



Europe's Children Our Concern asbl

supporting children and young people with learning difficulties

Under the Patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Mathilde

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"Together we can make a difference"

ECOC News No. 54 – November 2006

If you have news that you would like us to pass on, or if you would like us to publicise an event or mention a resource that you have found useful, please send us the details.

ECOC News

ECOC seminar – 20 November 2006 – The Right Person in the Right Place in Society
Insights into Human Capital and Coaching From Developmental Theory

We are delighted to invite you to this seminar at the International Association House (rue Washington 40, 1050 Brussels) from 15:00 to 19:00. The speakers include Dr. Otto Laske from the Interdevelopmental Institute in the USA.

More information is available from the EC-OC office. Email: ecoc@ecoc.be or phone: +32 (0)2.537.4836.

ECOC Conference – 29 November 2006 – Note change of date!

Exchange Today, Include Tomorrow

The conference will address the challenges of diversity, giving school administrators the chance to clarify the goals they have for their schools and parents and teachers the opportunity to explore techniques for fostering the potential of children who learn differently. Among the speakers are Matthieu Kleinschmager, who recently led a most successful EC-OC session on mind-mapping; Gordon Pope, who advises London teachers on gifted and talented children and developing thinking skills, and Julian Still, a consultant on organisational learning. Other workshops will present strategies for differentiation in the classroom, ways of communicating effectively with children and "brain-friendly" teaching.

More information is available from the EC-OC office. Email: ecoc@ecoc.be or phone: +32 (0)2.537.4836.

Other news

Parents can be advocates for their children

Parents are often the best educational advocates for their children, especially children with a learning disability. The US Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities (CCLD) has developed the following tips to help parents champion their child:

- Know the rules
- Get to know the people who make decisions about your child's education
- Keep records
- Gather information
- Communicate effectively
- Know your child's strengths and interests and share them with educators
- Emphasize solutions
- Focus on the big picture
- Involve your child in decision making as early as you can

More information from www.focusonlearning.org/

UK Government backs improved teacher training for special needs

UK Education Secretary Alan Johnson has announced fresh action to improve training for teaching staff which will help ensure special educational needs is a national priority in schools.

In publishing the official DfES response to the Education Select Committee report on Special Educational Needs (SEN), published in July 2006, Mr Johnson set out a package including:

- A national programme of continuing professional development to transform understanding of SEN and disability in schools - starting with speech, language and communication needs, including dyslexia and autism;
- A Dyslexia Trust, involving private sponsorship - local authorities and schools will be invited to bid for trust funding to support specialist teacher training;
- Work to strengthen the role and status of SEN coordinators (SENCOs) in schools and develop nationally accredited training for those newly appointed to the role.

The DfES is also accepting a number of the Committee's recommendations, including mandatory training for new SENCOs and a new requirement that SENCOs must be teachers.

Alan Johnson said: "I welcome the Committee's report and the recognition it gives to the substantial increases in funding for children with SEN in recent years. Our policy is clear that every child with special educational needs must get a high quality education which meets their individual needs.

"However I don't agree the time is right to replace the current assessments and statements system, as the Committee suggested. That would potentially reduce the rights of parents and children and hinder not help us in building on the progress made since our SEN strategy *Removing Barriers to Achievement* was published in 2004.

"We must now strengthen support for teaching children with special educational needs in school to ensure we have the right expertise in place in the classroom."

Copies of the response (Cm 6940) can be obtained from The Stationery Office, PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN, UK, or online at www.tsoshop.co.uk

***Yes I Can!* awards**

The US Foundation for Exceptional Children established the *Yes I Can!* International Awards Program in 1981 to acknowledge the achievements of young people with disabilities and increase public awareness of their abilities, aspirations, and personal qualities.

Yes I Can! International Awards Nominees will be recognized in each of the following nine categories:

- Academics
- Arts
- Athletics
- Community Service
- Employment
- Extracurricular Activities
- Independent Living Skills
- Self-Advocacy
- Technology

Nominees for the *Yes I Can!* International Awards Program must be between 2-21 years old. Each nominee is eligible in only one category and must be nominated by 20 November 2006.

More information from yesican@cec.sped.org

Infertility link to learning difficulties in children

Couples who find it difficult to conceive are more likely to have a child with learning difficulties, according to a report described at the American Society for Reproductive Medicine conference.

The risk of developing problems by the age of six is 2.7 times higher among children born to those with a history of infertility than in those conceived without difficulty, according to US research.

Assisted reproduction treatments could have an influence — but the raised risk also applied when a diagnosis of fertility problems was followed by a natural conception. Underlying infertility is therefore more likely to be responsible.

Scientists emphasised however that the absolute risk to infertile couples of having a baby with a serious disorder remained low.

Mary Croughan, of the University of California, San Francisco, compared children born to 2,000 couples with diagnosed infertility and those born to 2,000 couples who did not have problems conceiving.

After adjusting for the higher maternal age and multiple birth rate in the infertile group, Dr Croughan found that the risk of five disorders — autism, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, seizures and cancer — was 2.7 times higher. The risk for autism alone was four times higher. Moderate developmental problems such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, learning disabilities or serious sight or hearing disorders were also 40 per cent more common in this group.

The relative risk was higher for infertile couples who had children after treatment, but this could reflect the greater severity of their problems rather than the treatment itself, Dr Croughan said.

She told the conference "We are not finding significant differences between different types of treatment. It seems to be the result of a baseline risk across infertility patients. What has caused them to be unable to conceive goes on to cause problems. It is as if a brick wall has stopped you becoming pregnant. Treatment allows you to climb over the wall, but it is still there."

She added, however, that more investigation was needed to determine whether treatment created an extra risk.

Early repairs in foundation for reading

According to an article in the *New York Times* (4 October), a growing number of neurologists and educators consider that given the latest diagnostic tests, children at high risk of severe literacy problems can be identified in pre-school and treated before they ever begin to read.

The newer tests, available in computerized versions, measure a child's fluency with the skills that are the foundation of reading: the ability to recognize differences between sounds, the knowledge of letters and the accumulation of basic vocabulary and language skills. The US National Early Literacy Panel, a committee of experts convened by a consortium of federal agencies, has found that these tests, when given to 3- and 4-year-olds, predict later reading problems as effectively as they do with older children, according to the panel's chairman, Dr. Timothy Shanahan of the [University of Illinois](#) in Chicago. The committee plans to recommend increased pre-school screening when it publishes its findings later this year.

The panel also will recommend some shifts in teaching techniques, said a panel member, Dr. Susan Landry of the [University of Texas](#) Medical School at Houston. These include having at-risk children spend more time in small groups that address their specific weaknesses; emphasizing skills like blending sounds (C + AT = CAT), which have been found to be good performance predictors; and training parents to reinforce school lessons.

"Once a child falls behind, it's very difficult to catch up," said Dr. Angela Fawcett of the UK University of Sheffield. The key is early diagnosis.

In a US programme known as *Head Start*, screening and teaching are increasingly linked, and a detailed skills assessment is part of the new school year routine. Last month, Karen Gischlar, a reading consultant, sat down with a 4-year-old, Destiny Freer, with a set of blocks, a book of pictures and a hand-held computer loaded with *M-Class: Circle*, one of several formal screening tests on the market.

Destiny breezed through the first rounds of a series of one-minute tests, on naming letters and simple objects. She also did well on the first rhyming exercise, on whether pairs of words sounded the "same or different".

But her answers became hesitant on the next round, when she was asked to find a rhyme to a word given by Ms. Gischlar. And she had more trouble with higher-level skills, like using the blocks to show the number of words in a short sentence and clapping out the syllables in words like cowboy, big or wagon.

When the test was over, the computer screen showed Destiny's scores, colour coded in red, green and yellow, and a comparison to her scores from earlier this year, both of which showed Destiny to be developmentally on track, despite some of her faltering.

Another mouse click brought up a list of suggestions for her specific weaknesses — building awareness of word sounds, for instance, by telling a story in rhyme and letting her guess how some sentences end.

Destiny's teacher, Eliza Commareri, said the test helped plan how to individualize instruction and how to arrange small groups because the programme provides a database showing children with similar needs. The other benefit, she said, was the close link between the screening and suggested activities. For teaching syllables, for instance, Ms. Commareri said she might ask the whole class to clap out "play-ground" when they're headed out to recess, or get a few children together to bang out words on a drum.

In the past, children have qualified for significant extra help only after they have fallen behind. In 2004, according to federal data, fewer than 10 per cent of students getting special education services under the category of specific learning disability were younger than nine.

In August, US Education Secretary Margaret Spellings announced new regulations meant to make it easier for elementary schools to offer extra help as soon as students start to struggle.

Dr. Fawcett, who is also the editor of the journal *Dyslexia*, said making students wait for help was costly, both for schools and students.

A study she led found that a small amount of extra tutoring given to pre-school children with language delays — an hour a week of small-group work for 10 weeks — boosted their skills in comparison with similar children in a control group. The gain exceeded what a year's worth of remediation at age seven or eight would produce, she said.

BDA trials European web-based screening tool.

The British Dyslexia Association demonstrated the pilot version of a new online adult screening tool at the Polish Dyslexia Association conference in Gdansk, Poland, at the end of September 2006. This is part of Project INCLUDE, an EU-funded collaborative project with Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and several UK partners.

The tool is designed to help identify the needs of dyslexic adults. Trials in the UK are due to begin at the beginning of December. Meanwhile, the project team is developing support resources including a book with a dyslexia friendly CD. These will be available in early 2007.

Information from www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

Google launches literacy project

Google has unveiled a web site dedicated to literacy, pulling together its books, video, mapping and blogging services to help teachers and educational organisations share reading resources. See google.com/literacy and google.de/literacy.

The site was launched at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October in conjunction with the United Nations and a literacy campaign organized by fair officials.

"Google's business was born out of a desire to help people find information," said Nikesh Arora, vice president of Google's European operations.

"We hope this site will serve as a bridge to even greater communication and access to important information about literacy problems -- and solutions," he added.

Google has asked literacy groups around the world to upload video segments explaining and demonstrating their successful teaching programmes. Among the first few hundred to be posted is a same-language subtitle project from India that uses Bollywood films to teach reading.

The service also uses Google's mapping technology to help literacy organizations find each other, and provides links to reading resources.

Calendar published by German Downs syndrome organisation

Verein 46Plus, based in Stuttgart, published their illustrated calendar at the beginning of October. The photos show children and adults with Downs syndrome. More information from www.46plus.de.

New advocacy service launched in Scotland

The UK National Autistic Society has launched a new service within Scotland to help parents of children with autism get the most appropriate education for their child.

The Advocacy for Education Service aims to support parents who have children with an autistic spectrum disorder by providing accurate information. The service is divided into two specialist areas and is provided by volunteer advisers who have undergone extensive training.

The Education Advice Line has been offering advice and information on education law since May. Volunteer advisers aim to ensure parents and carers understand their rights and entitlements by providing advice on issues such as identifying additional support needs, requesting assessments, getting additional support at school, and communicating with local authorities.

A further service is now available to parents. The Tribunal Support Scheme provides telephone advice and information for parents who wish to challenge an education authority's decision about their child's educational needs at the Additional Support Needs Tribunal.

The commercial law firm Harper Macleod LLP have formed an alliance with the Advocacy for Education Service as part of their corporate social responsibility commitment and assisted greatly in establishing the service.

More information from AdvocacyScotland@nas.org.uk.

Film about autism for Festival

Magical Thinking is a short film which has been shortlisted for the Depict! 2006 short film competition, part of the Encounters Film Festival in Bristol (UK) this month (21-26 November). Made by parents of children with Asperger's syndrome the film is about a child who finds a mechanism to help him cope with an overwhelming sensory world of people, places, sights and sounds. The parents commented, "The film is based on our experiences with our two children, both of whom have Asperger's and one of whom also has Tourette's.

It was very much a team effort. We wrote, filmed and edited and our kids star and one of our boys narrates (wonderfully I might add)."

You can see the films at www.depict.org and vote online free of charge.

Autism-television link?

Autism may be linked to children watching television when very young, according to researchers.

Researchers investigating autism in the US said that, as recently as 30 years ago, it was thought one in 2,500 people had the condition. Today the figure is one in 166, a 15-fold increase. Scientists wanted to investigate whether the early introduction of cable television in the US had contributed to the current generation of children with autistic-spectrum symptoms.

Michael Waldman and Sean Nicholson from Cornell University said their research, conducted across California, Oregon and Washington states, set out to link the amount of television a child watched with the number of days when it rained.

They said their study showed just under 40 per cent of autism diagnoses could be explained by looking at the times when children were forced to stay in and watch television. When rainfall was high, autism rates rose sharply. The opposite was true when rainfall was low.

They did not say how watching TV could act as a trigger, but simply tried to show a relationship.

The Cornell study also looked at the results of an investigation into the Amish community. Based on the autism rates across the US, there should be several hundred autistic Amish, but fewer than 10 were found.

Carol Povey, head of adult services for the UK National Autistic Society, said it had an open mind on whether autism was rising. "The causes of autism are still being investigated," she said.

Deborah Pakenham, from London, whose son is autistic, said: "I think the idea that television is an environmental trigger for autism is difficult to grasp, dangerous even ... it risks parents beating themselves up for letting their children watch *Teletubbies* when they were younger."

£1million autism centre opened

A £1million centre to help 20 autistic youngsters stay involved in mainstream education was officially opened in London last month.

The Whitton Gateway centre, at Whitton School, was unveiled by actress and cake maker Jane Asher, who is also president of the UK National Autistic Society.

Whitton Gateway caters for four youngsters in each year group, twenty in total when five years' worth of children have been admitted. As well as state-of-the-art ICT facilities, it includes therapy and sensory rooms and has its own play area and garden.

More information from www.richmond.gov.uk

Ritalin use for pre-school children

A study in the US that raises the possibility of pre-school children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) taking Ritalin has sparked a debate over the safety and appropriateness of such a practice.

"This drug doesn't work as well in pre-schoolers as it does in older kids, and there are more adverse effects and a higher drop-out rate in this group," said Dr. Sidney Wolfe, director of the Public Citizen's Health Research Group. "In addition, there is an explicit statement [in the study] saying that the size of this study is too small to conclude that this drug is safe and, to me, that is as important as anything."

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), which funded the study, however, says the drug might be useful in certain severe cases of ADHD.

"Going into this, we had no data with which to know whether the medication was effective or safe, and what we know coming out of it is that there is some evidence of benefit in this young age group, but less than we see with older children, and the risks are somewhat greater," said NIMH Director Dr. Thomas Insel. "We are recommending to clinicians and families that the drug should be considered as one of many options that can be used in very young children with severe ADHD, and I underline severe. If it's going to be used, it needs to be used carefully with careful monitoring," he added.

Others agreed that Ritalin should be considered on a case-by-case basis. "It is well known that ADHD has its onset usually between 3 to 4 years of age, so it is only reasonable if behavioural and psychosocial interventions fail that we consider the use of psychostimulants such as Ritalin, as this intervention is successful at least 70 percent of the time," said Dr. Jon A. Shaw, director of child and adolescent psychiatry at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. "It's a cost/benefit decision that parents have to judiciously consider, weighing the risk of side effects and the benefits of helping a child to control himself/herself."

The study is the first, long-term government trial of Ritalin in pre-schoolers and is in the November edition of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.

The trial involved 183 children with severe cases of ADHD who took Ritalin for about a year. Thirty percent of parents reported moderate to severe adverse events in their children, including emotional outbursts, difficulty sleeping, decreased appetite and irritability. About 11 percent of children dropped out because of side effects.

The pre-school children taking the drug also grew about a half inch less and gained about two pounds less than expected for their age.

Improvements in behaviour were seen in children taking 7.5 to 30 milligrams daily, with the optimal dose being 14 milligrams daily. That is less than half the usual dose for older children.

The size of the study was a major sticking point for critics. "If you're worried about some serious adverse effects, you'd never see it in 183 kids," Wolfe said. "They specifically say this should be studied in at least 1,500 kids."

"What we don't know, and I think this is critical for parents, is what the long-term issues are," Insel said. "Are we altering brain development or is this a case in which the natural

course of brain development has already been altered by a disorder, and we're in some ways mitigating those effects? We will need long-term follow-up, and that's in the works."

More information from the National Institute of Mental Health at www.nimh.nih.gov .

Report on gifted children

Authors of a new book say the signs of brilliance in children are not always what you might expect.

According to Dr. Brock Eide, "One of the important things to understand about early signs of giftedness is a lot of times, they can look like problems."

In their book, *The Mislabeled Child*, Dr Eide and his wife say gifted children are often misdiagnosed as having attention deficit disorder, but instead of having problems learning, gifted children tend to soak it all in.

Other signs of a gifted child include a vivid imagination, an excellent memory, a questioning attitude to authority and a possible preference for the company of older children and adults.

Trouble often occurs because educators may not always recognize the child's gift, which is why the Eides say it is up to parents to find ways at school and home to help gifted children reach their potential.

Dr. Eide says, "It's important for these kids to turn their vision out and see what's not known and see what questions are there that remain to be answered because that's where they're going to make their big contribution in life."

Brain, Sound and Behaviour

If you have ever wondered how you recognize your mother's voice without seeing her face or how you discern your mobile phone ringing in a crowded room, researchers may have another piece of the answer.

Their work indicates that once you figure out your mother's voice is a good thing fairly significant changes occur in the sensory cortex, the part of the brain that responds to sound.

"When something starts to predict a good outcome, the sensory part of the brain that responds to those events starts to respond more strongly, making it easier for the brain to cause a behavioural response," says Dr. David T. Blake, neuroscientist at the Medical College of Georgia and lead author on a study in *Neuron*.

"We learn how to tell people's faces apart, we learn how to distinguish different words whether they are delivered orally or written. We can identify different speakers by the tenor and tone of their voice. All of these abilities are part of sensory discrimination, so we are studying how the brain changes as part of sensory discrimination learning."

The findings have wide implications for learning, including improving treatment for children with impairments in language learning, such as dyslexia. California-based Scientific Learning, a neuroscience company that grew out of the University of California, San Francisco, is already using advances in understanding behavioural learning to develop computer programs that dramatically improve the reading skills of dyslexic children. Another San Francisco-based neuroscience company, Posit Science, is exploring its potential in age-related cognitive decline, he says.

Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, Neuroscience Graduate Program, Center for Integrative Neuroscience and Departments of Otolaryngology and Physiology were collaborators on the study.

Resources

Books

All Cats Have Asperger Syndrome by Kathy Hoopmann

'There is a great deal of truth in humour. If you have only just begun to discover why someone with Asperger's syndrome is different, this book will inform and entertain you. The descriptions provide an accurate balance between the qualities and difficulties associated with Asperger's syndrome, while the photographs will make the journey of discovery enjoyable and remarkable.'

– Tony Attwood, author of *Asperger's Syndrome* and *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome*

All Cats Have Asperger Syndrome takes a playful look at Asperger Syndrome (AS), drawing inspiration from the feline world in a way that will strike a chord with all those who are familiar with AS. Delightful colour photographs of cats bring to life familiar characteristics such as sensitive hearing, scampering at the first sign of being stroked, and particular eating habits. Touching, humorous and insightful, this book evokes the difficulties and joys of raising a child who is different and leaves the reader with a sense of the dignity, individuality, and potential of people with AS.

Hardback, ISBN-10: 1-84310-481-4, ISBN-13: 9781843104810, 72pp, 2006, £9.99, \$14.95

Further information from: <http://www.jkp.com>

le TDA/H à l'école by Dr Xavier Schlögel, Pascale De Coster and Anne-Geneviève de Longueville

En Communauté française, un enfant par classe souffre de TDA/H (Trouble Déficitaire de l'Attention avec ou sans Hyperactivité). Une statistique impressionnante qui donne à réfléchir. Qu'est-ce que le TDA/H ? Comment établir le bon diagnostic? Comment gérer un tel enfant dans sa classe et dans son établissement ? *TDA/H à l'école* pose ces questions (et bien d'autres encore) et y apporte une réponse ! Il vous permettra de vous familiariser à cette pathologie dont on entend tant parler autour de nous.

Format de poche, 978-2-8010-5450-5, 11.90 euro

Further information from: www.woltersplantyn.be

Improving Children's Services Networks - Lessons from Family Centres by Jane Tunstill, Jane Aldgate and Marilyn Hughes

Designed to meet a range of day care needs for individuals, families or wider communities, Family Centres are central to the UK Government's provision of effective child care services.

The study of family centres – monitoring their objectives, examining key challenges faced and evaluating approaches to practice – is fundamental to the delivery of effective, evidence-based services. This book details and evaluates expert research into the developing role of family centres in the light of current political and social trends, including the *Every Child Matters* legislation. It outlines the different user groups serviced by family centres; the various combinations of services provided and the contribution that these are making to positive outcomes for children; major tasks facing family centres such as optimising access to services; and important partnerships between family centres and other services such as education and health care. Based on the evidence, the authors highlight key messages for future development.

Paperback, ISBN-10: 1-84310-461-X, ISBN-13: 9781843104612, 144pp, 2006, £17.99, \$34.95

Practical Sensory Programmes for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Other Special Needs by Sue Larkey

Children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) often have sensory processing difficulties. This practical book offers a six-step approach to developing a successful programme to help children cope with sensory input they find overwhelming, and to identify activities they may find relaxing or rewarding. Parents, occupational therapists and educational professionals will find this workbook to be a rich source of fun ideas for improving sensory processing in autism, and easily adaptable for children with other special needs.

Paperback, ISBN-10: 1-84310-479-2, ISBN-13: 9781843104797, 120pp, 2006, £17.99, \$29.95

Natural Genius: The Gifts of Asperger's Syndrome by Susan Rubinyi

This is a mother's story of raising son Ben who has Asperger's Syndrome (AS), and how she has come to view his condition as a blessing. While acknowledging the challenges posed by AS, she emphasizes the extraordinary positives of her son's life and his particular gifts - his photographic memory, perfect pitch and French-English bilingual abilities.

Susan Rubinyi advocates a strength-based approach, and explains how her personal experiences - living abroad, foreign languages, science fiction and music, as well as her own feelings of alienation - have helped her understand alternative and cross-cultural perspectives in life. Her journey with Ben is an enriching and strengthening one of personal transformation. An immensely hopeful and positive book, this should be read by anyone concerned with bringing up a child with Asperger's Syndrome.

Further details from: <http://www.jkp.com/new/1-84310-784-8>

DVDs

Dyslexia: Symptoms & Solutions by Susan Barton

Susan Barton's most popular three-hour presentation, filmed before a live audience. It includes:

- Symptoms of mild dyslexia in adults
- Inheritance patterns and the genetic link

- The classic warning signs in children
- Spelling and its relationship to dyslexia
- Why dyslexic children "hit the wall" in reading by third grade
- Why most schools don't test for dyslexia
- How to find a qualified tester -- and get an accurate diagnosis
- Research-based best practices to improve spelling, reading, and writing
- Why tutoring alone is not enough

Also available as a free webcast from: [Dyslexia: Symptoms & Solutions](#)

Available on DVD for \$49.95 from Bright Solutions for Dyslexia's [e-store](#) -- or [click here to download an order form](#)

Asperger Syndrome and Employment by Nick Dubin

People with Asperger Syndrome (AS) can find it difficult to work in an environment that involves socialization with colleagues or a lack of routine. However, *Asperger Syndrome and Employment* shows how success in the workplace is possible with perseverance and with the right supports and strategies in place.

Nick Dubin discusses his own experiences at work and highlights challenges common among employees with AS. The DVD also includes interviews with Nick's former employers who assess his strengths and weaknesses, as well as commentary from Gail Hawkins (author of *How to Find Work that Works for People with Asperger Syndrome*) who relates Nick's experiences to those she sees in her work with people with AS.

Dubin advises how to succeed in the workplace and offers practical advice on finding employment in line with your interests, making use of job coaches, developing self-esteem, using your strengths and being honest to yourself and others about your weaknesses.

DVD (PAL and NTSC) ISBN 1 84310 849 6, 2006, 43 minutes, £19.99 incl. VAT/US\$35.00

Further information from: <http://www.jkp.com/new/1-84310-849-6>

Conferences and events

3 November 2006

Good SLD Practice – what works?

Manchester, UK

Organised by British Institute for Learning Disabilities (BILD) in partnership with Mencap.

This is the third annual conference based on the successful BILD journal *The SLD Experience*. One of the speakers will be Philippa Russell, Disability Rights Commissioner and Disability Policy Advisor, National Children's Bureau. More information from:

<http://www.bild.org.uk/>

8 November 2006

Reversing Academic Failure: Enabling Potential Through the Use of High Technology Interventions

Geneva, Switzerland

Catherine Ruckert, therapist and speech pathologist will discuss Neurofeedback in ADD/ADHD, Autism, Anxiety Disorder; Fast ForWord computer-based intervention for

Dyslexia, Central Auditory Processing Disorders, and Specific Language Disorders; and Heart Math for stress reduction and examination anxiety
More information from: info@allspecialkids.org

14 November 2006

Trucs et astuces pour gérer le TDA/H

Brussels, Belgium

Organised by TDA/H Belgique, the Belgian ADHD association, this session will deal with children and adults and take place at 8 pm at 24 Rue de la Glacière, 1060 Bruxelles (Ma Campagne). More information info@tdah.be

14-16 November 2006

Policy and Practice for social inclusion of children and young people - The role of non-formal & informal learning

Berlin, Germany

The Child and Youth Welfare Association (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe - AGJ) in Germany and Eurochild AISBL are organising a European conference on the role of non-formal and informal learning in combating social exclusion of children and young people.

The conference will bring together three key areas of the EU's political agenda: the fight against child poverty and social exclusion, cooperation in the field of youth policy and implementation of the European Youth Pact. The conference will focus on exploring the inter-linkages between participation, learning and social integration. More information from: www.eurochild.org

16 November 2006

Dyslexia in the Workplace - Assessment Training and Consultancy

London, UK

A one-day training course at the Dyslexia Teaching Centre, 23 Kensington Square London W8 5HN. Information from info@workingwithdyslexia.com
www.workingwithdyslexia.com

17 November 2006

Keep them going!

Farnham, UK

'Keep them Going!' offers practical tips for primary aged (5-9 years old) children on:

- Helping with reading, writing maths and homework
- Everyday home issues – diet, sleep, exercise, screen time
- Understanding the challenges facing your child – self-esteem issues, motivation, quality time
- The parental role – working together, acceptance of learning difficulties, liaising and working with the school, study skills

More information from: <http://www.arkellcentre.org.uk/>

17 November 2006

British Institute of Learning Disabilities – *Valuing good practice in autism*

Newcastle, UK.

The conference aims to meet the needs of practitioners and parents living or working with individuals with autistic spectrum disorders of all ages. The conference will be of interest to a multi-disciplinary audience of professionals in services provided by health, social services and education as well as parents and individuals with autistic spectrum disorders. It aims to disseminate good practice, raise issues of relevance to practice and facilitate a reflective and

evaluative approach. This will be achieved through a selection of stimulating and thought-provoking keynote speakers and workshop sessions which cover a range of current key issues.

More information from: <http://www.bild.org.uk>

19-26 November 2006

International forum for Child Welfare

Vancouver, Canada

Immediate registration required at www.worldforum2006.ca.

25 November 2006

Tables Ronde provinciale sur l'intégration scolaire

Namur, Belgium

Sont invités à y participer les familles, les enseignants, le secteur médical, toute personne intéressée par l'intégration scolaire.

Aussi le **2 décembre** à Bruxelles, le **9 décembre** à Mirwart, le **27 janvier** à Liège et le **17 février** à Charleroi. More information from : www.liguedesdroitsdelenfant.be

25 November 2006

Youth Road Show

Bristol, UK

To encourage young people to speak out on issues of concern to them, UNICEF is organising a series of youth road shows. Others include Leeds on 10 December and Edinburgh on 20 January. More information from: www.unicef.org.uk

25 November 2006

Cross Cultural Study Day on Parenting Children with ADHD

Leuven, Belgium

Organised by ADHD Belgium, a composite of Flemish, French, German and English speaking family support groups, this project has been made possible with funding provided by the Prince Philip Foundation and the premises have been donated by KBC in Leuven. There will be space for over 200 participants and simultaneous translations of the presentations will be provided in English, Dutch, French & German. For further information, email simon.barber@skynet.be

27 November 2006

le TDA/H chez l'adulte

Brussels, Belgium

Docteur Pierre Oswald will lecture on ADHD in adults at 8 pm at the Campus du Solbosch (U.L.B), Avenue F.D. Roosevelt, 50 - 1050 Bruxelles, Bâtiment U, porte B, niveau 5, local UB5.132. The lecture is organised by the Belgian ADHD association, TDA/H Belgique.

More information from info@tdah.be

28 November 2006

Successful futures for adults with autism

London, UK

Jointly chaired by Professor Chris Cullen and Professor Patricia Howlin, the forum will look at the issues faced by people with autism in adulthood and will include models of care, housing and support and access to employment. More information from: www.researchautism.net

29 November 2006 – Note change of date!

EC-OC Conference

Details above.

14 December 2006

Le TDA/H et les fêtes : gestion du stress

Brussels, Belgium

Organised by TDA/H Belgique, the Belgian ADHD association, this session will deal with children and adults and take place at 8 pm at 24 Rue de la Glacière, 1060 Bruxelles (Ma Campagne). More information at info@tdah.be

27 January 2007

British Dyslexia Association AGM

London, UK

The British Dyslexia Association will hold its Annual General Meeting – postponed from 18 November – at the Institute of Child Health. Further information from:

admin@bdadyslexia.org.uk

Tip of the month

Think about technological options for learning

The pace of innovation in consumer electronics has brought many optional features into more of our personal experiences. We take it for granted that we can zoom in on the small print or increase the font size or contrast to meet our current needs. Research is beginning to catch up to show the added benefits of providing students access to these capabilities. Here are brief research summaries followed by practical suggestions on how to integrate these features into study.

Text to speech (TTS)

A speech engine that can read digital text aloud (usually available in multiple voices) with highlighting is quickly becoming a common feature of operating systems, some web sites, and is available to download. TTS can deliver proven multi-sensory literacy strategies. Matching these instructional methods with the technology features of simultaneous highlighting of the spoken text draws students' attention and helps them stay in sync with the reader. The value of this simultaneous presentation has been shown for improved word recognition and retention. TTS additionally relieves the attention burden of decoding for struggling readers by providing the spoken text, allowing them to focus on comprehension and improving their "endurance" for completing reading assignments.

It is no surprise that struggling students need more engagement with print. Providing TTS is a natural support to facilitate more reading. For early readers and young learners of English, digital storybooks provide a fun and interactive engagement with books. Older readers can utilize TTS to access motivating and content-specific texts on the Internet and textbook-related Web portals that are so important to vocabulary and background knowledge development. Much classic literature, which presents great difficulties for struggling readers, can be downloaded as e-books and read with TTS. E-book software can facilitate studying with tools such as annotation, highlighting, and linked dictionaries. All writers can benefit from listening to their compositions read aloud as a proofreading process. Compare a variety of commercial and free programs through the Reading Matrix at www.techmatrix.org.

Speech recognition

Speech recognition software that can transcribe spoken language to digital text or act upon spoken computer commands has been available as commercial software for years and is

increasingly being built into operating systems and other programs. The accuracy of these programs has increased and training requirements have dramatically decreased in the past few years. Speech recognition not only provides access to computer users who have physical disabilities, it also allows struggling writers to address issues of fatigue, poor handwriting, spatial organization or spelling. Speech recognition, moreover, is a powerful example of immediate constructive feedback, one of the key benefits attributed to well-designed computer assisted learning. Research has shown the learning value of using speech recognition to compose as well as to proofread writing.

Speech recognition can help motivate struggling writers and spellers to get their ideas onto paper and reinforce literacy skills in the process. The immediacy of the dictation process reinforces the vocabulary and use of writing conventions and punctuation. Special programs can help struggling maths students dictate and organize mathematical expressions, and, when paired with TTS, to decode those expressions. Vastly improved capabilities, reduced training requirements, and increasingly free versions in operating systems, mean many more students may benefit from interacting with the computer in this manner. Improved, too, is the sensitivity and quality of microphones available at very reasonable costs allowing for increased classroom and lab applications.

Graphic organizers

A third technology application that has received research attention is computer-based graphic organizers. These tools facilitate brainstorming, concept mapping, and outlining in much the same way as teacher-led instruction, but with obvious advantages. Digital graphic organizers have word processing and TTS support, the ability to rearrange elements easily, and switch between outline and map view. Students taught to use these tools strategically have been shown to write more complete and sophisticated essays and improve their reading comprehension.

Graphic organizers of all sorts are becoming more common in education. Computer-based graphic organizers can be used with whole class instruction to make visible the connections between big ideas in the content areas as well as demonstrate writing and reading comprehension strategies. Individuals find the programs valuable for annotations during reading or prewriting brainstorming, and the ability of most of the software packages to switch between map and outline views supports students' progress through the writing stages.

Visual representations and resources

Allowing students to "see" relationships and sequences can make key concepts come to life and be more comprehensible. In mathematics, the use of virtual manipulatives and online dictionaries has grown to mainstream usage as a powerful means to help students improve their conceptual knowledge of mathematics. Imagine how helpful an animated illustration of the relationship between fractions, percentages, and the number line could be to struggling students. The ability to manipulate and examine the results of the changes increases students' engagement and understanding. See a collection of sites at www.cited.org.

Online dictionaries, encyclopedias, and thesauruses not only bring TTS but supporting visuals to reference materials, notoriously difficult print texts for struggling students. Online dictionaries offer spoken pronunciations and instant word finds. Online thesauruses can help illustrate word study concepts and relationships between meanings. See a collection of sites at www.literacymatters.org.