

ACENA Newsletter Issue Eight

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From the President Dave Dvorak

In only the third year of existence, ACENA continues to make impressive progress in establishing itself as the organization representing programs and professionals providing Conductive Education (CE) services on the North American continent. This issue of the newsletter will speak to the new web site re-design initiative, completion of the Program Administrator Survey and a report on my recent trip visiting CE programs in the Eastern United States. Two additional pieces in this newsletter will highlight the 2009 North American Conductive Education Conference in Chicago in late summer and information on the five available ACENA officer positions.

One of my goals for the year was to take two trips to visit Conductive Education programs in North America. Last fall my trip to the new Loveland, Colorado program had to be rescheduled. This trip is now planned for late April. On an early March trip to Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey and New York, I was able to visit three CE programs.

My first visit was to the less-than-one year old Maryland program, founded by parent Robert Kurz for his son Sixten. This group program operates in a public school for physically impaired students. The school agreed to hire a Conductor to collaborate with the assigned Special Education teacher. The team seems to work well together and the students are clearly making progress, as evidenced by statements from school officials who were present for the classroom observation. Erika Nagy, Director of Advocacy, drove the four hours to be present and see what assistance ACENA may be able to provide to help address current issues, which could impact funding for next year.

My second visit was to Erika Nagy's program called Association for Conductive Education and Related Services, Inc. (ACERSI) in New Jersey. Erika operates CE programs in several locations, including the home base in Middletown. In addition to class observation, I held conversations with several parents as well as one of the Conductors. Erika and I were able to work on the new advocacy materials that are currently being prepared for membership uses.

The third visit was to Standing Tall, Inc. in New York City. I met Director Rachel Skinner in the classroom and observed a part of the class. I also spoke to a Speech Therapist and a Physical Therapist on the successful collaboration that the City Schools and Standing Tall have enjoyed for many years.

Brent Page, Director of Program Operations, has completed the ACENA Program Administrator Survey. Thanks to each of you for taking the time to complete a survey and returning it to Brent. The Executive Committee is studying the findings and recommendations of this survey to determine how to best meet the needs of the CE community.

ACENA has contracted with a web site designer to completely redesign the ACENA web site. The goal is to create a more attractive, easier-to-use web site with many more features. ACENA will also have a more prominent position in web searches for Conductive Education. We will let you know when the unveiling occurs.

Call for Abstracts

**5th ANNUAL NORTH AMERICAN CONDUCTIVE EDUCATION CONFERENCE
September 3 and 4, 2009
Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL**

The Association for Conductive Education in North America (ACENA) is hosting the 5th Annual North American Conductive Education Conference September 3 and 4, 2009 at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. The two-day conference has three streams for participants:

- Applications in the Conductive Education Classroom
- Conductive Education Program Administrators
- Adjunct Programs and Services

All interested persons are invited to submit papers and other materials of interest to be presented at this workshop. Length of presentations should be 45 minutes. Submissions are welcome from all persons who wish to present as an individual or in a group. We are looking for individuals who have benefited from Conductive Education or their family members/caregivers to share their successes and successful strategies as well as service providers/professionals to present their successes and best practices to a diverse group of delegates, including: program administrators, Conductive Education Teachers, and program participants and their caregivers. The theme for this year's workshop will be:

Conductive Education: Building an Educational and Medical Partnership.

Deadline for submissions: 30 April 2009

The abstract must include:

- Title
- Objective(s)
- Abstract (approx. 250 words)
- Name and Contact information (telephone, fax, email, address)

***Please direct all submissions (and questions) to Monika Robinson at
bigskyrobinson@comcast.net or fax to (708)588-0406.***

Conductive Education on Demand, Part 2

By Krisztina Abonyi Bernstein

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

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

Another trying situation that may occur during CE implementation: Working with assistants who are not trained in CE versus working in conductor groups

People familiar with Conductive Education (CE) know that a CE group includes more than one conductor. Therefore, when a conductor-teacher is hired, other personnel are commonly hired as well. If the other personnel are also conductors, then everyone is happy—and very lucky. However, in most cases, the new conductor finds that her only coworkers will be classroom aides. How does she deal with this situation? The conductor will try to train her coworkers. Most likely, she will also ask that another properly trained conductor be hired, or she may move on to the next job. But the idea of further hiring generates unexpected problems for the school administrators (usually the parents), such as: searching for a person, hassling with visa arrangements, and, most critically, paying more than anticipated. From their point of view, it seems reasonable that if there is one conductor, she can just train another person to have the assistance she needs. Is this correct? From the viewpoint of CE, it certainly is not.

Why? Because conductor training prepares people, over a period of many years, to support each other in many ways—for the optimal benefit of the group. Such training cannot occur on the job, in a limited time, and while the conductor is fully occupied with her work. The outcome in such situations will generally not be satisfactory: the children will not receive the proper experience and the conductor will not wish to lower her standards and expectations.

What does a conductor student learn during her training that is relevant when she acts as an assistant (facilitator)? First of all, a conductor student learns a strong commitment to the principles of CE. This is the motivation behind all her professional activities: it will allow her to sacrifice some of her own interests to make her program a success and to fulfill the expectations of CE. For example, despite her own fatigue, a conductor will still have the children walk to the door by facilitating each of their steps; or despite her thirst, the conductor will not go for a glass of water during the middle of a session. It is almost impossible to imbue this level of commitment in someone who has not had a complete course of CE training.

Second, a conductor student learns the knowledge and philosophy behind conductive education. Thus, she knows much more than just the techniques of providing manual facilitation. Her knowledge allows her to be professionally creative with the children, while still maintaining the rhythm of the group and following the lead conductor. As examples: many times an assistant conductor senses the right time to switch manual facilitations, due to a child's changing ability to cooperate; or, if a child has a tantrum during group work, the assistant conductor directs her back to the session in the fastest way with the least distraction to the other children; or, when a child acts in a certain way, all the conductors react in a similar way. This knowledge cannot be imparted in a few discussions or in a few ten-minute demonstrations on how to hold a child when sitting.

Furthermore, a conductor student learns cooperative skills, as I described in my previous article. Conductors support each other for the benefit of the CE group. During training, the interaction of the conductors is continually evaluated and modified so that it eventually becomes fluent and organized, and is constantly focused on helping the children. A conductor deeply internalizes these goals. Challenging situations will always arise, of course, such as trying to motivate a distracted child to focus attention on the task and on the leader without causing disruptions to the group.

Another important aspect of conductor training and in the operation of CE groups is that conductors learn to take turns in leadership and facilitator roles. If a conductor is a facilitator for one session, she will be the leader in the next. This rotation of roles increases the feeling of mutual support and respect, facilitating productive cooperation in which each conductor wants her fellow conductors to succeed.

Aides who have not experienced group conductor training will rarely be able to attain the levels of knowledge and cooperation achieved by those who have. CE schools should therefore be encouraged, as much as possible, to hire fully trained conductor teachers rather than teacher aides.

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

The Status of Research on Conductive Education

By Dave Dvorak, Ph.D.

Practitioners in the field of Conductive Education (CE) know intuitively that CE is effective for the motor impaired children enrolled in North American programs. Virtually every parent who has ever had a child enrolled in a CE program will say the same. In fact many parents are very adamant about the many accomplishments their child achieved toward the overall goal of reaching maximum potential. Parents across our great continent have completed multiple program Satisfaction Surveys at high levels of agreement with stated successes of CE programs.

Within this background, hopeful supporters continue searching the Internet, hoping to find the “silver bullet” research study that proves the efficacy of Conductive Education. Even though little research supports the current intervention of multiple therapies used by Special Education Programs, something new like CE is expected to demonstrate that it is better than what we have. And while this seems to be an unfair position, the issue will continue to be used by educators, health field professionals, public officials, funders, and other intervention supporters who feel the current practice is sufficient or who do not want to support the “unproven” intervention of Conductive Education. Therefore, evidence-based reasons are needed to begin to put a “full court” press on governmental, educational and other officials to uniformly support the practice of CE and allow funds to be used for its programs.

While the CE community continues to wait for significant favorable results from a large sample study using a rigorous methodology featuring randomized controlled trials (the gold standard of research study design), one should be aware of the minimal favorable results currently available in the area of CE. Over the past 15-20 years numerous research studies have been completed in an attempt to prove the effectiveness of CE.

One of the most quoted comprehensive reviews of Conductive Education research was conducted by the American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine in 2004. Fifteen different studies were reviewed in the published report called **Conductive education intervention for children with cerebral palsy: an AACPDM evidence report**. If you wish to read the entire review, Google the title for the complete 17-page document. The AACPDM organization seems to stand out among those connected to cerebral palsy research because they utilize a very comprehensive methodology which was just updated on December 17, 2008. Practitioners in the Conductive Education field should find the described procedures and methods very explicit and inclusive. Don't be surprised if this group conducted another review of CE studies in the near future. Go to the organization's web site for more information:

www.aacpdm.org

The total body of evidence within the 15 studies that were reviewed represented 966 different individuals. As noted by the review 626 of those participants come from a descriptive study from the Peto Institute, and another 109 children participated in a mail-out survey. The review pointed out that when these two studies were removed, the number of participants represented in the review was 231. The review indicated that this modest total sample, along with the lack of description of the study population and the heterogeneity of many study populations, made it difficult to determine if a specific treatment worked for a specific type of child. The review summarized that the majority of the results revealed no difference in outcome between the CE intervention group and the control group or pre-post CE group results. The review further pointed out that of the 20 statistically significant outcomes, 10 were in favor of the CE and 10 favored the control group. The 10 areas listed in favor of CE were: gross motor functions (2), fine motor function, self-care, communication, toileting, daily living activities, social interaction, dressing, and parent/family problems. Because of the previous stated inadequacies of the research studies, the review essentially cautioned everyone to not place very much emphasis on the findings, since no one outcome of interest consistently showed improvement in the CE group across the studies.

While the results of the review were inadequate overall to prove the efficacy of Conductive Education, one has to be encouraged by the fact that key components that form the foundation of the intervention of Conductive Education are beginning to be proven as statistically preferable, albeit in a somewhat weak position. So what does the future hold for more and improved research studies on the intervention of Conductive Education?

One of the best hopes is to track the progress of the research study being conducted in the State of Michigan. Dr. Nigel Paneth, Michigan State University, gave a status report on the Conductive Education Evaluation Project (CEEP). He stated that one quarter of the research project's goal to involve 80 total students having cerebral palsy in control and treatment groups has been met. While no preliminary results are available, Dr. Paneth noted a tremendous amount of parent satisfaction. He said that he is awaiting word from the National Institute of Health for the balance of funding, and if granted, would allow for completion of the project in 2012, with outcome reporting in the following year.

Reference

Darrah, Johanna, Ph.D.; Watkins, Beth, PT; Chen, Lucia, PT; Bonin, Cindy, PT (2004) Conductive education intervention for children with cerebral palsy: an AACPD evidence report. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*, 46: 187-203