

ACENA Newsletter Issue 9

President's Column

By Dave Dvorak, Ph.D.

I can't remember a year with so many people saying "can you believe summer is about gone?" Once we have passed Labor Day, most people feel summer is gone. While many Summer Camps have now ended, full-year programs are just getting started. We hope all Summer Camps were successful and a big "good luck" to the School Year programs. The 5th Annual ACENA Conference was held in Chicago on September 3rd and 4th. Our thanks go to the Center for Independence staff, led by Executive Director Patti Herbst and on-site Coordinator Monika Robinson. In spite of the down economy, a good showing of CE and related professionals was in attendance. The ACENA Board of Directors (BOD) voted to hold next year's conference in Toronto, Canada.

The ACENA BOD has created a new Plan of Work for the 2009-10 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. The five-page document will be sent out to all ACENA members once ratification of the document occurs at the October 20 BOD meeting.

We are very excited to introduce our latest BOD members, who were selected in the May election. The new Secretary is Andrea Swiger from Conductive Learning Center in Grand Rapids; Elizabeth Filkins, also from the CLC, was elected as the Director of Continuing Education; Krisztina Weiszhaupt, from the Pittsburgh programs, is the new Director of Communication; and Jim Prust, ConductAbility, Inc. is our Director of Finance. I was re-elected as the President Elect, leading to President for years 2010-12.

In the spring of 2010, ACENA will be holding elections for the following positions: Director of Advocacy, Director of Membership, Director of Practice and Director of Program Operations. Of course you must be an ACENA member to be eligible.

ACENA is very excited to hear that the Director of Special Education for Prince George's County in Maryland has decided that CE is the missing link for their motor impaired programs. They are actively seeking CETs to work directly in the public school classrooms. Please contact ACENA member Robert Kurz with names or ideas on how to find these CETs. The total renovation of our website should be completed within a couple of weeks. We are continuing to add new and unique features to enable this website to become the dominant website for info on CE in North America, and other parts of the world. Thanks for your patience while the renovation was in progress.

This is the first newsletter under the new Communication team. Our thanks go to Krisztina Weiszhaupt and Erika Bartos for creating this piece. May you enjoy your reading!

To all in the Conductive Community

By Kasey Gray, CET Director of Membership

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It was such a pleasure to meet with so many of you at the recent Conference in Chicago. As I reported at the Annual General Membership meeting, ACENA now has 50 members in the categories of Conductive Education Teacher (CET), Program Administrator (PA), Related Credentialed Professional (RCP), and Associate. It will be my focus to maintain a minimum of 50 members, and to continuously recruit new members.

This newsletter is being sent to members and non-members alike to provide a summary of the Chicago conference; however, future newsletters will be mailed to current ACENA members only. To continue receiving the newsletter and to receive the other member benefits, please complete the included Membership Application and send it with the appropriate dues to the ACENA P.O. box. One membership application should be completed for each individual requesting membership. If you are unsure of your membership status, please contact me.

Please remember that membership in ACENA also gives you access to great resources – the Program and Practice Manuals. For more information on the CE Practice Manual, please contact Andrea Benyovszky, Director of Practice. For more information on the Policies & Procedures Manual, please contact Brent Page, Director of Program Operations.

Feel free to contact me with any questions regarding your membership. Should your contact information change after you submit your Membership Application, please send me an email so that the Member Directory can be kept up-to-date, and to ensure that you receive the newsletters.

I wish you all the best as you deliver and promote Conductive Education this year!

Fifth Annual ACENA Conference Held in Chicago

By Elizabeth Filkins, Director of Continuing Education

On September 3rd-4th, 2009, thirty-eight conductive education professionals and parents gathered at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago for the Fifth Annual ACENA Conference.

The program kicked off with a keynote pre- sentation offered by V. James Garofalo, Ph.D. who explored the topic of "Conductive Education in the USA: Yesterday- Today- Tomorrow." His presentation was followed by sessions covering various topics in conductive education ranging from transition and participation to research and documentation.

A new addition to this year's event included a number of vendors and catalogue exhibitors who offered various CE resources to those participating in the conference.

The event concluded on Friday with a group forum discussing the possibility of a *Conductive Education Day*, which was then followed by the annual ACENA Membership Meeting.

Thank you so much to all of you who helped to make this year's conference a success. We would like to extend a special thanks to the staff of the Center for Independence for their hard work and hospitality. Stay tuned for more information regarding upcoming ACENA professional development events!

Dear Conductor Colleagues

By Borbala Goda CET – ConductAbility, Inc.

I have served two terms as a continuing education board director and know I am going to encourage all of you to get involved and join the committees to help the board of directors. You should choose a committee that fits you the best and one that you feel confident with so you'll succeed. **I would also like to encourage all non-members to join ACENA.** I will be helping by being on the communication committee. We need everyone's ideas and inputs. All of us have to do our part and share the work so we can make our professional organization – ACENA stronger.

Please go to our website, read our forums, and input your thoughts on the forums, so that the forum will be more helpful to multiple people.

Fundraising by Movie

By Dave Dvorak, Ph.D.

Bruce Burow, Executive Director of the Conductive Education of Northwest Arkansas (CENA) program in Springdale, AR, told us about a unique fundraising idea. A full length movie called "War Eagle, Arkansas", which was shot in the Ozark Mountains, features a young man who has cerebral palsy. This senior in high school has to make career decisions that may involve leaving his family and friends. The movie has Emmy award winners and is being shown in major cities throughout the U.S. The world premiere, held June 11, 2009 in Fayetteville, AR, featured a VIP Reception and limited seating at \$50 per seat. The proceeds of this event benefitted the CENA program.

Our congratulations go to Bruce and his team at CENA.

Aquinas College Conductor Teacher Training Program

By Andrea Benyovszky, CET Director of Practice

After a hiatus on enrollment to the Conductive Education/Physically Impaired (POHI) training program, due to Michigan Department of Education changes in standards, Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, MI, is reinstating the only Conductor Teacher training program in North America.

The Conductive Learning Center (CLC) will be working closely with Aquinas to market and recruit students to the program. Graduates of this program will receive an elementary, K-grade 5- teacher certification, K-grade 12 physically impaired (POHI) endorsement, and a Peto certified Conductor-teacher certificate. Past graduates of the program are highly qualified in the field and have found employment very quickly upon graduation from the program.

The requirements for the degree are:

- 165 credit hours of classes (9 semesters)
- 10 lab school hours/week sophomore through senior year
- 1 semester student teaching (eight weeks general ed. and eight weeks conductive ed)

Potential candidates for the program are encouraged to contact Aquinas College, Director of Admissions, Angie Schlosser Bacon at (616) 632-2860, Nanette Clatterbuck, Dean of the School of Education at (616) 632-2973.

Andrea Benyovszky at the Conductive Learning Center would be happy to answer questions about the lab school requirement and Peto Institute's program at (616) 575-0575.

Conductive Education on Demand (Continued)

By Krisztina Abonyi Bernstein CET – Conductiva

Creating the Proper Conductive Educational Environment: Equipment and Facilities

At the Pető Institute, authentic Conductive Education (CE) equipment is ubiquitous. The plinths, ladder-back chairs (the best known symbol of CE), and other distinctive tools of CE are almost always available for the students.

Once we venture beyond Pető, to CE groups and schools around the world, we encounter a great variety of equipment. Many questions then arise about whether a piece of equipment is proper or not for CE. It is the conductor's responsibility to assess what pieces of equipment are acceptable components of an optimal learning environment for the students. While CE is a system that is actually not tightly bound to particular equipment, there are certain questions that should be asked when deciding on a tool's suitability: Is it compatible with the philosophy of CE: can we use it without increasing the child's dependence on the equipment? Will it facilitate the learning of self discipline, ultimately leading to normalization? Does it help the child to reach her/his CE goals? Is it compatible with the other relevant tools she/he uses? All CE-compatible equipment has certain characteristics. First of all, any piece of equipment is a teaching tool useful for helping students accomplish tasks and reach developmental goals. The ensemble of these tools provides the desired "facilitative to learning" physical environment. Such an environment supports the students' active, continuous, consistent, and systematic learning. This environment is carefully recreated and rearranged many times during one day. More specifically, a classroom's necessary minimum equipment is determined by the children's program and the particular teaching methods. The daily routine will define the basic requirements, as the equipment needs to facilitate the students' various actions throughout the sessions (transferring, lying program, bathroom activities, academic work, etc).

Because children with cerebral palsy often have difficulties with paying attention, concentrating on tasks, and perceptions, these dysfunctions will impose extra requirements on each tool and also on their arrangement. The individualization of equipment, with modifications that address a student's condition, is crucial in CE.

Let's take the example of transferring: walking by pushing ladders. In order to correctly move the furniture when learning to take controlled steps, a child needs the right configuration of floor and furniture. To make the task understandable and perceivable for the child, marked spots on the floor will help with orientation. To engage children in the task, providing objective motivation is also essential. If the children are young, they will walk to toys; for older children who have already developed some task-knowledge, the goal could be to reach prepared tools for the upcoming activities. When selecting toys or manipulatives, the conductor chooses the ones that are appropriate for the particular children's developmental goals. If there are visually impaired children in the classroom, it is imperative to use contrasting colors and high foreground/background contrast, both in regards to outlines and colors; reflective surfaces may also be necessary.

I now wish to call attention to one of the pillars of CE practice as it applies to equipment: consistency in teaching that produces consistency in expectations. As the students are conducted to their maximum activity throughout the day, the entire ensemble of employed tools needs to be facilitative to that purpose. Thus, when children are taught to develop a desire to move and to improve their overall coordination (including symmetrical weight bearing, weight shifting, and taking steps), the use of conflicting equipment, such as a chair with straps or a head rest, or a wheelchair in a classroom, is inconsistent with CE.

Finally I highlight a few more factors relating to equipment that apply when an objective learning environment is created, such as:

Easy-to-use tools: Such tools do not disturb the rhythm and the fluency of the sessions. For instance: a push-down grasp bar (or two rings) is easier to handle during a group session than a grasp bar that is fixed from underneath the plinth by screws (and which also requires the adjustment of a liner during installation). Of course, the compatibility of the tools is crucial, too. (It is very frustrating when rings do not fit between the slats of the plinth or stool.)

Stackable furniture: This allows the conductor to use the available space in a versatile way, while providing new and exciting challenges for the students.

Hygiene: There is a “no shoe” policy in CE classrooms. Children need a clean space where they can learn without jeopardizing their health. The classroom’s floor and the tools are regularly washed and disinfected.

Attractive tools are more appealing and motivating than unattractive ones; a pleasant milieu is inviting, and this applies even to short-term sessions.

Organized environment: An organized arrangement of the tools creates a learning environment that contributes to improving the children’s attention skills, memory, and orientation, while also inspiring orderly behavior and actions. Based on my experience, such an organized environment is often lacking. Video recordings published on the Internet that advertise CE programs commonly show people in the background stepping over students’ heads and busily doing various chores during a session. These are serious problems for CE. We conductors need to take the responsibility for our students’ maximum learning. We need to set up classroom policies to provide a distraction-free environment, where all the conditions are created to allow children to focus on their tasks. The parents and school founders need to understand that children with cerebral palsy are easily distracted and also that their proper posture, which has been attained through hard work, can be easily upset by an unexpected move or noise. Therefore, activities such as opening and closing doors, walking through the classroom during a session, and chatting in the classroom while the students are involved in a session, are disrespectful to the children and counterproductive to CE.

In short: While providing CE, conductors organize the optimal learning conditions for their students. However, in order to fulfill their mission, they need the freedom and authority to do so.