

DISES Newsletter

Division of International Special Education and Services

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Division of
International
Special Education
and Services

The voice and vision of special education

President's Message

Susan O'Rourke



Volume 22, Issue 3

Dear DISES members,

Remember a time when you watched as a child learned to do something for the first time? Can you see the expression on their face - the pride in their accomplishment? If you were the teacher can you think a moment about how you felt knowing that you were somehow instrumental in their new found accomplishment? These moments make the work that we do so important and valuable to children with disabilities and their families.

The Pittsburgh Public Schools recently sent out 285 notices to teachers who will lose their jobs ([Pgh Post-Gazette](#)) next year. Some of these teachers are special education professionals but more significantly, these layoffs affect class size, which influence every teacher's ability to meet the needs of each student in the inclusive classroom.

These cuts in public funding for education are not limited to the US. I have just spent the last month in Ireland where cuts are equally drastic. Positions are not being filled, inspectors are closely monitoring the number of classroom personnel and materials are limited in sheltered workshops and other training facilities. What a challenging time to be an educator!

As special needs educators, we must face these challenges together. As advocates for our students, we must ensure that individualized learning plans are available to our students and that their individual needs are being met. DISES is here to support your efforts by connecting you to other special education professionals who share your passion – who share your experience in knowing how wonderful it is to watch a child learn, to develop their sense of self and become more independent.

The DISES board is moving forward with the strategic plan adopted in 2011 which specifically outlines projects designed to facilitate communication and sharing of knowledge. Visit the newly designed DISES web site for more information on the strategic plan and consider finding us on Facebook, Twitter and Linked In. These social media sites will allow us to support each other and ensure that our discipline is vibrant and can face the challenges before us.

Susan L. O'Rourke
DISES President (2012- 2013)

DISES International Round Table

Sligo, Ireland

July 8 - 13, 2012

DISES first international Round Table, held in Sligo, Ireland in July was 'wildly successful.'

The conference, held at the Innisfree International College and Convention Center, which overlooks Lough Gil, combined formal presentations together with opportunities for informal conversations among participants.

Seventy-five participants, including 14 guests, who selected one of three topic areas, attended the event. The topic areas included Scholarship & Research, Collaborations, and Policy & Advocacy. The Round Table format is unique in that it is designed to stimulate conversation among members of a topic area. After each of the 35 presentations, participants were invited to extend the topic through discussion. Sometimes these conversations continued into the canteen over lunch or into the Irish pubs in the evenings.

In addition to the Round Table presentations, four invited speakers addressed the group during the week. David Gast, from the University of Georgia provided a lighthearted look at a variety of cultural nuances for consideration when conducting international work. A team of special needs practitioners from the Sligo area explained the many services available to individuals with disabilities in the local area. Marie Martin, from Northern Ireland, offered her perspective on 'Learning by Wandering' - the notion that digital tools may provide the means by which we nurture our spirit through lifelong learning. And finally, Kathleen Puckett shared her perspective on international efforts in meeting the learning needs of exceptional students.

Sligo is 'Yeats Country' and no visit to the area is complete without developing an understanding of the writings of William B. Yeats and experiencing Irish cultural heritage. An expert from the Yeats Memorial Society guided the group around Lough Gil, Dromahair and Drumcliff. The group also toured the Carrowmore Megalithic tombs and hiked up Knocknarea to Queen Maeve's Cairn with a local archeologist.

The final evening of the event included a closing banquet at the spectacular Markree Castle. Thanks to all of the participants for their generous contributions to conversations, the hilarious stories and jokes, fabulous attitudes, kindness and consideration for others and especially their friendships! May they endure forever...



And say my glory was I had such friends.

[William Butler Yeats](#)

Challenges and Perspectives

Autism in Cuba

*Stacy P. Dean, Ph.D.
Virginia Commonwealth University*

Background

A mere ninety miles from the United States, Cuba, in some ways, is a vastly different country. One of the few remaining communist governments, it provides socialized health-care that ensures free and accessible medical treatment to all of its citizens. Cuba boasts one of the world's highest rates of physicians per capita; largely due to an education system that provides universal access at all levels. Cubans can attend college for free and are assigned a position by the government after graduation. Males must commit one year to the military prior to college. Cubans claim a literacy rate of 100% for adults and youth alike. It's also worth noting that Cuba's unemployment rate is around 1.7% (Unesco, 2009) because, until recently, almost everyone worked for the state.

However, despite these perceived strengths, most of Cuba lives in poverty. According to the U.S. Department of State, the average Cuban makes \$20 a month; not enough to buy the basic necessities for living. Most do not own houses or a car and live in substandard conditions. Despite their health care system, most Cubans cannot afford aspirin. Only 15% of the population has access to the internet (Unicef, 2010).

These vast contradictions are also prevalent in their services for persons with disabilities. A recent delegation with the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities allowed researchers to visit multiple educational and vocational facilities, as well as interview Cuban professionals in the field. These professionals included physicians, professors, and educators who worked primarily in Havana – Cuba's capital.

While the delegation professionals examined services for persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Autism, this article will primarily discuss services for persons with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). As the United States prevalence rate and need for services surges, it may be beneficial to examine whether similar trends exist in other countries.

In order to fully understand the contradictions of Cuban education, one must be aware of the policies set forth by the Cuban Constitution and government. Post revolution initiatives promote inclusion to the fullest extent possible; however, over 500 special education schools maintain a continuum of services offered for students with disabilities. These juxtapositions are quite common in Cuba. While Cuban education officials state there has been an increase in the prevalence of ASD, current estimates indicate 1 in 500 children are being diagnosed; much lower rates than US figures. In 2002, President Fidel Castro initiated a project to provide "educational attention to educate children with autism in Cuba." As a result of this, *Escuela Dora Alonso*, was the first school completely dedicated to ASD in Havana, Cuba. Dora Alonso has 46 students ages 2 – 18. Currently, there are a total of four self-contained schools for students with ASD in Cuba.

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Etiology, Assessment, and Diagnoses

Dr. Ovidia Rodriguez Mendez is revered as the national authority on the research and treatment of ASD. In discussing etiology, she explains that researchers in Cuba do not believe there is any causal link between vaccinations and autism. However, they do believe that Candida and intestinal issues may have some effect and therefore gluten and casein are eliminated from the diet of many diagnosed children. Researchers are also looking at the effects of antibiotics in the early years of life. Perhaps the most interesting belief, explained by Dr. Mendez, is that the increase in television viewing plays a major role in the increase of ASD. It is believed that the effects of electromagnetic waves and anti-social behavior elicited by watching TV may cause autism. Cuban studies indicate that if a child watches more than six hours of television a day within the first three years of life, they have a much greater chance of having autism (Mendez, 2011).

In terms of diagnosing ASD, Cuba uses criteria set forth by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM - IV) and the Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS) as a primary measure. The Bayley Scales of Infant Development may also be used for younger children. A comprehensive assessment by a multidisciplinary team will include a family history, metabolic tests, EEG's to check for seizure disorder, and muscle development tests to examine 'unusual movements.' American researchers hypothesize that 'unusual movements' are likely what we consider sensory issues. Cuba does not currently look at sensory issues as a major characteristic of ASD.

Interventions and Educational Programming

Family involvement is perhaps the most prevailing and intensive intervention in all areas of disability. There is a major focus on early intervention that includes training and treating parents. There are schools for family members that teach them how to care for and teach their child with a disability. Cuba has Law 222, which the government pays a trained member of the family to stay home and care for the child. There are also therapeutic interventions for families that provide psychotherapy and medications for depression or other psychiatric issues related to the child's disability. Parents must be involved in the Psychological and Pedagogical Evaluation that occurs three times a year and are given a summer program to implement at home. Home visits are performed monthly by a social worker and the school provides monthly classes for parents in the evening. Cubans advocate the use of applied behavior analysis. There were clear examples of discrete trial teaching throughout Dora Alonso, however, there doesn't seem to be a major emphasis on data collection. There were picture communication symbols used for schedules, emotional regulation, and choice-making evident throughout the school. However, the lack of funding for ink and paper make this a very difficult intervention to maintain. There was no evidence of personal augmentative communication devices. This was not surprising since technology is a rare luxury in Cuba. There is a strong emphasis on positive reinforcement and the use of aversives is prohibited (Quintero, 2011).

Medications are also a prominent intervention. These can range from herbal to allopathic. Haldol or Risperadol are often used for severe behavior problems or stereotypies. Cuban educators promote the use of organic eating and have organic gardens on some of their school campuses.

Similar to the US, Cuba promotes the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Self-contained schools teach the importance of social skills, although no specific program was noted. Dora Alonso teaches with the goal of transitioning students to a regular school. They employ two transitional teachers that shadow students in the mainstream setting. Since, 2002, sixty students have made this transition (Quintero, 2011). It is unclear how supports and integration are provided in the mainstream schools and throughout adulthood.

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However, there are still institutions and 'community schools' where many adolescents and adults with autism will likely reside and work.

Final Remarks

It is evident that Cuban educators are working hard to meet the needs of their students with autism. There seems to be a genuine affinity for teaching, a thirst for knowledge, and at moments, an evidence-based approach. While resources are scarce, passion is not. Cuba and the US are politically worlds apart, however, some of our educational philosophies and approaches are not.

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DISES is on Facebook! Join in the conversation.

Members Making a Difference

Special Education Reform in Kursk, Russia

Melinda R. Pierson

Debra L. Cote

Vita L. Jones

California State University, Fullerton

A team of eight special educators and professors traveled to Kursk, Russia in March of 2012 to lead a special education seminar at the Regional Open Social Institute (ROSI). Kursk is eight hours south of Moscow by train and has a population of 414,600 with principal industries in machine making and rubber. ROSI is a private university consisting of five schools including the Faculty of Pre-Institutional Training and Supplementary Education. Within the 12 specialties, pedagogy and psychology is a major for students who want to be special education teachers. International students from Belgium, Great Britain and the United States also participate in their programs, but the students must be fluent in Russian as that is the instructional language at the institute. Students are allowed to work throughout their programs which allows them to gain experiences in schools while focusing on the curriculum in education.

The seminar focused on the inclusion of students with disabilities as Russia has been moving toward fully inclusive practices since 1993 when the Institution of Inclusive Education was established in Moscow. Since that time, a total of 129 organizations and schools try to integrate students with disabilities. This means that general education school sites may add classrooms for students with disabilities at the same school. Currently, there are 700,000 students with disabilities in Russia and approximately 200,000 do not attend school. Education for students with disabilities is not mandated so parents must enroll their children into special education schools. Many schools have lengthy waiting lists. Online programs exist for students in wheelchairs who do not typically attend school. They stay at home and take online courses with parental and minimal teacher support, but no peer interaction. Overall, just 5% of students with disabilities attend general education schools and this occurs only in Moscow.

Special education teachers, administrators, school psychologists, support services personnel and parents from the Kursk region as well as from farther locations throughout Russia travelled in heavy snow to attend the three day seminar. Presentations were given in English and Russian with translations by a professor and his students. Topics shared by the American educators included: Special Education in the United States,



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Current Issues in Inclusive Education, Research-Based Instructional Strategies, Models of Co-Teaching and Collaboration, Effective Collaboration with Parents of Children with Disabilities, Services for People with Disabilities in One New York County, Special Education Models and Strategies, Gifted Students with Learning and/or Behavioral Disorders, Autism: Diagnosis, Strategies and Supports, Children who are Deaf and/or Blind: Strategies and Practical Experiences, Early Childhood Practices in the United States, and Psychological Development of Children with Special Needs. One Russian principal presented on Challenges and Tendencies of School Inclusive Practice in Russian Education. Participants were especially interested in co-teaching and collaboration models as well as the overall education system in the United States. A few teachers mentioned that they were familiar with co-teaching models, but the majority of participants were concerned about how it could work within Russian schools due to the fact that students with disabilities are educated in separate schools or at home.

The group from the United States was taken to several school sites where only students with disabilities are educated. Seminar participants first visited the Rehabilitation Center for Children and Teenagers with Special Needs in Kurchatov, Russia. The instructors taught the students functional skills, music and theatre. The next visit was to the Psychological-Medical-Social Institute of Kursk. The team was able to observe therapy sessions with children who had speech deficits, neurological disorders, and other medical conditions. Although the government of the Russian Federation is attempting to move toward full inclusion, it is too expensive to implement the necessary changes. For instance, general education schools are not equipped for students in wheelchairs due to stairs and bathrooms will not accommodate wheelchairs. Thus, without changes in the physical environment, full inclusion will fail to become a reality.

Future collaborations include hosting a team of Russian special educators in the United States to allow visits to model school sites specializing in full inclusion and co-teaching/collaborative practices. In addition, opportunities to provide online trainings for teachers in Russian will help teachers to understand possible models of full inclusion. Continued collaborations will be possible with the use of translators as few Russians in this area are fluent in English. Both teams are motivated to continue cooperative projects to encourage full inclusion for students with disabilities.



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Have you checked out DISES' website?

[Just click here!](#)

Student Members News

Are you a Student? Do you know a Student?

Are you interested in becoming more involved with DISES?

Hello DISES Student and Professional Members!

My name is Jacqueline (Jackie) Rodriguez, and I am the DISES Student Representative to the 2012 DISES Board. I met many of you at the CEC Annual Convention in April and I look forward to meeting more of you throughout the year.

The DISES Board has eagerly developed a STUDENT SECTION on the DISES website. We are currently looking for contributions from DISES Student members for “*Spotlight*” and “*Blog*” posts!

1. Each month a DISES Student member will be “*Spotlighted*” in the student section of the DISES website.

In order to submit an abstract for the Spotlight, the student needs to adhere to a 150-200 word parameter.

The abstract should include

- Cultural background,
- Education,
- Research interest and/or teaching experience,
- Interest in international special education.

The student’s picture will accompany the spotlight post!

Check out the [Current Student Spotlight Here!](#)

**If you are interested in submitting a VIDEO of your spotlight instead of text, please contact me and I will help you develop the video!

[Submit Your Spotlight Here!](#)

2. Student members can also choose to write for the “*Student Blog*” on the webpage.

In order to submit a blog post, themes have been pre-selected and students can choose from 24 themes on the submission form.

- Blog submissions should be within a 300-500 word parameter.
- Include both the native language and the English language translation.
- Student’s picture will be posted alongside the blog post!

[Submit Your Blog Post Here!](#)

3. Student members who have professional blogs can submit them to be linked from the student section of the DISES website for direct access by DISES members and non-members alike. Consider sending me your blog web address so that it can be linked. We are looking for:

- Instructional blogs
- Research Blogs
- Programming and Collaboration Blogs

Please consider reaching out to me and other DISES members if you have questions about becoming more involved as student members. We are looking for students to become spotlight and blog authors on our website each month SO CONSIDER SUBMITTING an abstract!

Jackie Rodriguez

University of Central Florida

Jacqueline.A.Rodriguez@gmail.com

Student Spotlight September 2012



This is the inaugural *Student Spotlight* and I hope it will motivate DISES Student Members to submit their own spotlight abstract for inclusion on our new website! We plan to post a new student spotlight each month in an effort to highlight our DISES Student Members and the contributions you make to the international special education community.

I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Exceptional Education department of the University of Central Florida. My research interests include capacity building through global inclusive education policy and practice- specifically in developing and post conflict areas, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education for culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs, and urban teacher preparation.

This fall I'll have the great fortune to intern with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in Amman, Jordan and West Bank, Palestine. While interning I'll be collecting my dissertation data on promising inclusive education practices employed by UNRWA educators. I'm looking forward to learning more about UNRWA's new inclusive education reform and the current status of inclusion of students with special needs in UNRWA schools.

At UCF I work on a team of incredibly talented professors and colleagues who have developed a "mixed-reality" teaching experience called TLE TeachLivE. TeachLivE uses avatar students to help prepare pre-service and in-service teachers in practicing or refining their teaching skills. As the program director for the TLE TeachLivE™ Lab, I am responsible for assisting in project development including scale up procedures and coordination of university partners in system protocols and teacher programming. Check out the website for TeachLivE™ www.UCF.edu/TeachLivE!

Prior to entering the PhD program at University of Central Florida, I was a special educator in Washington, D.C., and Florida. I've worked in the public, private and charter systems of education to facilitate the move towards inclusive education and provide research-based practices for co-teaching in the general education classroom.

One of the most important lessons I've learned as a member of DISES is to reach out to other members for support and mentorship. Mentorship of prospective and early career special educators is vital to the success of our students with special needs. My mentors in DISES afforded me the opportunity of interning with UNRWA this fall and have continued to support my growth as a student and advocate. Please consider reaching out to me and other DISES members if you have questions about becoming more involved as student members. We are looking for students to become spotlight and blog authors on our website each month SO CONSIDER SUBMITTING an abstract!

All the best, Jackie

Upcoming Events



CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The Bridge from Segregation to Inclusion...A Long Journey Vancouver, British Columbia 7-11 July 2013

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS—1 October 2012

Dr. Marg Csapo and Dr. Iris S. Drower, Conference Co-Chairs, cordially invite all interested parties to submit presentation proposals for IASE's 13th Biennial Conference —*The Bridge from Segregation to Inclusion...The Long Journey*— sponsored by the International Association of Special Education (IASE), and the University of British Columbia (UBC), Department of Educational Counselling & Psychology and Special Education.

Submit Your Proposals to: iris.drower@asu.edu or <http://www.iase.org/>

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS:

Please be sure to review all of the information and instructions regarding proposal submission prior to completing your proposal.

- Review your proposal thoroughly before submitting.
- Proposals should be submitted in English.
- All proposals are stored in a secure database.

All proposals are due on or before **1 October 2012**.

Article Submissions

DISES Newsletter

The Editor of the DISES Newsletter welcomes member submissions of articles presenting current teaching innovations, research, collaborative efforts, and service initiatives around the globe. Please take this opportunity to share current activities and information with your colleagues internationally. Please direct completed articles and inquiries to the editor at:

newsletter.dises@gmail.com

For Newsletter guidelines: [click here!](#)

The Journal of International Special Needs Education

The purpose of the Journal of International Special Needs Education is to provide DISES members and members of the international scientific community with information that reflect the field of special education around the world. It is a multi-disciplinary journal for reporting original and theoretical contributions concerning disability and the delivery of special education programs and services to individuals with disabilities throughout the world. For further information regarding submission inquiries please contact the editors at:

jisne.dises@gmail.com

For Journal guidelines: [click here!](#)

DISES Membership CEC/ISG

Time to renew your membership? Or maybe you aren't a member yet? Use the following links to begin or renew your membership in the Council for Exceptional Students (CEC) and remember to add The Division of International Special Education and Services (DISES):

[CEC Associate Application](#)

[CEC Premier Application](#)

[CEC Professional Application](#)

[CEC Retired Application](#)

[CEC Student Application](#)

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