

Australia's braille code

The east coast of Australia was initially settled in the 1780s as a penal colony of the United Kingdom, later as the home of pioneer immigrants who rapidly displaced its indigenous peoples. Historical records reveal that braille has been in continuous use in Australia from at least the 1860s (Watkins, 1987) and that the emerging Australian braille

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code was governed by the codes, rules and formats developed in Great Britain. Braille books and equipment produced in Britain were sold to Australian braille users at heavily subsidised prices. In the 1950s, the introduction of the Perkins Braille (manufactured in the USA) was the first departure from Australia's complete reliance on Britain for all its braille requirements. However, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, a combination of factors arose which caused Australia to develop its own unique approach to the braille code. These six factors were:

- the introduction of computerised braille production;
- the introduction of capitalisation into braille produced in Australia;
- the development of a national braille consciousness in Australia, demonstrated by:
 - the establishment, in 1981, of the Australian Braille Authority (ABA);
 - the increasing number of students expecting to have material in braille; and
 - the results of a survey of braille reading trends in Australia (Johnson; 1986)
- proposals for braille reform; and
- the emergence of an articulate consumer movement (ABA, 1999).

Subsequent changes to the Australian braille code have resulted in the current literary code (while not being vastly different

from other codes used by English speaking countries) having become uniquely Australian. Further, due to several substantial changes made in the British mathematics braille code, Australia has developed its own maths code. New Zealand, one of Australia's closest neighbours, employs the Nemeth code, so that the exchange of school maths texts between the two countries is not possible.

To an observer, it seems obvious that the future success of braille in Australia is contingent upon successfully developing greater links with other players in the English speaking world. It is the view of many ABA members that the key to reducing Australian isolation in part resides in promoting and developing a universal braille code.

Braille reform

Since commencement of the international Unified Braille Code (UBC) Research Project in 1993, Australia has been an active participant in and is committed to the introduction of a more simple universal code for English braille. In 1999, an ABA working party produced a comprehensive document entitled *Braille 2000* (Australian Braille Authority, 1999). The document detailed the history and present day status of braille in Australia including concerns about the decline of braille use. It provided information on the background to the proposed changes and included recommendations that would be transmitted by Australia to the Assembly of the International Council on English

Braille (ICEB) in Baltimore in November 1999. With its commitment to the introduction of the Unified English Braille Code (UEBC), Australia played a pivotal role at the meeting in ensuring that deliberations on the proposed new code would be completed and be ready for consideration at the next ICEB General Assembly in 2003. It is to be hoped that the recommendations will be adopted at that time. Initially, it is anticipated that changes in the code may pose some difficulties for Australian braille readers, particularly in the areas of mathematics and the other specialised codes (e.g., computer, chemistry, electronics). Nevertheless, these significant changes, should they occur might mean that Australia will then be able to access and provide texts on a global basis, provided that there are necessary changes to international copyright law.

Educational Issues

It seems that braille literacy issues in Australia have closely reflected those in other countries, notably the USA. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for Australians has been the advent of the movement towards greater integration and inclusion of students with vision impairments in the regular school system. In fact, Spungin (1996), has identified the movement towards 'full inclusion' as "the greatest threat to the education of children who are blind and to braille literacy" (p. 274). This reality has to date seemed very much the Australian experience.

In Australia, the move from segregated to integrated settings for students with vision impairments started in the mid-1970s and today the majority of these students are now included in their local schools (Pagliano, 1994). In general, this move to greater equality in normative educational opportunity has provided many benefits for students, their families, peers and for the community. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed by Australian specialist teachers of students with vision impairments, that the inclusion of greater numbers of their students in local schools makes the provision of instruction in the unique disability-specific curricular areas (or in the expanded core curriculum as it is now known), a more challenging prospect than when those students had been supported in segregated settings.

As a compensatory academic skill, braille is the student's major literacy medium, and as such it must be taught effectively by an itinerant teacher (Hatlen, 1997). Such teachers must be trained and fully competent braille users. They must have a comprehensive understanding of, and total commitment to the braille code. However, an itinerant teacher may visit a student only once or twice a week. During this often brief contact, it is quite impossible to effectively teach a child braille. As children in the regular classroom are totally immersed in the print medium, the child who is blind requires total immersion in the braille code so that he too can become absorbed, enthralled and

fascinated by discovering and using his primary literacy medium. It is essential for many children that they have an aide or support person who is competent, enthusiastic and is highly committed to braille. This is because of the need for constant immediate braille provision. It is of the utmost importance that a child is taught by those who respect and understand his primary literacy medium. There are such teachers and aides in Australia, but as recent research has revealed, they are in short supply (Gentle, 2000).

Many teachers are those who lack specialist training, or have been generically trained, or may be trained but have not taught a child who is blind for several years. This has caused them to lose (and perhaps devalue) their braille competence, which in turn erodes their confidence. Consequently, negative attitudes to braille by generic school staff can often develop because specialist teachers lack confidence and because they are led to believe that modern technology has rendered braille redundant.

In classrooms

The issue of whether to teach Grade 1 or Grade 2 braille to beginning braille users continues to cause heated discussion within Australian classrooms and school systems. There is an obvious need for much intensive debate on this issue. The dilemma seems initially to have been generated in integrated classrooms where there has been an increased emphasis on teaching Grade 1 braille, because it is so

much easier to teach and manage. Results of research by Troughton (1992) have indicated that students can benefit from starting with Grade 1 and then successfully moving to Grade 2. Perhaps one of the drawbacks of an over-reliance upon Grade 1 is that teachers who have only rudimentary braille skills themselves, see Grade 1 as the viable option and fail to hone their braille skills, so that both they and the child progress to Grade 2 when the student is ready. One of the expectations that the adoption of a UEBC may generate, is that Grade 2 braille will be simplified and the leap across the chasm between Grade 1 and Grade 2 will then be less challenging for students progressing from one code to the other.

Other important issues for Australian educators include: (a) questions about the optimum time at which to introduce braille to a student with deteriorating vision, and (b) whether or not to introduce braille as a literacy option to a student with low vision. Both issues present a constant challenge to teachers in Australia. Luckily there is much valuable, current literature on the subject (Corn & Koenig, 1996; Harley, Truan, & Sanford, 1997; Koenig & Holbrook, 1995).

The resolution of such problems as those identified above should significantly affect the content of Australian specialist teacher preparation programs.

Teacher training

The extreme lack of appropriately qualified teachers in vision

impairment is a matter of major concern for Australian educators. Economic rationalist policies have caused the closure of many tertiary courses and several States and Territories have for some years had no formal specialist teacher training programs. In Australia, the dearth of local on-site training has resulted in the delivery of some courses in distance mode and in other courses being offered only as periodic funding opportunities become available. As a result of these cuts, there is in Australia at present, only one tertiary education institution offering an on-campus braille training course, with other institutions providing braille training through distance mode. Unless the current predicament in the tertiary education system changes radically, it is difficult to imagine that a dynamic and viable future for braille literacy in the Australian school system will eventuate. There are also, in the opinion of the author, several significant problems with braille certification that impact upon the future of braille literacy in Australia.

Braille certification

In Australia, while there exists through the ABA national level certification for braille transcribers, there does not, at this time exist a credible, high standard, national level credential for teachers of braille. A comprehensive national survey of braille teachers and support staff has recently revealed that in 1999, across Australia, 25 different types of braille competence certificates were held by only 66% of braille teachers while four

types of braille certificates were held by only 9% of active support staff (Gentle, 2000). Obviously all teachers of braille need to be appropriately credentialed. Under such circumstances it seems in Australia, highly important that concerted thought be given to the development of a national level braille teaching qualification.

Technology

There is little doubt that technology has revolutionised the education of students with vision impairments in Australia as it has elsewhere in the developed world. As an itinerant teacher 25 years ago, the author's tools of trade were a Perkins brailier and a tape recorder. Students in the schools also had this equipment and in a few instances also had a typewriter and a dictaphone. Today, the range of electronic equipment for students appears to be almost limitless and the explosion in its availability seems to increase exponentially. The smorgasbord of potential offered to current students with vision impairments is of enormous benefit. There currently exists in Australia as elsewhere, perception both from the wider public and more alarmingly from teachers, that the introduction of computers, speech software, braille translation programs and other highly sophisticated electronic aides will supercede the need for braille. Whereas these alternative technologies have a valuable role to play, their use should never be regarded as a substitute for hard copy braille. There has long been concern as to whether listening is in fact literacy or

merely a component of literacy acquisition. However, it is generally agreed that in order to develop true literacy it is essential to be able to both read and write and the necessary skills cannot be attained though dependence on the auditory media alone (Australian Braille Authority, 1999).

Quigley (2000) commented upon the dangers to students posed by an over dependence on technology. The major threat is often derived from educators over-enthusiasm. Today, many Australian schools are self-governing. The administrators of these schools decide the way in which monies for students with disabilities will be spent. The allure of highly sophisticated equipment with voice output to solve the difficulty of having to provide a child with braille, can be seductive, although highly detrimental to the student's literacy acquisition. Teachers must constantly question how much technology is necessary and as well ponder the appropriate time for its introduction to each child.

Braille accessibility

Difficulties with the provision of braille texts in a timely manner is an issue for some students with vision impairments in regular schools. An excellent Australian national catalogue of braille texts exists. However, there have been reports of difficulties in accessing it and consequently this, in addition to the ever increasing demand for braille, has meant that some production agencies are unable to keep up with demand and students do not always

receive their texts on time or may have to be content with audio substitutes. Australians do not have the luxury of receiving mandated support through national or state level braille legislation as do students in some American states. These Acts, for example the Texas Braille Bill, “ensure access to youngsters with visual impairments in school settings” (Jones & Wolffe, 1996).

Communication

In size, Australia is as large as the continental USA. By comparison, in relation to its vast landmass, Australia has a relatively small population. The majority of Australians live in urban coastal areas in large cities that are widely separated from each other. The balance of the population live in rural regions, scattered across the country in remote and often isolated areas of the outback, or in sparsely populated communities. The resultant ‘tyranny of distance’ not only presents problems for effective service delivery, but also causes enormous fragmentation and difficulties in communication between education services across the country, since educational jurisdiction in Australia is mostly a state and territory, rather than a federal responsibility. Until recently, communication between specialised educational services for students with vision impairments between states was ad hoc. Biennial conferences of the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI) and annual conferences of the Heads of Educational Services from Australia and New Zealand

(HOES) have provided the only forums for discussion of issues. Between these conferences there has been some liaison between members but any national projects have been slow to bear fruit. Neither of these bodies employ staff, so that work between meetings relies on the good will and industry of those who can find the time. States and Territories hold their own local meetings but there is little or no interstate interaction. This situation started to change in 1999.

Addressing the issues

For many years Australian teachers of students with vision impairments have reproached themselves individually and collectively about the obvious decline in braille literacy. Many have been aware of the escalating problem and its many causes, but have as individuals felt powerless to address it. As a first step in the process, the Australian Blindness Forum (ABF), currently chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, was formed in 1992. Its membership comprises the Chief Executive Officers of the major Australian charitable service provider organisations concerned with people who are blind or vision impaired. In June 1998, the ABF approved the appointment of a Policy Officer (Blindness and Vision Impairment) who would be based in Canberra, the national capital and employed on its behalf by ACROD Limited, the Australian national industry association for disability service provision.

The success of such an appointment is necessarily very person-dependent. The Policy Officer who was appointed had significant experience in the disability field but very little in vision impairment. However, her fresh approach and willingness to learn was truly impressive. She quickly identified that one issue in particular elicited strong views and universal agreement that something needed to be done. It quickly became obvious through her consultations that children who are blind or vision impaired were ‘falling off the literacy agenda’. Information was rapidly collected from those in the field about current education standards and benchmarks as well as about the experiences and problems of the past two decades. Following her initial investigations, the ABF confirmed braille literacy as a priority issue and developed the following Policy Statements. That the AFB will work to:

- confirm the importance of braille as the key to acquiring literacy skills for children who are blind or have low vision;
- raise the status of braille literacy within service-providing and consumer agencies and with families, educators and the wider community; and
- provide a consistent, national basis for promoting braille literacy.

For Australian vision impairment educators nationally, the appointment and work of the new Policy Officer has provided the field with a much needed impetus and

a renewed focus on braille literacy. She has drawn together educators and interested participants from the wider blindness sector to unite nationally in a common campaign. Recent initiatives have included a discussion paper entitled *Braille literacy: Getting back on the literacy agenda* (Verick, 1999), which highlights major concerns about the declining levels of braille literacy among students who are blind. This paper has been widely distributed to professionals and service consumers as well as to the Federal Minister for Education who has acknowledged it and has agreed that he considers literacy to be a key equity issue in education. Other AFB initiatives have included face-to-face meetings of key players, articles published in newsletters and journals and an active email list through which the Policy Officer keeps the field constantly informed about her work as well as any braille literacy developments. This potent ABF initiative has provided the vision impairment field with a unique opportunity and the potential to unite over a critically important issue.

As well as the ABF Policy Officer's work, the past year has seen several other significant braille literacy initiatives. These have included a major survey of literacy levels among braille teachers and support staff (Gentle, 2000). As well, there has been a braille literacy survey of itinerant teachers (Vision Impairment) in New South Wales State Education Department schools (Telec, 2000). The Gentle Report

presented the results of a national survey of 299 braille teachers and 128 support staff. These numbers are concluded to represent almost all braille literacy teachers and support staff in Australia. The survey revealed that 63% of braille teachers were proficient in the literary braille code of whom 53% were knowledgeable of the braille mathematics code. Of the 128 braille support staff who responded, 30% were proficient in the literary braille code and knowledgeable in the braille mathematics code. Recommendations from this study included the following:

- that refresher courses in braille should be offered by those Australian institutions at which there are braille training programs;
- that braille training programs should include instructional methodologies and information on braille programming needs as well as instruction in braille formatting and layout guidelines, braille translation programs and embosser technology;
- that educational institutions should offer braille training programs in mathematics, music, chemistry and computer codes;
- that distance education courses should be made available and promoted as a component of professional development; and
- that greater networking is necessary between states and territories.

Telec's research is still in process and it is anticipated that the

survey will be completed by mid-year.

Conclusion

As a result of the publication of the Federal Government's paper *Literacy for all: The challenge for Australian Schools* (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998), one of the most exciting initiatives to have occurred just prior to the time of writing, is the publication of a four volume report entitled *Literacy, numeracy and students with disabilities* (van Kraayenoord, Elkins, Palmer & Rickards, 2000). The long-awaited report presents the Commonwealth state and territory governments' commitment to literacy and numeracy with the goal "That every child leaving primary school should be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level" (p. 9). In the opinion of those who wrote the report, the acquisition and use of literacy and numeracy skills is portrayed as a critically important source of active participation in society, personal empowerment, and self advocacy for people with disabilities. It is their view that people with disabilities who are literate and numerate have more opportunities to integrate with their communities. They have greater access to education, recreation and leisure opportunities, employment, housing and transport. Literacy and numeracy should, therefore, be conceived by Australia's Federal Government as a basic right.

Primarily due to lobbying by the ABF's Policy Officer as well as by the Chief Executive Officer

of Vision Australia, the federal Department of Education and Youth Affairs (DETYA) has commissioned a substantial research report on literacy and numeracy acquisition (including the role of braille) from Melbourne-based consultants Jolley William & Associates. The consultant's group includes academics from Sydney's Renwick College and the Schonell Special Education Research Centre in Queensland. Their final report is expected in June this year.

It is hoped that the aspirations and recommendations of those who wrote both reports will be realised through increased government involvement in braille literacy development.

Despite impressive advances made through the work of such community special interest groups as SPEVI, HOES and the AFB; the promise of greater international involvement for Australia through adoption of the UEBC, and the promise of greater involvement of Federal and State governments in enhancing braille literacy opportunity, the challenge of getting braille adequately and intensively taught to students in regular educational settings still remains. It is in this author's opinion, one of the major issues facing braille literacy decline nationally. Until this predicament is addressed and resolved, the current status of braille literacy in our schools is likely to continue.

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Brief Report of ICEVI Asia Region Activities

Cont. from page 33

in collaboration with the National Association for the Blind, Nepal. The workshop will be organised in the month of December 2002 and the dates are yet to be finalised.

- A workshop on Abacus will be organised in Dhaka, Bangladesh in December 2001. This is the second workshop initiated by ICEVI – Asia Region. Dr. S.R. Mittal from India will serve as the Resource Person for this workshop and Mrs. Manju Samaddar, Principal, Baptist Sangha School for Blind Girls will be the local contact person.
- At the initiative of ICEVI, Sri S. Satishkumar, a blind adult person from Sri Lanka will be attending a short-term course on Computer Training for Blind Persons at the International Human Resource Development Centre, Coimbatore from October 2001 to May 2002.

Though ICEVI has no financial commitment for this programme, the initiative taken by ICEVI in 1998 (during the visit of the Regional Chairman to Sri Lanka) has resulted in the training for this client.

- The workshop on “Information Technology” conducted by ICEVI in collaboration with the National Association for the Blind, Delhi on 22nd and 23rd December 2000 received overwhelming responses from all professionals and as a result, ICEVI was requested to organise one more workshop in 2001. The second workshop on this subject will be organised by the National Association for the Blind, Delhi on 23rd and 24th December 2001 and 20 participants from India and the neighbouring countries will be attending this workshop.

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Blind Climber Scales Mt. Everest

On May 25th, 2001 Erick Weihenmayer, 32, of Golden, Colorado, USA, became the first blind climber to conquer Mt. Everest. Marc Maurer, president of the National Federation for the Blind, which sponsored the expedition said “The primary goal of the climb was not to put a blind climber on the summit at any cost, but to place a true team of climbers, one of whom happens to be blind, on the top of the world.

The climb makes a bold statement about the capabilities of blind people, their right to assume first-class citizenship, and the fact, given the proper training and opportunity, blind people can do just about anything”. In the past Weihenmayer has climbed Mount McKinley in Alaska, Kilimanjario in Tanzania and Mount Aconcagua in Argentina.

The Braille Beginner - A Constructive Learner

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Literacy means more than just being able to read and write. It means being able to communicate on different levels - with an author through the text of a book, by correspondence with other people, famous, obscure, personally known or not; and with society as a whole. Literacy is obviously a necessary skill for anyone who lives in a society where reading and writing are used daily. But it will become ever more necessary in a future society dependent on information and advanced communication technology. Reading, of course, serves so many fundamental social needs that individuals are highly motivated to learn to read - not only for their own pleasure and satisfaction, but also because today's society makes demands on reading skills. School and society impose necessary reading tasks which differ in nature from reading for pleasure.

To meet these required everyday reading situations an individual must adapt his or her reading strategy to the reading task. A reader who can do this exhibits what we may call *reading competence*. Reading competence in this sense implies an interaction between an individual and his/her surroundings. A person with reading competence reads and understands, adapts reading strategy to the reading task and uses his/her reading ability to the

reading demands expected from people in his/her surroundings.

How then do reading ability and reading competence develop? From my point of view the acquisition of literacy is a social construction that develops in interaction with the environment. The question thus arises: what does this approach offer to the braille beginner and to his/her educator?

The theoretical framework for the development of the individual states that every child actively searches for knowledge by interacting with his/her surroundings. The child is simply a constructive learner (Piaget, 1954; Vygotsky, 1978). Research has taught us that the sighted and the blind child differ in the way they explore and acquire concepts and language (Warren, 1994). We do not yet fully understand, however, how the blind child's surroundings affect his/her efforts to construct the world (Webster & Roe, 1998). That is, how the braille beginner constructs the concepts of reading and writing in interaction with the family, school, and society. And how does the teacher's knowledge of and experience with the way blind children explore the surroundings affect an individual child's chance to be a constructive learner? These are matters frequently discussed nowadays when most blind children are in-

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egrated in mainstream school systems.

As a former special teacher in a special school for visually impaired and someone who today trains other teachers, I have had reason to reflect on how a teacher's experience affects blind learners of different ages and learning situations. Two of my pupils especially come to mind - both girls, and both in my classes in the special school. And both constructive learners.

The first, Tiina, came to the special school when she was seven years old in grade one. Tiina was the most curious pupil I had ever met with an incredible hunger for learning to read. She was always asking questions about the dots she felt everywhere in the surroundings of the special school, and of course there were always people around to answer. I am sure she would have been a reader by seven if she had been a sighted child. Once she was familiar with the positions of the dots in the braille cell, she asked what the names of the letters were. In those days, we assigned each dot a position number in the cell, and this methodology gave Tiina a language to describe what she wanted to know. "What letter is number one, three, four, and five?", she would ask when she found a letter she didn't recognize. Very early on she began to single out letters from a whole written word and would describe them in the same way as a sighted child does who points to a letter and says its name. Tiina had never had the opportunity to

learn about letters before she came to the special school. She had the "appetite" but no food!

By the end of her first school year Tiina was a fluent reader, she also was able to write with slate and stylus. Today she is in her thirties - the mother of three children and a lawyer. She got her law degree before computer reading and writing in braille.

The second constructive learner, Katarina, had a hearing impairment besides her visual impairment. She had been fitted with a hearing device just before school started and she did have some residual vision. I was told before we met that she was a slow learner, and might perhaps have a slight mental retardation. She was a very silent girl and it was not easy for me to get close to her so she would share her thoughts.

I noticed almost at once, though, that something happened to her when she was introduced to letters in braille. She learned them very easily, and was obviously pleased to be using her fingers and sense of touch. Then on parents visiting day about two months later, when Katarina had to show her anxious mother her braille reading trials, she was brilliant! Katarina had been given a medium that allowed her to express her hidden talents. It was obvious that previous judgments about her mental retardation and slow learning were wrong. During her preschool years she'd been misunderstood because she had no opportunity to be a constructive learner. Her two impairments were not

merely added they were multiplied in the ignorant environment she lived in, and environment, that was her biggest handicap. Once she got the key to literacy, she devoured books and journeyed away to a world of poetic imagination.

Today Katarina, totally blind and severely hearing impaired, has published a book of poems, *Cautious Hands* and works for the deaf-blind association. Reading and writing have helped her survive, but who knows what more she might have accomplished had she lived in a competent environment during her preschool years. Several other pupils also have become more relaxed when they are able to use touch instead of bad vision. One girl with CVI and normal intellectual development had severe visual perceptual problems told me she was much more comfortable when she was reading braille instead of print (Fellenius, Ek & Jacobson, in press)

What happens to blind children like Tiina and Katarina today? Has anything changed in the last twenty-five years? Does a child have an opportunity to be curious about the dots before going to school? And if a child is curious, do the people around him or her, have the knowledge, the imagination, or the appropriate tools to satisfy the curiosity? Do children have more access to information, more opportunity now for learning and teaching before school starts?

The methodology for teaching braille has long focused on the single braille letter and the ques-

tion of how a child learns to recognize the patterns of the dots. We have evolved efficient reading techniques and rapid reading, we understand the use of contractions as a way to overcome a slow reading rate and to develop exercises for going from dots to letters, and from letters to reading words and sentences. But can these methods be combined with the philosophy of a constructive learner? Piaget has said that each time we teach a child something, we keep him from inventing it himself. This is the essence from the perspective of a constructive learner. To give a blind child the chance to invent letters, words and sentences would put enormous demands on his/her learning environment - that is, teachers and tools. One reason Tiina and Katarina learned braille so quickly, was of course the access they had to letters and texts in braille in the special school. You cannot be curious and ask about something you don't know exists. Secondly, other pupils around them were also striving to understand the meaning and the use of reading and writing in braille. Once you understand what being able to read means, you are more motivated to learn. Thirdly, they were made aware of what they were learning and why; and awareness is always important for progress. And lastly, they had knowledgeable people around them to answer their questions, stimulate their curiosity and make them eager to grow.

Learning is an interactive process. Learning never exists in a vacuum. Vygotsky (1978) em-

phasized the importance of socio-cultural interaction if a child is to be able to move ahead from his/her actual development level. He talks about "the zone of proximal development" (ZPD) where the child has the opportunity of developing inherent resources during particular circumstances e.g., in co-operation with or in interaction with more capable people. He defines the nearest development zone as follows:

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers...

The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state.

(P. 86)

From this perspective, the educational process becomes important for, and determines, the child's learning. Education must be based on those processes which are under development in every child/pupil if it is to stimulate further development of higher cognitive processes. Reading is such a process.

Therefore, the learning environment of pupils with visual impairments must be considered important if the child is to develop reading ability and reading competence. This point of view

presumes access to people who know about, and have experience of, the consequences of visual impairment for reading development, which is to use Vygotsky's words, scaffolding; the child in his development. The adult must support the child in his problem-solving in such a way that later on he/she will be able to manage alone. From this perspective the educator will function more as an observer and supporter rather than as a traditional instructor. Such an educator observes and based on his/her own knowledge, interprets what is seen and supports the child to facilitate his/her own problem-solving. It is a delicate task that requires a teaching competence involving both 'timing' and coaching. As a teacher it is my duty to promote learning and to create a room for active learning in which learning also has meaning for the pupil.

The access to "room for active learning" is relatively easy for a sighted child. It is much more difficult for the braille beginner to find an environment enriched with opportunities for incidental learning. Sighted and visually impaired pupils report very different kinds of interaction within their families when they describe their home reading environment. Many pupils with visual impairments report that people at home never or almost never talk to them about what they read (Fellenius, 1999). This lack of interaction is an alarm signal and a pedagogical challenge. As educators with our knowledge of blind children's needs and learning processes, it is our responsi-

bility to describe and participate in creating opportunities for active learning in the child's total environment, and to do so in collaboration with the family, the school and the society.

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Howe's Now

If you want to know what is going on the field of education of blind and visually impaired as it relates to schools for the blind in the United States and Canada this is the publication for you. It is publication of the Council of Schools for the Blind Howe's Now is a quarterly newsletter.

Annual subscription rate is \$10 (U.S.). Braille, large print, and diskette copies are available on request or can be downloaded at <www.tsbvi.edu>

Direct correspondence to:

Howe's Now
Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind
205 East South Street
Talladega, Alabama 35161
U.S.A

WBU Committee on Blind Children

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Ms. Kicki Nordström, Sweden

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Ms. Aurora Sribuapun, Thailand
Ms. Ana Pelaez, Spain
Ms. Olga Souza, Brazil
Ms. June Waugh, USA
Ms. Gladys Nyaga, Kenya

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New Publications

Cont. from page 39

"saviour", Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe. Dr. Howe (1801-1876) became famous not through being the first director of the first school for the blind in the United States of America (Perkins School for the Blind) but because of his work in educating Laura Bridgman. To get a true, if not complete, picture of Laura education it is well to read both books. In addition I would recommend reading Chapter 3: "The Development of Education for Deaf-Blind People", in Regi Enerstvedt's book *Legacy of the Past*, Forlaget Nord-Press, Dronninglund, Denmark, 1996.

Freeberg, Ernest (2001). *The Education of Laura Bridgman: First Deaf and Blind Person to Learn Language*. Harvard University Press.

Gitter, Elisabeth (2001). *The Impresioned Guest: Samuel Howe and Laura Bridgman, the Original Deaf-Blind Girl*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux,.

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Together Everyone Achieves More (Together Europe Achieves More)

Regional networks of parents support groups:
Do they work? What is their value?

The majority of blind and partially sighted children in many developing countries have limited access to education and independent living skills services. ICEVI Europe Regional Conference held in Crakow in July 2000 recognised both the lack of services in those countries and the valuable contribution that parents can make in the education of their visually impaired children. We applaud them for facilitating a workshop on parents with the view of setting up a European Network of parent support groups.

The workshop's theme was "T.E.A.M" *Together Everyone Achieves More* and it was based on the LOOK London model of setting up and running local parent support groups that can develop to regional and national organisations. Could this model be used for other regions?

Participants were asked to consider the value of such groups. Presentations were made by participants who had had experience working with parents in parent support group settings in their own countries. It was an interactive day with views expressed and ideas and suggestions put forward.

After many contributions and much discussion it was decided that there was (and is) a need to "join the efforts" of parents in different countries within the re-

gion through the establishment of parent support groups in countries without such networks.

We decided to call the European Network "T.E.A.M.", to carry through the theme of our workshop but also because we believed that "*Together Europe will Achieve More*".

We have already started working together on joint projects. From organising penfriends between countries in Europe to working together as partners. At present The Moscow Foundation "Parents of the VI" and LOOK London are involved in a Britain-Russia Development Partnership project to respond to and address the needs of MDVI (Multi-Disabled Visually Impaired) children in Russia. More projects are in the pipeline.

Not all of the 39 European Countries at the conference were present at the workshop, so we need to set up structures to ensure that, in due course, there is a "T.E.A.M" group in every country in Europe and a representative and contact person from every country in Europe.

I realise that this is an immense ambition but, with aid from modern technology, a very able information officer and involvement of professionals who work with our VI children I believe that it is achievable.

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The Digital Talking Book: The DAISY Book

A new and comfortable way of reading talking books

There are many reasons for reading. One is to get access to information, to obtain knowledge about things we need to know. Another reason is to experience joy and excitement. As a teacher you know that your students' reading improves their language and increases their vocabulary. A book might absorb you completely, and make you dread the moment when it is finished. Of course everyone should be able to read books, lots of books!

For many young people with visual impairment, the talking book is a necessary tool in their studies.

The typical student that I am thinking of is a teenager, whose vision has deteriorated, and reading print has become too tiring and too time-consuming. He or she started to learn Braille a few years ago, and has not yet reached an acceptable reading rate, sufficient for studying. In this situation I would always advise him or her to start reading talking books.

In my work as a teacher at the Institute for Special Needs Education I have often noticed that both the students and their teachers have been a bit reluctant to using talking books as study material, the main reason being the complex navigating among the cassettes. The students' earlier experiences of talking books consist mainly of listening to fic-

tion, which means placing the first cassette in the tape recorder and changing cassettes after a while; no searching for specific pages or paragraphs. It seems to be a simple enough activity. But you need to keep your mind on what you hear. Everyone who has listened to a recorded book – or tried to listen to it – knows how hard it can be to keep concentrated on the text, when you are free to do other things while listening. When you have reached the level where you really enjoy listening to the book, then you have come a long way, and you have acquired what is absolutely necessary for studying non-fiction by using talking books.

You must be extremely motivated to listen to a non-fiction text without having prepared yourself in one way or another. An impending examination can surely be motivation enough. But otherwise you need some kind of strategy. Preparing a pupil for reading a recorded non-fiction text might consist of giving him some hints of what the text is about, some words to collect information about or some questions to find the answers to. On top of that there is the navigating among the cassettes – listening to the list of contents, choosing cassette, start the fast forward winding to the specific paragraph, while listening to different signals. This takes time.

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Sometimes the teacher prepares this before the lesson starts, so the student can sit down and just push the play button. But in this way the student does not have the freedom to read what he needs to read, when he wants to read it. And as a good teacher I want to supply my student with an efficient study technique and make him independent in his studies.



DAISY-players from Plextalk (left and right) and Victor (middle)

New digital talking book

In the DAISY-format, the book is being recorded on CD-ROM discs. DAISY means Digital Audio Information System. There are two ways of listening to a DAISY-book, either in a special CD-player (e.g. the one called Plextalk or the smaller one, Victor) or in a special computer program (e.g. Playback 2000 or LpPlayer).

Advantages of the DAISY-book

The DAISY format enables you to:

- move between headings and between the different levels in the book,
- go to any page you search for,
- search for words found in the headings of the book,
- place bookmarks in the text.
- make notes in the text (text notes and voice notes),
- increase and decrease the rate of speech without distorting the sound,
- easily get access to a lot of text, as one cd can contain 50 hours of recorded speech and
- concentrate on listening, as the navigating in the book is no problem.

The Swedish Library for Talking books and Braille has at present about 2500 titles in the DAISY format. The institute for special needs education, the department for production of learning material, has up to now produced

about 30 textbooks as DAISY-books and new titles are made on demands from teachers working with visually impaired students and students with a reading disability. The books already recorded on cassettes are continuously being transformed into the DAISY format.

My first contact with the DAISY-book took place about two years ago. All my experiences regarding the new digital talking book have so far been good ones. The students I have met appreciate the efficient way of navigating in the book. Imagine getting a complete encyclopedia on three or four cd-rom discs! Students with a reading disability realize that from now on the talking book will be very valuable in their studies, not just something you turn to when there is no other alternative left.

Catharina Johansson
catharina.johansson@sit.se

The Daisy Consortium

There is an international group called the Daisy Consortium. Its mission is to develop the international standard and implementation strategies for the production, exchange and use of Digital Talking-Books in both developed and developing countries

See <www.daisy.com> for more information.

First Blind TV Newsreader?

Nuria de Saz is reported to have made history by becoming the world's first blind TV newsreader. 25-year-old Nuria is employed by the Spanish state-owned Canal 2 Andalucia. ONCE provided special equipment to help Nuria successfully complete a journalism course and gone on to offer practical

advice and assistance so that Nuria could present the news in a natural and flowing way.

**The official website of
ICEVI**

www.icevi.org

ICEVI Executive Committee Meeting

The Executive Committee met in May 2001 in Chihuahua, Mexico. Host for the meeting was Centro de Estudios para Invidentes, an educational resource center serving visually impaired students in the city and state of Chihuahua in northern Mexico.



The Executive Committee in front of the CEI headquarters in Chihuahua

The center is also the home base of Carla Herrera, the treasurer of ICEVI. Thanks to Carla's organizational skills and the CEI staff always available the members of the Executive Committee could concentrate on the extensive agenda without worrying about practical details. Among the issues on the agenda were:

Constitution

The Executive Committee endorsed the fine work that has been done by Colin Low (Royal National Institute for the Blind) on the ICEVI constitution. Colin is now working on the final details of a revised constitution with Nandini Rawal, Secretary and Bill Brohier, Past President. A copy of the revised constitution will be printed in a future issue of *The Educator*.

Regional Realignment

William Brohier has put in great efforts in studying the regional alignments of various international bodies. At the meeting he put forward a plan to the Executive Committee who endorsed the plan which fits in better with the new World Blind Union (WBU) groupings.

The WBU had spent a great deal of time grappling with the same issue and ICEVI was happy to take full advantage of the research they had already put into this matter. The Executive Committee agreed to a realignment of the ICEVI regions along the same lines as the WBU, with the exception that ICEVI will continue to maintain a Pacific Region. With the adoption of the revised constitution which is expected within the next few months ICEVI will move from 8 to 7 regions as follows:

Africa, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America/Caribbean, Pacific and West Asia (which will include the Asian countries of the former USSR and the current countries of the Middle East).

This realignment which has the backing of the current Middle East region will not only resolve some of the difficult challenges currently facing the Middle East but has the additional advantage of making collaboration between ICEVI and WBU much easier. A full listing of countries by region will be published with the revised constitution in a future issue of *The Educator*.

Nominations Committee

A nominations committee with Richard Porter as chairperson was appointed to prepare the election of the Principal Officers next summer. The other members of the committee are: Herman Gresnigt, Regional chair, Europe
Lucia Piccione, Regional chair, Latin America
M.N.G. Mani, Regional chair, Asia
Jill Keeffe, Regional chair, Pacific
Gladys Nyaga, Deputy regional chair, Africa
Mike Collins, Perkins School for the Blind & Deafblind International
Susan Spungin, American Foundation for the Blind

The committee is open to inputs from all members. Communication regarding nominations should be sent to:

Mr. Richard Porter
ICEVI Nominations Committee
c/o Sight Savers International
Grosvenor Hall, Bolnore Road
Haywards Heath,
West Sussex RH16 4BX
United Kingdom
rporter@sightsaversint.org.uk

ICEVI Secretariat in India

The Executive Committee made a decision to strengthen the ICEVI Secretariat in India. We are most grateful to Christoffel Blindenmission for their financial support of this work. In the future the layout, printing and mailing of all ICEVI publications and the maintenance of the ICEVI databases will all be coordinated through the ICEVI

Secretariat in India. Please direct all communications regarding address changes directly to Nandini at the Secretariat at <bpaicevi@ad1.vsnl.net.in>.



Deafblind International's president Mike Collins and ICEVI's past president William Brohier.

Strategic Planning

One of the most important issues discussed at the Executive Committee meeting was planning the future direction of ICEVI. If ICEVI is to fully implement the policies adopted at the 10th

World Conference in São Paulo the regions must be strengthened by engaging and involving our members, and developing the untapped potential that ICEVI has as an advocate for equalization of educational opportunity at a national, regional and international level.

There were many excellent suggestions that came out of the discussion in Chihuahua, including one that resulted in a Strategic Planning Work Group, which over the next several months will articulate a process for moving forward a strategic planning process. M.N.G. Mani, Jill Keeffe, Carla Herrera and Meredith Tilp (representing Helen Keller Worldwide) and Bill Brohier have volunteered their services to this working group.

The working group welcomes any input that you might wish to make which should be sent to the chair <larry@obs.org>. Please caption any of your communications on this matter "ICEVI Strategic Planning".



The Executive Committee testing Mexican specialities prepared by Carla Herrera and her family.

**11th ICEVI World
Conference
and
50th Anniversary**

27 July - 2 August 2002

**Leeuwenhorst
Congress Centre**

**Noordwijkerhout
The Netherlands**

**You will find the latest
information about the
11th World Conference on**

www.icevi.org

New Visions: Moving Toward an Inclusive Society

Host Committee

As the chairperson of the Dutch Host Committee, I am pleased to invite you to participate in the 11th ICEVI World Conference, which will take place in the Leeuwenhorst Congress Centre, Noordwijkerhout, the Netherlands

This Conference will offer opportunities to meet each other, exchange experiences and information for those who are involved with raising, educating and rehabilitating children and young people with a visual impairment.

The theme of this Conference *New Visions: Moving Toward an Inclusive Community* lends itself learning through experiences elsewhere in the world.

The Host Committee expects many participants, especially because the ICEVI will celebrate

Programme Committee

On behalf of the Programme Committee for the ICEVI 11th World Conference, it is my pleasure to invite you to the conference.

The theme of the conference “*New Visions: Moving Toward an Inclusive Community*” has been chosen to promote an international exchange of ideas, research, practices and future trends. It will embrace the last decade of international policy on inclusion for all drawing upon such documents as UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,

its 50th Anniversary during this Conference

The ICEVI was founded in 1952 in the Netherlands. In the last few years the ICEVI has been pro-active in stimulating international exchanges and through that contributing to the access of equal educational opportunity for people with visual impairment.

The Host Committee is doing its very best to organize a wonderful conference. However, much of that success will be related to your contributions as participant. I am looking forward meeting you in July 2002 in Noordwijkerhout, the Netherlands.

Yours sincerely,

Hans Welling
Chairperson
Dutch Host Committee

UNESCO’s Salamanca Statement and the Dakar Declaration.

The Programme Committee has sought high quality presentations in the form of:

- Stimulating papers
- Interactive workshops
- The latest in research
- Poster sessions
- New video and CD-ROM material

Yours sincerely,

Heather Mason
Chairperson
Programme Committee

Important Information

Venue

The conference will take place in the Leeuwenhorst Congress Centre, Noordwijkerhout, the Netherlands.

The Leeuwenhorst is a world-class congress centre with excellent meeting rooms, restaurants, recreation and hotel facilities. More detailed information about the centre and how to register will be given in the registration brochure, which will be sent in November 2001.

Fee

The conference fee covers full participation, hotel-accommodation and breakfast, coffee/tea during breaks, lunches, dinners, social events and closing dinner. (only during conference days). The early fee is approx. Euro 975 for 1 person (single room).

If you share a double room the fee will be approx. Euro 925 per person.

More detailed information can be found in the registration brochure.

Languages

The official language for the Conference will be English. All announcements, programmes, abstracts and conference proceedings will be in English. Presentations may be held in English and Spanish.

Plenary Sessions: English with simultaneous translation into Spanish and vice versa.

Parallel sessions: English with Spanish translation in some sessions and vice versa.

Important dates

- (Submissions of abstracts was in October 2001)
 - Notice of Acceptance: December 2001
 - Mailing of Registration Forms by Conference Office: November 2001
 - Submission of Registration Forms to Conference Office: 1 March 2002
 - Submission of complete papers to Conference Office: 17 May 2002
-

Conference Office

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Ineke van Dijk • The Netherlands
Herman Gresnigt • The Netherlands
Lucia Piccione • Argentina
Bhushan Punani • India

Report on Refresher Course for Specialist Teachers in Malawi



Gladys Nyaga in lecturing position

Malawi is usually referred to as “The Warm Heart of Africa”. It is a small country bordering Tanzania, Zambia, and Mozambique. The country has adopted Itinerant Education (IE) and Resource Centre Models for educating visually impaired children in Malawi. IE programmes are funded by Sight Savers in collaboration with Ministry of Education while Resource Centres receive support from Christoffel Blindenmission (CBM).

ICEVI identified Dark & Light Foundation to fund a 5-days refresher course in April 2001 for 20 specialist teachers representing 13 resource centres in Malawi. The centres are currently serving 289 visually impaired children but there is room for more if funding was available.

The facilitators were drawn from Monfort College, Ministry of Education, and assisted by Mrs Gladys Nyaga Sight Savers Education Adviser. The following topics were covered: Braille,

Daily Living Skills, Orientation and Mobility, Art Techniques, Guidance and Counselling, Eyes and Vision, Vision Screening, Use of Abacus, Cubarithm, Learning Difficulties, Rehabilitation, Record Keeping and Management of programmes as well as policy issues.

The course was a dream come true because some of the specialist teachers were trained in late 70’s or 80’s. These teachers had no opportunity of attending any workshop since they were trained. The course gave them a chance to update skills, learn new skills, and share experiences with other colleagues. The knowledge will make them better teachers and benefit visually impaired children. I look forward to more assistance through ICEVI and traditional donors as well as new donors in future.

Gladys Nyaga
Deputy Regional Chairperson
ICEVI Africa, Sight Savers
International Education Programme
Adviser

The participants in the Malawi Refresher Course



Brief Report of ICEVI Asia Region Activities

May to August 2001 and activities finalised for the period September to December

May 2001 to August 2001

• Soon after the meeting of the Officers of ICEVI held in Mexico from 4 to 7, May 2001, proposals for funding were sent to ICEVI. These proposals include advocacy programmes and subject related workshops in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India. Other salient activities are as follows:

• The Regional Chairman represented ICEVI – Asia Region at the Sub-Committee meeting of the Rehabilitation Council of India – Professionals dealing with Visual Disability on May 14, 2001. ICEVI – Asia Region continues to enjoy membership in this highest policy making body of India.

• Regional Chairman served as a Resource Person at the Refresher Training course for teachers of the blind in Asia and conducted workshop sessions on Teaching Mathematics to visually impaired children. The programme was organised by the Asian Blind Union from 2 to 7 July 2001 in collaboration with the NABP, Norway.

• Regional Chairman held discussions with various organisations in Chennai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad regarding the possibilities of holding various workshops in the region.

• Conducted a workshop on Teaching Mathematics and Mathematical braille codes in

Hyderabad on August 4, 2001. 35 teachers working in integrated and special schools attended the programme. Various organisations from the State of Andhra Pradesh have requested ICEVI – Asia Region to help their teachers to equip professionally through conduct of similar academic oriented workshops and seminars.

• Conducted a workshop on “Assessing the Reading Preference of Low Vision Children” on 13th and 14th August 2001 in collaboration with the International Human Resource Development Centre for the Disabled, Coimbatore. 18 teachers attended the workshop.

• In a southern regional conference organised by the National Council for Teacher Education in Mysore, India on August 21, 2001, the Regional Chairman spoke about trends in special education teacher preparation and pleaded for inclusion of education of children with visual impairment in the general education curriculum. He also spoke about the role of ICEVI in developing professionalism in the region.

Activities to be conducted in October to December 2001

• A regional workshop on Low Vision will be organised from 5 to 12 October 2002 at Ludhiana in collaboration with the

Vocational Training Centre for the Blind. About 30 participants from the northern region will be attending this programme and Dr. E.M. Johnson will be the local organiser. ICEVI will be sponsoring this event.

• A regional workshop on “Education of visually impaired children with multiple disabilities” will be organised from 18 to 22 November 2001 at the Divine Light School Trust for the Blind, Bangalore. 30 teachers working in special and integrated schools will be benefitted by this programme. Sri S. Ravindra, Secretary of the DLSBT will be the local organiser.

• In collaboration with the Society for the Visually Handicapped (SVH), Kolkatta, India, ICEVI will be organising a workshop on “Child-centred education for Visually Impaired Children” from 26 to 28 November 2001 for professionals working in the area of visual impairment. More than 40 persons will be attending this programme. Mrs. Hena Basu, Secretary of the Society is making arrangements for this programme.

• In continuation of the workshops for teachers who are visually impaired, an inservice course on effective teaching will be organised for 30 teachers by the Nepal Chapter of the ICEVI

Cont. on page 20

Message to all educators from the World Blind Union and its new president

First of all, let me wish you all a good and successful 2002. Let us hope that all our high expectations of this year comes true.

Secondly, I would like to express my high appreciation for your work for our members, young and older, throughout the world.

As we all know, education is one of the most important issues we have to face. Without education we will not be able to change the present situation for the developing countries.

Those who need education more than any one is all blind and visually impaired children in developing countries. Not only to create understanding, but more to be able to survive and live a life in dignity,

All blind and visually impaired children need high quality of education and accessible materials as well as an high interest from the educators.

Without this interest together with a basic education of WBU members, children or adults, none of us will be able to take a step forward, develop our organisation and reach our goals.

Education is the fundamental platform for a future. It is therefore in our common interest to have a good co-operation with the ICEVI.

Because we all want the same thing and only by working to-

gether, we will be able to reach our common goals.

If WBU is to secure the leadership of the future we must rely on you!

All of us who are coming from the industrial part of the world must be aware of the enormous advantage we have. We must share this advantage with children from developing countries.

We may set up goals, action plans, and position papers, but we can not expect any action if the people concerned have no education and can neither read nor interpret what have been set up.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to inform you about my vision and hopes for the coming four years as WBU President.

The WBU has established a number of committees and working groups. One of them is the United Nations Committee. With this committee we hope to co-operate with the United Nations and its agencies and Commissions, like for example WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO and the World Bank.

Another of our working groups will work on policy, media, advocacy and information. The third example is the working group on organisational development and support to developing



The first meeting between the new presidents of ICEVI and WBU was held at Tomtebodas Resource Centre, Sweden, on December 13, 2000.

On December 13 Sweden celebrates Sankta Lucia, the queen of light. In many other countries St. Lucia is known as the patron of the blind. The two presidents could hardly have chosen a better day for the first summit.

countries. The aim will be to strengthen the regions with leadership development, training, capacity building and democracy.

Besides those we have five committees, namely:

1. WBU committee on children
2. WBU committee on women
3. WBU committee on elderly
4. WBU committee on youth
5. WBU committee on indigenous people

In order to make the committees and working groups effective, I have identified a number of cross cutting issues and among them. We have literacy, educa-

tion, Braille and rehabilitation which each committee and working group should take into account.

In order to develop WBU and our individual members, I have invited ICEVI to send one representative to our newly established Committee on children, which will be chaired by Gertrude Fefoame from Ghana.

Gertrude herself, is a rehabilitation teacher and will certainly provide the committee with all her experience and knowledge.

The ICEVI can for sure

strengthen this committee by giving its experience and knowledge in the field and contribute where ICEVI has its expertise.

I hereby acknowledge that ICEVI has accepted and appointed Ms. Gladys Nyaga from Kenya to be part of the WBU Committee on Children. We will congratulate her and welcome her to our work!

Together we will be able to make a difference!

Yours truly

Kicki Nordström
WBU President

The New WBU Leaders

The following officers were elected when WBU met for the General Assembly in Australia in 2000.

President

Ms Kicki Nordström, Sweden
(see cover page 3 for address)

Immediate Past President

Dr Euclid Herie, Canada

First Vice President

Mr Arne Husveg, Norway

Second Vice President

Dr William Rowland, South Africa

Treasurer

Mr Geoffrey Gibbs, New Zealand

Secretary General

Mr Enrique Sanz, Spain

See page 24 for members of WBU Committee on Children

WBU Regional Presidents

Africa

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School for the Blind
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CAMEROON
paultezanou@voila.fr

West Asia

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PAB N House n° H-165
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East Asia - Pacific

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adaptive@singnet.com.sg

Europe

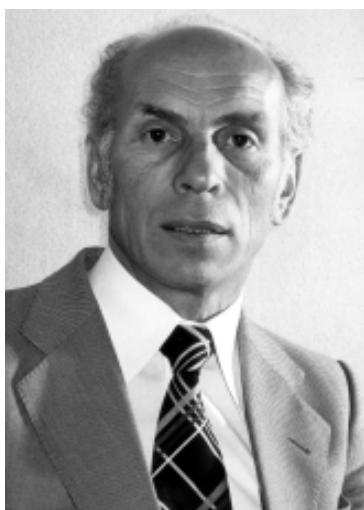
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cbird@rnib.org.uk

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Federación Venezolana de Instituciones de Ciegos
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ulac@reacciu.ve

North America/Caribbean

Mr. James SANDERS
The Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded
1929 Bayview Avenue
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CANADA
E-mail: sanderj@east.cnib.ca



Wolfgang Stein (1930-2000)

Wolfgang Stein

died December 28, 2000 at age 70 after decades of services to the visually impaired. Among his efforts were the ten years he was president of our organization 1977-1987.

In the late 1950s he spent a month at the School for the Blind in Sheffield, England to extend his knowledge about blind children and incidentally to improve his English. The director Frederick Tooze and Wolf became life-long friends and accepted a few international assignments together. Wolf's first challenge was as director of School for Blind Girls and Women in Hong Kong where he modernized school activities and established a training program for the women.

Five years later, he joined Christoffel Blindenmission as director of International Service for the Visually Impaired. He travelled extensively and one day found himself in a travel bureau in India. He was so impressed by the manager Mr. P.G. Michael that he invited him to work for CBM. Since Mr. Michael knew little about special education or rehabilitation, Wolf drew up a plan for his preparation. Again, Wolf made a life-long friend of Mr. Michael whom he affectionately called Mike. Eventually Mike became a regional CBM representative and fostered the growth of many existing programs in several countries in south Asia and set up new ones, including two large university level teacher training programs in Trichy and Bangalore, India.

In 1972, I became the president of ICEVH as it was then known and Wolf and I met often to share information from each other.

Having developed a small project in which excellent teachers were sent as volunteers for short periods to developing countries, I was grateful for Wolf's broad knowledge of creative teachers. Once he and I were asked to talk to a class of international students at University in Heidelberg, Germany. Having taught classes to university students in my own country and several others, I was looking forward to the afternoon in Dr. Schindele's class. Wolf spoke first for about 40 minutes and he was so good that when he finished - with all my experience teaching university students - I felt tongue-tied.

Wolf was a family man having two daughters and a son. There was much fun in their home and one April Fool's Day the children tacked up a sign on the bulletin board at the entrance of CBM. Wolf had just acquired a new car of which he was extremely proud. The sign read "almost new Peugeot for sale - cheap. Contact Wolf Stein". All morning long that April 1 Wolf received telephone calls asking the price. Finally he figured out what was going on and laughed until his face muscles ached.

In 1981, I joined CBM and some time later, Robert Jaekle also came on board. On four occasions through the years, quite by accident the four of us met at

conferences or between trips; Wolf, Bob Jaekle, Mr. Michael, and I. After an early dinner, we sat at a table for hours talking about what we were doing, the problems, our inadequacies, and our small successes. More than once the management of the restaurant asked us to leave after midnight.

In 1977 Wolf became president of ICEVH. He took the 1982

World Conference to Nairobi, Kenya. The very day of the opening, he woke at 4:00 am to the sound of revolutionary rifle fire. The conference had to be cancelled and five days later, it was finally safe for all participants to go home. Wolf began to plan the next World Conference at once for 1987 to be held at Wurzburg, Germany. That was a huge success.

Wolf Stein was a dynamic leader and this organization grew into its present importance largely because of his years of service. He will be missed, but schools and centers around the world will always remember the elegantly dressed visitor who offered encouragement and help in many forms.

Dr. Jeanne R. Kenmore

Past President, ICEVH (1972-1977)

Susana Crespo

(1928-2000) teacher and founder of the Helen Keller Institute in Cordoba, Argentina died on May 25, 2000. She was 72. She dedicated her life for more than 50 years to the education of the visually impaired. During those years her friend Lucia Piccione says she sowed the seeds of hope everywhere she visited, in each school where she gave courses and counselled". In 1977 she was appointed the first ICEVI Latin America chairperson.

Enrique Elissalde

(1939-2000) president of Braille Foundation of Uruguay and a member of the Latin American Union for the Blind and World Blind Union died on January 5, 2000. Enrique was the first blind student in Uruguay to finish his high school education in a mainstream class. We all mourn the loss for he was a person who encouraged associations of the blind to organize and fight for a better life for all those with visual impairment.

William Gallagher

(1922-2000), former executive director of the American Foun-

dation for the Blind died, April 19, 2000. Bill, a graduate of Perkins School for the Blind in 1945. He started his outstanding career in 1954 at the Catholic Guild for all the Blind (now the Carroll Center for the Blind).

Victor Vaughan

ICEVI member and educator of the blind from South Africa died in Pretoria, South Africa in 1999. He was known for efforts in educating visually impaired children in his country. He was 93.

Edward J. Waterhouse

(1902-1999), former president of ICEVI (formerly ICEBY) 1962-1967 died in Bath, Maine, USA on September 17, 1999. He was 96 years old. He was born in Hale, England. He graduated from Queen's College Cambridge University in 1930. He emigrated to the United States shortly afterwards and began teaching mathematics at Perkins School for the Blind in 1933. He was also a housemaster in one of the school's residences. Dr. Waterhouse was an outstanding educator of the visually impaired. Among his many accomplishments were that he helped

establish deafblind programs and services in the United States and worldwide. Also he helped to expand the Perkins Teacher Training Program for overseas professionals. In 1945 he was appointed manager of the Perkins' Howe Press and while in that position he did much to introduce to the world the newly designed Perkins Braille. In 1951 he became the fifth director of Perkins. He resigned as director in 1971 but continued to work as a consultant for Perkins for a number of years. He also served as a trustee of the National Braille Press, Boston and as an overseer of the John Milton Society for the Blind, New York. He was chairman of the North American Committee on Service for the Blind and Deaf, 1970-74. He was involved with ICEVI from its very conception and its first conference in 1952. During the early years he was one of the organizations' guiding lights. He was a great friend to many thousands of blind students and professionals in the field of blindness and deafblindness worldwide.

Honors, Awards and Appointments

William Brohier, past president of ICEVI has been awarded the Tun Hussein Onn Award for distinguished services to visually handicapped person from the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia. He was also awarded in 1999 the Teakeo Iwahashi Award for his outstanding contribution to work for the blind.

Rodney Clark has retired as the leader of Sense in the UK. His successor is Dr **Tony Best** from the RNIB Condover Hall School. Both of them are well known for their involvement in ICEVI. Rodney has been representing Deafblind International in the ICEVI Executive Committee. He is also a member of the Publications Committee. Tony is representing the English speaking countries in the European Regional Committee of ICEVI.

Herman Gresnigt, European Chairman ICEVI was awarded the Golden Medal, the highest award a Polish minister can give, at the ICEVI European Conference, Cracow, Poland, July 2000. He was awarded this because of his involvement in early intervention of visually impaired children in Poland. In Paris during the conference "Year 2000 Young Visually-Impaired People: Present State and Future Prospects in France and in Europe" November 30-December 1, 2000, Dr Gresnigt was also awarded a Bronze Medal by the City of Paris.

Enrique Pérez, Spain, has been elected President of the International Blind Sports Association (IBSA) for 2001-2005. Mr Pérez is well known on the interna-

tional arena. He has chaired the International Relations Committee of ONCE, the European Blind Union's Youth Commission and been the European representative in WBU's Youth Committee. Today he is International Affairs Advisor to the ONCE General Council and a member of the European Blind Union Board.

Solveig Sjöstedt, who has retired after 28 years as principal of the Swedish School for the Visually Impaired in Helsinki, Finland, was awarded by the President of Finland an honorary title of Counsellor of Education. Solveig was granted the award for 28 years of educational work as head of the school.

Ms Sjöstedt will continue as the Nordic/Baltic representative in the ICEVI European Regional Committee.

The new head of the school is Ms **Kajsa-Lena Koskinen**. During her maternity leave Ms **Rigmor Levänen** is the acting head of the school.

Keld Stochholm, Refsnaes School for the Visually Impaired in Denmark, retired this summer as principal of the school after 27 years of devoted work. Mr Stochholm will fulfil his term as the Deputy Regional Chairperson of ICEVI Europe. Ms **Ellen Gertz** has been appointed the new head of Refsnaes.

Audrey Smith, executive director of the Institute for the Visually Impaired at the Pennsylvania College of Optometry, recently received the Faculty Member of the Year Award.

Arter, Christine and others (1999). *Children with Visual Impairment in Mainstream Settings*. London: David Fulton.

This book, written by the very experienced team of the department 'visual impairment' of the school of Education of the Birmingham University seeks to inform teachers in mainstream schools and colleges who are new in teaching children and young people with visual impairment, how to successful inclusion maybe achieved.

Dixon, Judith M. /Ed./ (2001). *Braille: Into the Next Millennium*. Washington, D.C: National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

An excellent anthology of articles by more than two dozen international experts and advocates in the field of Braille, including library services. The book is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Braille in the Past", Part 2, "Braille in the Present" and Part 3, "Braille in the Future". It is Free.

Fellenius, Kerstin (1999). *Reading Acquisition in Pupils with Visual Impairment in Mainstream Education*. Stockholm: Stockholm Institute of Education Press.

This doctoral thesis gives an overview as well as a close-up of the reading situation for pupils with visual impairment in the regular school system.

Kef, Sabina (1999). *Personal Networks and Psychosocial Characteristics of Visually Impaired Adolescents*. Amsterdam: (Available from the author, Wibautstraat 4, 1091 GM Amsterdam, The Netherlands).

Doctoral thesis. A report on a study into 354 visually impaired adolescents aged 14 to 24, 19% of whom are blind, 18% severely visually impaired and 63% moderately visually impaired.

Leonhardt, Merce (1999). *Iniciacion del Lenguaje en Niños Ciegos*. Madrid: ONCE.

This book is about linguistic development in the first two years of life of blind children.

Silverstone, Barbara (Ed./ (2000). *The Lighthouse Handbook on Vision Impairment and Vision Rehabilitation*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

This two-volume set is a "must" for any agency, organization or school working in the field of low vision and low vision rehabilitation.

Swenson, Anna A (1999). *Beginning with Braille – Firsthand Experiences with a Balanced Approach to Literacy*. New York: American Foundation for the Blind Press.

This book is intended to provide teachers of Braille with a variety of practical guidelines and activities for promoting literacy. It is a good resource for those who teach Braille with good references and ideas to integrate literacy teaching with both blind and sighted children.

Laura Bridgman (1829-1889). Laura Bridgman has mainly be known for the past hundred years in brief mentions in books and plays related to Helen Keller, the most notable of all deaf-blind people. Yet within this year more than two major works have been published about Laura. The remarkable thing is that not only have been published at nearly the same time but that both have different views about her education and the person who was her

Cont. on page 24

Calendar of Events

2002

18 - 19 January

Balkan Conference on Vocational training and Employment, Athens, Greece
Bettel@otenet.gr

29 - 31 January

Middle East Regional Conference on Braille Translation and Transcription, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
www.moe.gov.sa, smuhanna@moe.gov.sa

18 - 23 March

17th CSUN International Conference "Technology and Persons with Disabilities", Los Angeles, USA
www.csun.edu/cod/

16 - 19 April

Braille in the Age of Digitisation, Copenhagen, Denmark
www.ibos.dk/braille/index.htm

15 - 20 July

8th International Conference on Computers Helping People with Special Needs ICCHP '02, Linz, Austria
www.aib.uni-linz.ac.at/icchp02.html

17 - 21 July

AER - Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, Toronto, Canada
www.aerbvi.org

21 - 25 July

7th International Low Vision Conference, Göteborg, Sweden
www.congrex.com/vision2002

27 July - 2 August

11th World Conference and 50th Anniversary of International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment World Conference, Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands
www.icevi.org

18 - 24 August

68th IFLA General Conference and Council, Glasgow, UK
www.ifla.org/IV/ifla68/index.htm

2003

19 - 22 February

Vision Loss in the 21st Century - Everybody's Business, Beverly Hills, USA
www.afb.org/events.asp

4 - 7 December

Getting In Touch With Literacy, Vancouver, Canada
cay.holbrook@ubc.ca

FOUNDING ORGANIZATIONS

American Foundation for the Blind

Susan J. Spungin
11 Penn Plaza, Suite 300
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Perkins School for the Blind

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director@perkins.org

Royal National Institute for the Blind

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INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Christoffel-Blindenmission

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Helen Keller Worldwide

John M. Palmer III
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Suite 1200
New York, NY 10010
USA
(see www.hki.org for information)

Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted

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Organizacion Nacional de Ciegos de España

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International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness

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World Blind Union

Kicki Nordström
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Important

To receive The Educator in the future you have to submit your name and mailing address.
Please make a photocopy of this form and send it to:

**ICEVI Secretariate
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Dr. Vikram Sarabhai Road
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INDIA**

Fax: +91 79 6300106

You can also use the on-line registration form on the website of ICEVI
www.icevi.org

First name: _____

Family name: _____

Organization/Company: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Postcode/ZIP: _____

Country: _____

E-mail: _____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

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