

# CONDUCTIVE EDUCATION REPOSITORY

“Cyber Experiment” in Conductive Education

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## **“Cyber Experiment” in Conductive Education**

### **Why undertake a ‘Cyber Experiment’ in CE?**

Conductive Education (CE) is a developmental approach, executed mostly in a group setting that helps both children and adults with physical disabilities. It holistically links the cognitive, social, emotional and physical aspects of an individual’s development and it introduces a holistic transformative teaching/learning, learning/teaching, upbringing system. It is a complex, person-centred habilitation/rehabilitation method and there is a lot of physical contact and facilitation involved in its delivery. There is also a strong psychological aspect due to the inter-personal relationships between the client(s) and the professional(s).

The experiment presented here is a response to an issue often raised by outsiders, interested clients and other professionals as to whether distance Conductive Education could be executed. Below is a short analysis of the result.

### **Summary**

An international “pilot” was successfully undertaken between a USA based conductor in New York and disabled children, professionals and assistants at a CE centre near Chorley, Lancashire in the UK.

The aim of this project was to create a situation whereby CE was delivered with a distance between the conductor and the clients in order to consider the possibility of such services in Conductive Education. The experiment was developed to give insight and possible guidance to conductors, clients and other practitioners when considering this approach. The results identify the possible potential and prospect of providing broader services and addressing distance issues with the provision of Conductive Education.

### **Method: What happened?**

The experiment took place in The Legacy Rainbow House, Mawdsley, near to Chorley, Lancashire, UK. The group of children involved in the experiments consisted of 7 children with extra pyramidal motor-disabilities who have their three-hour regular CE session at The Legacy Rainbow House on a once weekly basis. As it was an experiment, the children were looked after by a conductor and three internally trained classroom assistances in order to carry out manual facilitation and to solve any other upcoming problems.

The US-based conductor volunteered to lead the class. He was previously employed at The Legacy Rainbow House and used to work regularly with this group of children. He made the cyber contact with the class using Skype. The children were able to see the conductor’s body on a large, flat-screen television mounted on the classroom wall and were able to hear his instructions clearly. The conductor was able to see the children on

his computer screen using a web-cam from a laptop placed in the classroom.

The classroom was set up for a sitting program; the children were sitting on boxes in a semi-circle in front of the web cam and the television screen. It was decided beforehand to keep the programme short and deliver basic tasks in order to get the most from the experiment.

The activity took forty minutes from beginning to end and included the following; welcoming each other, chatting for motivation, carrying out tasks in sitting position, carry out differentiated standing tasks, and individual walking i.e. taking steps. After initial cyber contact was made with the conductor he welcomed the children and vice versa. Then they had a short “catch up” conversation, a dialogue where both parties seemed to be very excited to start the programme. Unfortunately, the line was not working accurately at first and some delays made the contact a bit disrupted. However, after a short time the connection stabilised and became clear enough to start. The conductor was able to verbally direct the group, lead the task series and give feed-back to the children and facilitation tips for the assistants.

### **Discussion of the Experience (Result)**

Having tried “Cyber Conductive Education” the first and most notable thing we should recognise was that the idea worked. The conductor had the capability to carry out his program from a long distance. He was able to lead and control the group of seven motor-disabled children and facilitating participants (other conductor and assistants). The children were able to follow instructions and carry out tasks as they were required and the facilitators could potentially give optimal facilitation.

However, the circumstances for the experiment were constructed in a way to provide optimum opportunity for success; all the participants knew each other well, the children were members of an existing dynamic group, the professionals were CE trained and worked with the group before the event as a team. The long-distance leading conductor was also part of the team before he moved away.

The interaction between the long-distance leader and the group was also a little different from the normal delivery of the CE programme. The children paid special attention; their concentration was held by looking at the screen for a high proportion of time to try to understand what they were told or shown, they listened carefully to the words coming from the television’s speaker and they responded in a much more intentional way i.e. focusing on their own speech in recognition of the difficulty of the “cyber contact” which resulted in a clearer, better articulated communication. The situation that was created was conducive to a slower, more patient, focused interaction since the children and adults involved waited for each other’s turn to talk or respond to the conductor. However, this made the fluency of the programme and the communication a bit intermittent and disrupted at times.

The execution of the tasks in a sitting position seemed to follow a very “normal” traditional delivery of a sitting programme. The difficulty however came from the restricted space situation created in ensuring everyone could be seen by the camera. The children had to be positioned closer to each other than they normally would be so in some cases they bumped each other and were disrupted in carrying out the proper task. Also, in some cases the facilitators had problems to get between the children in order to provide manual facilitation when required. With regards to this the facilitators tried to facilitate from behind (so as not to block the camera’s vision). However, this was not always optimal – especially

when the children were executing lower-limb tasks as they could not get close enough to facilitate most effectively.

During the leading and facilitating of standing-up and sitting-down the leading conductor had great difficulties in visually identifying what was going on. When it took place with a child individually directly in front of the camera it was possible to complete and the conductor was able to provide optimal verbal prompting. Similarly, when attempting to facilitate walking this was more successful with one child in-front of the camera. However; the view of the single camera was very limited and so it was only possible to walk for a few steps before being lost from the view of the conductor. At this point the locally-based conductor also engaged in leading a group walking activity in the room but the long-distance conductor missed out many things and could concentrate only on one person.

A principal criticism of the event is that despite the success of the delivery of a distance CE programme, the use of computers and television screens had a strange non-personal effect on the whole programme. It remains questionable how the leader conductor can support inexperienced assistants to facilitate children/ clients optimally and how the leader-conductor could respond to psychological, behavioural and motivational issues. Furthermore, the technical equipment used in the experiment was not reliable and caused some difficulties. The suggestion would therefore be to use more suitable and reliable distance-conference techniques in the future.

## **Rationale**

Due to the very restricted numbers of available Conductive Education professionals, and centres there has been an appeal for an experiment into Conductive Education being delivered in a long-distance format. This project responded to the call and resulted in the following conclusions:

a) There is technical possibility to deliver long-distance CE. However, to do so would require suitable technological equipment and set-up (more similar to those used in modern long distance conferences for example). High quality and quantity of cameras would be necessary and fast and sensitive audio techniques would reduce delay and disruption to communication. Most importantly, a reliable network connection would be required. Without these prerequisites the quality of the vision, audio and communication and the fluency of the program would be highly jeopardised.

b) There is a rationale for the possibility of delivering CE from a long distance. This would however be reliant on having a well-trained/professional person(s) to be local to the client(s) to provide facilitation. With regard to this point however, it must be highlighted that a personal meeting between client(s), local facilitator(s) and the leading conductor appears to remain very crucial. Without previous personal contact and the development of common trust and relationship between the client(s) and the conductor, that allows for established facilitation solutions, CE could lose its purpose.

“Often there are small isolated projects, that produce interesting results, but have little influence on the development of practice, and contribute neither to significant changes in practice nor to the evidence on the effectiveness of Conductive Education.” Tony Best

In order to avoid falling into this situation, following this experiment we have decided to publish the results of our Cyber CE Project in order to leave it open to discussion by the professional world.

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