



A Comenius Project



MOBILITY IS FUN FOR EVERYONE

Simple steps to empower parents, families and professionals.

Safe travel and movement **T**hrough the **E**nvironment
for young learners with visual impairment,
Promoted by all!
Understanding and **P**articipation.

STEP UP!

NEWSLETTER 4

February 2014

www.step-up-comenius.eu



Blindsquare

By Outi Lappalainen,
Onerva Centre for Learning and Consulting,
Jyväskylä

Blind and VI pupils at Onerva use a mobile phone application BlindSquare, which, together with the phone and bone conduction headphones, provide pupils with the necessary information about their surroundings. The program is invented by Ilkka Pirttimaa as part of his hobby.

Since May 2012 the app has spread among visually impaired people throughout the world. The app is available in 16 languages currently, but has the potential to be translated into 26. It is used by VI people in fifty countries.

BlindSquare is an augmented reality GPS application for the visually impaired which provide them with spoken information from FourSquare and Open Street Maps.

People with vision using FourSquare are helping people who cannot see to locate places. And instead of proprietary data, open data is used and a high quality speech synthesis is applied.

By shaking the iPhone, the app tells the current address and the nearest intersection. There is also a "Look around" feature that brings up a compass and reads out directions. When demo mode is selected, the app simulates a location for user.

BS find and guide people to a hamburger restaurant within a small radius and give VI pupils experiences of independent travelling.

Ilkka Pirttimaa has also put together a setup where you can use iPad's bigger battery life in your backpack, and be able to control the app using a Bluetooth game controller attached to your white cane.

<http://blindsquare.com>



Let's build the city!

By Jorge Raedó

Director at Rakennetaan kaupunki!
and stage director of the opera



Rakennetaan kaupunki!

Rakennetaan kaupunki! / Let's build the city! (<http://www.rakennetaankaupunki.fi/>) is a Finnish association on arts and architecture education for children. Our main project is to make operas with schools. Our operas are always related with Architecture.

The first opera was in Helsinki in 2011-12, the second opera was in Seinäjoki 2012-13, the third opera is in Jyväskylä in 2013-14 with Onerva Mäen koulu (Onerva Mäki School) and Alvar Aalto Museum. The fourth opera will be in Helsinki in 2014-15.

Our opera with Onerva Mäen koulu and Alvar Aalto Museum is about the new school building that Onerva is designing (it will be ready in 2016), and about the architect Alvar Aalto. The students are creating the libretto. Sanna Ahvenjärvi is the composer of the music, together with Tapio Lappalainen, composer specialist on electronic music. Students use tablets and smartphones to record sounds and videos for the opera, as well as instruments.

We work with the students and teachers from September 2013 until April 2014. The premiere will be on April 8th at Alvar Aalto Museum. We will do eight performances. Students from other schools will go to the museum to see the opera, and they will do a workshop of architecture. Audience will see also an exhibition about Rakennetaan kaupunki!

On April 9th we will do a seminary on opera education in schools at Alvar Aalto Museum. The guests are Tim Yealland from English Touring Opera (UK), Pedro Sarmiento from Proyecto LOVA-Teatro Real (Madrid), Jorge Prendas from Casa da Musica (Porto) and Tuula Jukola-Nuorteva from the Finnish National Opera (Helsinki).



Preparation of the project meeting

by Jana Loudová

High School for Visually Impaired, Prague

After we had attended project meetings in Örebro, Luxembourg and Edinburgh, the time has come to organize project meeting in our school in Prague. The date had been set for beginning of October. We started to prepare meeting during summer holiday.

First we were able to do was to find some hotels. Our school is placed in the same area as a Hotel School, which provides its own hotel Matura. Students learn here what the job in a hotel entails. Advantage of accomodation in this hotel was that it was really near to our school where the meeting took a place. Dis-advantage was that it is little bit far from city centre. So we tried to find some more hotels in the centre. It isn't so easy to find some good hotels in Prague, because there are so many hotels. Finally we decided to find hotels close to Charles Square in the centre of Prague, near the metro line which goes to our school.

Programme for Tuesday evening was clear from the first moment. Although it isn't common to visit some exhibition during our meetings, we decided to change it. Reason? In Prague, there is an exhibition, which is closely connected with our project. It is in

absolute dark and it is very interesting. Followed by traditonal dinner with czech beer, we hoped we all will spend a very nice evening.

What next to be prepared? Catering. Because our school doesn't have its own canteen we have to organize different way of catering. We asked Hotel School to cook a lunch for our guests and some small refreshment for coffee breaks were prepared and baked by our colleagues. Thank them all.

There was a small complication. In the half of September we received a letter from Czech School Inspection. They notified us, that the inspection visit will be held at the same dates as our Step up meeting.

What to say in the end? It was a quite great experience especially for me. I attended all project meetings and all of them were organized at the highest quality. So I was little bit afraid, if our small school team is able to prepare it in the same way. I think we did all the best. The pleasant atmosphere of our meeting was also supported by the city of Prague. Prague is a beatiful town, especially in autumn, with longlasting history a lots of places to see. I hope you enjoyed it.

PS: In the report of Czech School Inspection, activities of our school were evaluated very positively.



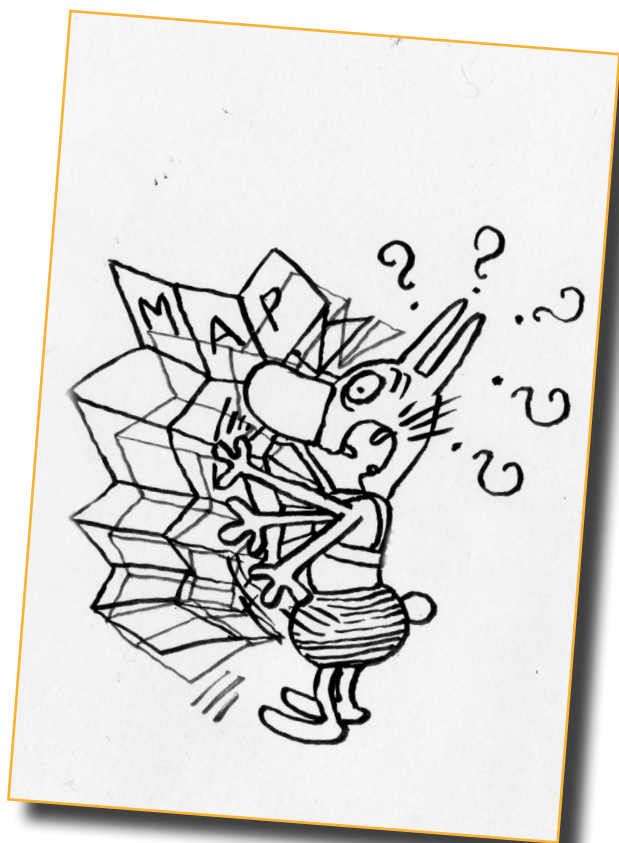
My way stepping up to an O&M trainer

by Anouck Preusche and Josée Weber
Institut pour Deficients Visuels IDV,
Luxembourg

As the common images associated with blindness are the white cane and a guide dog for having an independent and active life, I decided to go for a professional training and become an Orientation and Mobility trainer to underline the challenges and perplexity of this process. Indeed, orientation and mobility teaching focuses on the acquisition of strategies and methods to develop essential core skills to assure a safe and self-governed movement within the environment.

MAIN MOTIVATIONS

After having gained essential experience working with visually impaired and blind children in the school environment, it seemed to be obvious to broaden my scope of duties with an O&M qualification. The understanding of the use of residual vision as well as other senses to facilitate safe movement in addition to encouraging exploration from the earliest age is relevant for visually impaired children. The positive effects of your own acting and considerations must not be forgotten either in the child's development.



APPRENTICESHIP

The training consists of a 60 days in addition to practising sessions to develop skills. The whole training was instructive and informative and included a final abstract with annotations, elaborations of terms, concepts and experience gained through the whole span of our training. This abstract has been illustrated with pictures taken over the entirety of our formation and shows particular situations, environmental features and potential hazards. It consists of the theoretical and practical experiences gained over the complete period of the qualification and provides the basic guidelines for the everyday work.

TRAINING

An orientation and mobility training occurs on an individual basis, in due consideration of the physical, mental and emotional mood of the visually impaired learner. The course complies with the visual skills of an individual and it is modifiable according to his needs, proficiency and aptitude. Different technics are developed, explained and tested in order to make full use of information that can be gained through the use of remaining vision or other senses and allow the learner to become independent, to develop self-confidence and spatial as well as an environmental awareness.

CONCLUSION

The challenge to teach Habilitation, Orientation and Mobility training needs accurate preparations to address the specific complex problems of each young learner. This makes you see the inclusive school situation in a quite different way and attracts your attention to the individual situation of each youngster in consideration to his personality.

Childvision preschool

by Breda McSharry

National Education Centre for Blind Children,
Dublin

September of this academic year, 2013, saw the opening in ChildVision of a purposely designed pre-school presently meeting the needs of 38 young VI and MDVI children. There has been an existing service in this area since 1998 but it has had to function scattered around the campus and with limited space for its student group and staff.

The extensive new facility incorporates an eye clinic, a nurse's station, a comfortable parent's room, offices and three dedicated learning areas. Within these there are areas for play, structured activities, and physical stimulation e.g. massage mats and 'little rooms'. There is also an expanse of open space where walkers, mini trampolines and other aids to movement and exploration can be safely used.

This spacious environment affords staff the opportunity to work directly with children in a setting that has been constructed to encourage curiosity, self-expression and a sense of fun. Individualised therapies also take place here and the improved physical layout has made collaborative working a more practical option.

As a result of my participation in the Step Up project I have become involved in working with some of the pre-school children specifically around Orientation and Mobility. This has been very much a learning experience for me, entailing observations and consulta-

tion with the pre-school staff, OT's and the student's family members, all of whom would have greater experience of working with early years children than I.

Indeed appreciating the value of the knowledge to be gained from parents/ guardians and other professionals in supporting early years O&M skills was for me the major issue highlighted when distributing the research questionnaire upon which much of the content of the final Step Up Project resource will be based.

Many of the O&M specialists in Ireland who were asked to participate responded that whilst they had studied mobility with young children during their training they had little practical experience of delivering it in their present roles. They stated they did not have sufficient experience or knowledge in the area. Within ChildVision the questionnaire was extended to pre-school staff, and the speech and OT departments, all individuals who have an active involvement with young children.

The resulting guidance and shared experience expressed by these and other practitioners across the project partners when distilled is intended to provide a practical and accessible resource. I would hope that Step Up's final publication will be something I can use as a learning tool with my colleagues and as a means of providing useful ideas and support to the parents/guardians of our Pre-school children. We now have an appropriate physical environment to help foster early O&M concepts and the work of Step Up will provide complimentary resources to enhance these.



by Gail Lawther

“A must See!” -The Invisible Exhibition in Prague
Our Project has Orientation and Mobility as its theme and we are all working with Visually Impaired pupils. Orientation and Mobility is a very important part of our work but none of our training in this field can reflect exactly what is like to be blind or partially sighted ourselves. Moreover our training and years of experience did not prepare us for the “Invisible Exhibition”!

This exhibition is trying to acquaint people with the world of the blind and show them what life is like when you cannot see. Hence we were taken on a unique and interactive journey in total darkness for one hour! We had find our way only by touch, sounds scent and our sense of balance through different rooms in a house, into streets, the countryside, into a hunter's cottage and even a gallery with some rather strange statues.

We were baffled by many objects and this made us realise just how much information our sight does give us and how we rely so much on this sense. Walking through the hustle and bustle of a city is daunting in the dark as is travelling over rickety bridges, on leafy paths through a wooded area. That tree was very hard to bump into and that coffee table was very

sore on the shins! It was quite scary to get separated from the group when a wrong turn was taken or when they are all on one side of the room and you aren't!

The journey ended in the cafe when we had to pay for and drink our drinks in total darkness. Coins are very hard to distinguish without sight! But we managed not to spill any drinks. Our guides who were all visually impaired themselves certainly knew what they were talking and did a wonderful job. They did have some rather rowdy and mischievous “children” in some groups.

This exhibition has on display a lot of devices and gadgets used by Visually Impaired people in everyday life. It was certainly a very revealing experience and gave us a renewed insight into just what life would be like without the sight!



Project updates

by Angie Bisson

Royal Blind School, Edinburgh

Following a successful first year of the STEP UP project that focused on gathering and collating information, planning, drafting and trialling of pro-forma, it is now down to the serious business of turning all these ideas and data into actual documents to help raise awareness of parents/family, carers and educational professionals of their role in supporting and assisting the visually impaired learner.

Utilising the creative thinking and talents of the group, we set about our task at our latest project meeting hosted by our project partners at the Gymnazium pro zrakové postizene a Stredni skola pro zrakové postizene in Prague. (Our thanks again to Ivan and his staff for making us all so welcome.)

The group as a whole felt the 3 days of working time were put to good use and were very productive in moving towards our targets.

- The draft template and guidelines for an environmental audit were tested out to check for ease of use and effectiveness.
- Our simple steps booklet is beginning to look like a booklet rather than lots of pieces of information.
- An initial glossary of common mobility terms was put together for consideration by the group. Our Slovenian contingent is looking into illustrations to accompany the text. We are looking forward to seeing the final draft at our next project meeting in February 2014.

- Our 'myth busting' leaflet is taking shape now that we have our exclusively designed cartoons by Riitta Uusitalo (a Finish artist) to help illustrate our points. We are all certain the finished product will be greatly enhanced by these.

- The website is looking great thanks to Pierrot and Jussi. We are very grateful of their IT skills which are helping to promote the project through the website <http://www.step-up-comenius.eu> and provide useful information to interested parties about our work.

It is quite exciting now that we are getting closer to seeing the fruits of our labour in real document form. This does however mean the massive task of translating all the information from English into the different languages encompassed by our project partners now begins in earnest. For those who are native English speakers in the project we are the lucky ones as the workload for this falls on our European friends, some of whom have more than one language to battle with. We wish them well in their endeavours.

Our next project hosts are Onerva Mäki School, Jyväskylä Finland in February 2014. We have all been warned to come dressed for the cold and snow!

