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What's inside:

From the President

Conductive Education on Demand by Krisztina Abonyi Bernstein

Continuing Education

From the President

By President Dave Dvorak

Happy Holidays to all! As you read this, we hope you have all your parties planned, gifts purchased and you are settling in for a meaningful year's ending. Even though we could be "emotionally down" because of the economic conditions of our world, we still have a lot for which to be thankful. Read on!

Through the leadership of the Center for Independence staff, led by Executive Director Patti Herbst, ACENA enjoyed a highly successful Conductive Education conference this summer in Chicago. Close to 100 CE and related professionals, speakers, parents and guests attended this dynamic event in the beautiful Miracle Mile downtown area. Even though this was the Fourth Annual North American Conference, there were many first-time attendees. The overall Conference Evaluations provided "good to excellent" ratings from almost everyone attending. The two key note speakers, Franz Schaffhauser, Peto Institute Rector, and Andrew Sutton, ex-officio Director of the National Center for Conductive Education in England, brought their "international" CE knowledge and experiences to share with the enthusiastic audience. We are already planning a reprise of the Chicago Conference for next year, held again on the Thursday and Friday leading up to the Labor Day weekend.

The ACENA Executive Committee has created a new Plan of Work for the 2008-09 Year. All members of the Board have indicated their top three goals for the year, along with a timeline and strategies on accomplishing the goals. This concept arose from a Strategic Planning session your Board held at the Chicago Conference and marks the first time we have prepared a "road map" for all to see and follow. This five-page document was sent out as part of membership recruiting materials and can be found on the ACENA web site.

We are very pleased on how our two new Executive Committee members "hit the ground running". Kasey Gray, Director of Membership, and Brent Page, Director of Program Operations, have already contributed and implemented significant new products for their respective areas. You should find articles from each of them in this issue of the Newsletter. As we speak about new officers, now is time to start contemplation on whether you wish to be a candidate for one of the Executive Committee positions. In the spring of 2009, ACENA will be holding elections for the following positions: President Elect, Secretary, Director of Communication, Director of Finance and Director of Continuing Education. Of course you must be an ACENA member to be eligible!

ACENA is very excited to hear that at least two new Conductive Education programs are being formed within the last few months. These two are in Bend, Oregon and Loveland, Colorado. Let us know if you are aware of, or involved in, starting a new program in any other part of Canada or the United States.

Now raise your glass of holiday refreshment and say "Cheers"! May you have a safe, peaceful and blessed season.

ACENA NEWS 2008

Membership News

By Kasey Gray

Dear Members,

As you may have read in emails and heard at the August 2008 Conference, all memberships expired at the end of August 2008, and must be renewed in order to continue receiving Membership Benefits. You should have received a Renewal Form by email, but if you missed it, please visit www.acena.org to print out a Renewal Form. Simply fill it out and mail to the ACENA address with appropriate membership fee.

Please remember that your 12-month membership term will begin the first of the month in which your Membership Application or Renewal Form was received. For example, if your Renewal Form was received on any date during the month of January, the start date of your membership would be January 1, 2009, with an expiration date of December 31, 2009. Four weeks prior to the Membership Expiration date, you will receive a notice to renew via email.

If you have any questions regarding your membership, please contact Director of Membership, Kasey Gray, at kaseygray@acena.org.

Conductive Education on Demand

By Krisztina Abonyi Bernstein

Founder and Senior Conductor of *Conductiva*, Menlo Park, CA

<http://home.earthlink.net/~conductiva/>

Stepping out of Pető

Conductor-teachers are in demand. Those who are willing to venture beyond the professionally proper and secure grounds of the Pető Institute will find job offers from all over the world.

In the United States the majority of offers originate from small groups of parents who say, "Here are our children: please provide them with a conductive education program." The conductor-teacher is thus immediately faced with the task of setting up a new conductive education (CE) program, one that is always motivating and highly facilitative in every developmental area for each student. What is next? The contract. Then the first task, to assess each child to determine goals, necessary equipment, and curricula.

How does a conductor-teacher (or "conductor") deal with this situation? If the children constitute a good "group" (in the CE sense), then the conductor is happy—and very lucky. However, many times the provided assemblage of children does not fulfill the basic requirement of a CE group, so the conductor either moves on to the next job or insists on recruiting other children to build up a group or groups. But the idea of further admissions generates unexpected problems for the parents, such as: searching for a good source of children, providing more furniture and other equipment, and possibly adding additional personnel. Why should they expand the program? Much more investment would be required in many ways, heavily straining financial and other resources. In general, the parents do not want more than to provide conductive education for their own children with the minimum necessary investment. Having a few children (who have been assembled essentially randomly) with one conductor sounds very reasonable to the parents. But from the viewpoint of CE, this is certainly not reasonable.

Becoming committed to CE

Before I go further, I must point out an important fact that we conductors have learned: there is no bad, good, or better CE. There is just CE. If the conditions for effective CE learning are not fulfilled, it is not CE. I will attempt to outline how conductors are uniquely trained to develop their specialized skills as well as a strong commitment to the principles of CE.

To obtain the skills needed for creating optimal learning conditions, strenuous classroom work is a major part of conductor training. The four year course of training involves almost daily practical classroom work in close collaboration with fellow students and graduate conductors, under the supervision of the head conductor and with coaching from various specialized professors. The performance of the student conductors is continually assessed in detail. To insure a wide variety of experiences, the classroom work involves working with various groups of children. In addition, the conductor students learn their very special role as team members through 1) assisting their colleagues in providing facilitations within the group and 2) leading the group, including directing their colleagues. This aspect of their work is also constantly discussed, evaluated, and refined. Ultimately, conductors develop strong practical skills in CE: the ability to teach a group of children in collaboration with other conductors.

Conductors fully internalize the expectations of CE, and they generally have a firm commitment to the principles of CE. Dr Hari Maria often proudly proclaimed to her students that conductors are the only graduates who possess all the skills needed to immediately start work.

After graduation conductors look for the opportunity to provide their unique skills to the world beyond the walls of the Petó Institute. A common major challenge is to convince the parents (or other school administrators) to allow the conductor the freedom to set up the groups and the educational environment in a manner fully consistent with the principles of CE. A few trying situations that may occur during CE implementation: working with a given arbitrary assemblage of children versus creating a workable group; working with assistants who are not trained in CE versus working in conductor groups; using a few pieces of symbolic CE equipment versus consistently using CE equipment; working in an uncontrolled environment versus establishing an organized learning environment with no distractions.

Working with an arbitrary assemblage of children versus creating a group or groups.

During conductor training, the concept of a "group" is a major topic, as the group is one of the fundamental elements of CE. This is the ground upon which teaching occurs, whether for infants or older children. Therefore, conductors are trained to induce and utilize the energizing power derived from the group to enhance learning, ultimately increasing students' motor coordination. As CE students present diverse abilities in cognition, motor development, emotional development, and social, adaptive, and language skills, they must be selected carefully to create a workable CE group. Nonetheless, we need to keep in mind that not everybody can benefit from CE.

Conductive Education Students

CE was created for people whose disability was caused by damage to the central nervous system. However, all such subjects are not suitable. A conductive assessment determines both the person's suitability for CE and his or her conductive education goals. As the result, the person (in this discussion, the child) will be placed in the right group.

Suitability

In general, children in CE need to be able 1) to participate in physical activities without jeopardizing their health and 2) to be responsive to at least some kind of motivation in early childhood. After the age of about two years, the child needs to show signs of an ability to cooperate, such as in understanding basic situations or requests and at least trying to respond. If the child complies with these criteria he/she is suitable for CE.

Who, then, is not suitable for CE: children with health problems that interfere with being involved in physical activities (heart problems, apnea, acute orthopedic problems, etc.), or who have severe mental retardation, uncontrolled seizures, or progressive muscular dystrophy.

Questionable cases

The suitability of many children is not always clear. Such children include those with motor coordination difficulties who don't have cerebral palsy or spina bifida, but who have other conditions such as autism and various genetic disorders. Suitability depends on 1) the child's ability to cooperate and 2) if the right group is available. If the child seems to be cooperative enough to benefit from the program and there is a suitable group for him/her to join, a trial period with specified goals could determine whether or not the program is actually beneficial. Within the group there may be a way to provide temporary, highly individualized attention during an adjustment period. This would help the child to adapt. As long as the child's motor coordination continues to improve, the child can stay in the CE program. However, a child should not be allowed to be a distraction to others.

Conductive Assessment, Goals, and Group Choice

An assessment is combined with parental information as well as teaching the child in order to appraise the child systematically from a variety of angles. The assessment is far more than just an exploration of muscle tone, posture, and symptoms. The assessment is the measurement of the child's developmental potential through the child's spontaneous and directed activities. The findings will be used to outline the child's needs, and ultimately to choose the program with the appropriate group. In short: pure educational aspects will lead to the choice of a group. On the other hand, the group needs to be dynamic and provide the proper rhythm in order to create a milieu that is conducive to learning for each of the group members.

Building groups

Let's go back to my example of the conductor who faces a small number of children whose parents would like to put them into a group. By keeping the above criteria in mind, the children perhaps should not be grouped together. In that case, more children need to be recruited in order to build up workable facilitative conductive groups.

More about the challenges of conductive education outside of Peto will follow in future installments.

Continuing Education

By Adrienn Deák PhD
Head of the Department of Adult Education
Pető Institute

As part of the recent structural transformation of the Peto Institute's Conductor Training College, the Department of Adult Education has been established in response to the needs of our time. The duties of the Department include the extension of training opportunities, the organization and implementation of postgraduate training, further education for professionals, training and introductory courses, further education in foreign languages, professional training on higher education level and IT courses, also in foreign languages and in the form of distance education.

The activity of the Department of Adult Education is integrally linked to the realization of the goals of the European Union i.e. the principles laid down in the Memorandum on Life Long Learning. In the further education for conductors working both in Hungary and abroad the goal is to refresh, deepen and extend previously acquired knowledge by transmitting and elaborating the latest achievements of science and research in the areas of general and conductive pedagogy, psychology and medicine.

In the spirit of the above, we would like to offer in Grand Rapids, Michigan, further education for qualified conductors working in the United States. As we want every participant to really benefit from the training, we are going to circulate a questionnaire to estimate needs. The topics for the 3 to 5-day courses will be assorted in accordance with the demand. The courses will provide an excellent opportunity for employers to contribute to improving the standard of conductive education. Colleagues who are interested in participating in the planned refreshment courses are kindly requested to contact Andrea Benyovszky. (abenyovszky@aol.com or telephone 616-575-0575)

Hoping for a successful cooperation and with kind regards,
Adrienn Deák PhD

Association for Conductive Education in North America

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