

# iatse Update

SPRING UPDATE

SPRING 08

## 20TH IATSE ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Dates: 12 – 14 June, 2008

Venue: St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9

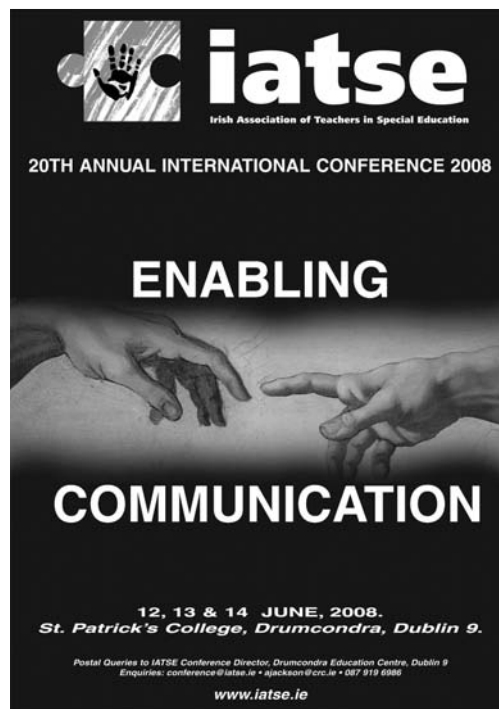
The programme for this year's conference, entitled "Enabling Communication" is almost completed. The printed version will be posted to members and presenters as soon as it is available from the printers and a copy will be displayed on the website.

The keynote address on opening night, Thursday, 12 June, will be given by Maggie Johnston and her theme will be 'Creating A Communication Friendly Environment'

Maggie is a speech and language therapist advisor specialising in childhood communication disorders and selective mutism. With over twenty years experience in education and community settings, Maggie works closely with families and schools in East Kent and provides training and workshops for schools, parents and health professionals across the UK and abroad.

After the official opening there will be a reception, hosted by Dr. Pauric Travers, President of the College. This will provide an opportunity for delegates, guests and presenters to meet and socialise before the busy two days of presentations and posters and displays.

The range of paper presentations is varied and comprehensive. Presenters come from all over Ireland as well as from England, Scotland, USA, China and India. Two presenters from Australia had to cancel at the last minute due to travel difficulties. This blend of speakers from places with different experiences and legislation is very informative and enriching for everyone. Titles, in general, reflect the broad theme of conference but each has its own unique focus. Topics include practical issues such as Deafness and Communication, Memory Skills, Sensory Drama, Communicating Science, Floortime Approach, Personal Safety Skills for Students, Handwriting Programme, Literacy and Teaching of Phonics. International perspectives from China, India, UK and the US will be presented. Issues of current interest will include Communication & Collaboration in the IEP process, Psychiatric Disorders in Children, Research on Disability Data, School Leadership, Behavioural Support and many many other topics of interest at present.



As usual the presentation will be organised in concurrent sessions. It is important for delegates to study the programme in advance to make the choice and check on location. Presenters have been requested to provide a synopsis of their paper for display on the website after conference. Presenters are also responsible for providing handouts for delegates if necessary or relevant. In a climate of conservation delegates are asked not to expect paper handouts from all presentations. Other options may be offered. No photocopying facilities will be available at conference.

On Friday evening after the sessions there will be a reception in the Clock Tower in the Department of Education complex in Marlborough Street. Transport will be provided if required.

On Saturday after the concurrent sessions there will be an Open Forum

to debate and discuss some aspects of the conference theme. Conference will end at one o'clock.

A limited amount of student accommodation in College rooms will be available as well as lunch in the College diningroom on the Friday of conference but both must be pre-booked. Coffee will be available at break times as part of conference package.

The poster display will be on view in the Auditorium on Friday. Details on the posters will be available in the conference programme. A tribute to the honorary members of IATSE will be collated and displayed by Barbara O'Neill. Barbara is herself an honorary member of the association. Delegates are invited to call in during the day on Friday. The publishers display will be available on Friday and Saturday.

We would ask all members to distribute information about the conference to their colleagues and other staff and schools that might be interested in attending. The conference is an invaluable source of information and professional development but is only really successful if it can attract a critical mass of delegates. Support the committee and the association by attending yourself or encourage a friend or colleague to come along.

Looking forward to seeing many of you in June.

# PREPARATIONS FOR A CONFERENCE

## The Story from the Wings

Conference time is almost upon us again! This is the annual event where teachers, parents, SNAs and other professionals working with students with special educational needs meet to discuss the latest research and innovation, to share strategies and projects, to meet old friends, to greet colleagues from abroad and, when all the hard work is over, to chat and socialise and catch up on all the important stories and gossip.

This year we have special cause for celebration as this is the 20th conference. For a small voluntary committee comprising teachers, who are either working or studying on a full time basis, the organisation of an annual event such as this is a mammoth task. Preparations start after the annual AGM in the autumn but in fact the dates and title are usually decided long before that. The first major task is getting out the call for papers and then getting back in the proposals from potential presenters. The committee must then decide which papers to accept for the programme. Care must be taken to have a variety of topics that give breadth and balance, just like the curriculum! The programme tries to strike a balance between research and class based practice, between theory and provision for as many of the categories of students with special needs as possible and between teachers and other relevant personnel as presenters. With a range of subject matter and concurrent sessions it is hoped that there will be a full programme of interest to all our delegates from at home and abroad, from mainstream and special schools, from schools, Colleges, research centres and service providers. This year we were oversubscribed with applications and had to reject some paper proposals. In addition we received a large number of late applications which we could not consider as the programme was full. This wealth of interest may reflect the fact that many teachers and others working in the area are engaging in more professional development, post-graduate studies and research or school based project than in the past.

The final programme, when printed, will be available on the web and delegates can then decide on the presentations of interest to them in advance of conference. In addition we would like to encourage attendees to pre book as early as possible. The registration form will be available shortly on the website at [www.iatse.ie](http://www.iatse.ie) In addition a form is contained in this newsletter.

In tandem with the selection of presentations the committee must select and confirm a speaker to deliver the keynote address on the theme of conference at the opening ceremonies on the Thursday night, chairpersons for the sessions must be chosen, accommodation and presentation rooms must be booked, printing and posting must be done, social events must be arranged, publishers and poster display must be organised as well as making preparations for registration of delegates. A most important task is the application to the Department of Education & Science for sanction for teachers to be absent with pay from their school on the Friday of conference. This sanction has in recent years been extended to cover all types of teachers in mainstream primary schools as well as teachers in special schools and special classes. Details of the criteria for this leave is available on the IATSE website.

The month leading to conference is quite hectic with pre-booking and all the last minute details that are so important. This all comes at a time of the year when many teachers on committee are very busy with year-end activities and events in their own schools. A special word of thanks to the principals and colleagues of all our committee members for their patience and support all during the year but especially at conference time.

Finally the conference date comes around and it is time to see if all the hard work has been worthwhile. The success and climate of conference is mainly determined by the delegates themselves –

good attendance numbers, enthusiasm for the array of topics and activities and a willingness to participate wholeheartedly in the entirety of the conference. Hopefully this year many of you will come along to help us celebrate the twentieth conference of IATSE.

Finally a word of thanks to all the hard-working committee, old and new, that give so generously of their spare time to organise and plan this event. Mile Buiochas!

*Ann Jackson. Conference Director*

[conference@iatse.ie](mailto:conference@iatse.ie) or [ajackson@crc.ie](mailto:ajackson@crc.ie)

## ANNUAL IATSE AWARDS '08

IATSE's annual award aims to give recognition to good practice in Irish schools in the area of special education. Last year the CEC of IATSE had the pleasure of awarding Sinéad Clifford of Coars National School, Co. Kerry with a framed certificate and a cheque for €500 for her winning submission. In her paper she described 'A Programme for a Child with Selective Mutism- a successful journey into speech'.

All practising teachers involved in special education are invited to apply. This also includes teachers of mainstream classes where pupils with special educational needs are included.



*IATSE Award winner Sinéad Clifford from Coars NS, with President Ann Jackson and Principal Marion Murphy.*

Submission may describe:

- A piece of work carried out with a particular pupil/group or class
- A programme of staff development established (e.g. school based induction programme for new staff i.e. teachers or SNAs)
- A curricular programme or innovation

A submission may be in the form of a case study / project which would describe the practical application, methodologies and outcomes of the innovation. It may also take the form of a narrative through which the story of the innovation is told. It should be between 1,000 and 3,000 words in length. Submissions may be made by an individual or a group of teachers.

Up to four prizes of €500 each will be awarded each year. Only one award will be made for each winning submission.

### Adjudication

Winning submissions will be selected by a panel of adjudicators comprising members of the Central Executive Committee of IATSE, representatives of REACH committee, and members selected from a panel of readers. The CEC of IATSE will be the final arbiter in relation to the award.

Applicants should note that submissions may be published on the IATSE website.

*Submissions should be made to Annual Award, IATSE, c/o Drumcondra Education Centre, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. Closing date for submissions is Monday 8th September 2008.*

# CYBERCORNER



Many of the software programs used in school for students with special needs can be divided into one of two major categories – **Content-rich** software and **Content-free** software.

Content-rich software, as the name implies, contains most or all of the content that the student will use. Programs in this category would include interactive talking books, spelling programs, maths practice programs and packages such as **Issues in English** for use with second level or adult students with literacy difficulties. In fact most drill and practice programs, such as **Maths Made Easy** and **Reading for Literacy** series from Prim-Ed fall into this category.

Content-free software, again as the name implies, has little or no content other than a framework into which students and/or teachers can input text and pictures and sound as relevant. Content-free program has the advantage that the content can be tailored to the specific needs and ability of the student or it facilitates the student to present material in an individual way. However they can have time implication for busy teachers if the need requires them to input a lot of content on a regular basis.

Commonly used Content-free software would include word-processing programs, spreadsheets, presentation and publishing packages. Examples are Word, Powerpoint, Excel, Access, Publisher and the equivalent programs from OpenOffice and Star Office. Teachers will make regular use of many of these applications and will introduce many of them to students when they have acquired the necessary skills to use them.

There are many content-free packages designed specifically for student use. **Clicker 5** from Cricksoft is an innovative word-processor designed for use at

primary level or for use with students with special educational needs. It has most of the standard features required for use as a writing tool but in addition it provides the student with picture, speech and word grid support. Teachers can personalise it for individual students and can make word banks, literacy and cross-curricular support grids and talking books. In addition the program, which can be assessed by using the keyboard and mouse, can be operated by means of a switch and scanning for students with no hand function. Older students who may need to progress to a more age-appropriate program might use **Wordbar**, which provides the speech and word grid support, and is used in conjunction with a standard word-processor such as Word. More information about these programs can be obtained on [www.cricksoft.com](http://www.cricksoft.com)

**Powerpoint**, or its equivalent, is very useful to support writing and literacy skills for older students. They can be used to encourage revision of information and lessons, comprehension and project work as well as being attractive for students who are slow and laborious producer of text in an essay format.

Teachers, working with students with more significant cognitive disabilities, need content-free options that facilitate quick and easy production of basic activities for their students. **SwitchIt! Maker 2** allows staff to make attractive cause and effect activities using pictures, digital photographs, symbols, video, text and speech. These activities are easy to make and can be individualised to needs of each student. Students can activate the activities using mouse click, single switch or touch monitor.

**Chooselt! Maker 2** is a framework for staff to produce choice making activities on the computer. Again pictures, symbols, photos, video, text, speech and sound can be inserted. Activities include odd-one-out, find the..., categorisation, receptive language, auditory and visual discrimination, and lots more. Both programs contain free resources including sample symbols, pictures, video clips and music file for use with the programs. The programs are easy to use and have great potential as an educational resources for teachers and students and for use in the classroom and at home. For more information on these programs look on [www.inclusive.co.uk](http://www.inclusive.co.uk)

Ann Jackson [ajackson@crc.ie](mailto:ajackson@crc.ie)

## PETER McGRANE

The CEC of IATSE was saddened to learn of the untimely death of Peter McGrane. In his role as INTO CEC member, Peter acted as the liaison officer between the INTO and the IATSE. His support and enthusiasm for the organisation will be missed. We offer our sympathy to his family and his colleagues in the INTO.



## THE FUTURISTIC WHEELCHAIR PROJECT



The Futuristic Wheelchair Project arose from discussions in the Senior Post Primary classrooms on the needs of wheelchair users in the future. This was a topic that evoked a passionate and well-informed response from our adolescent students and we were moved to create an ideal wheelchair for the future. Our starting point was an old-style redundant wheelchair which immediately stirred excitement at the prospect of its being transformed into our dream chair. This project was initially incorporated into our Art planning for the year and soon spread to other curricular areas. During Maths class, we surveyed other classes for ideas and listed and prioritised items to be considered for the chair. Ideas and suggestions for the chair's colour scheme and accessories were canvassed from the entire school body through an Art competition.

The actual construction and decoration of the chair involved the students collaborating together and helping each other where possible. Problems with the construction were discussed within the group and possible solutions canvassed from the students themselves. This focus on learning in a social setting meant that the activities were seen to be relevant, fun and challenging.

In addition, we feel that this project has greatly enhanced the self-esteem and participation of our students. The students have enjoyed the challenge and the team approach to this project. This collaborative approach extended to the wider school and clinic community, as evidenced in the support given by therapy staff such as Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists. This clinic-wide support has enabled our students to get out of their wheelchairs and participate while on the floor – a very liberating experience for wheelchair users. In addition, we found the freedom of working on the floor to be very therapeutic and calming for some of our behaviourally-challenged students.

The long-term aim for the project is to produce an entry for the Make a Book Challenge ([www.jcsp.ie](http://www.jcsp.ie)). This entails adding a life-size sculpted figure reading a book while seated in the futuristic chair.

During the project we were invited by Trinity College to help design an online interactive driving game based on their Virtual Dublin Metropolis Project. The game uses our futuristic chair as the driving vehicle going through virtual Dublin streets. This aspect of the



*Designers of the future at the CRC Jerry Pierce, President of the IATSE and teacher at the CRC.*

project has been very successful. It has challenged our students to devise a story-line for the game and to develop audio and visual effects to enhance its appeal to younger players. Our students have developed a repertoire of technical and communication skills as they engaged enthusiastically in planned meetings with the game designers.

We were visited by the Nationwide team during this period and we hope to see the Futuristic Chair Project featured in a forthcoming Nationwide broadcast on RTE 1.

Link to the online game: [www.candointeractive.com/crc](http://www.candointeractive.com/crc)

Link to Trinity College press release:

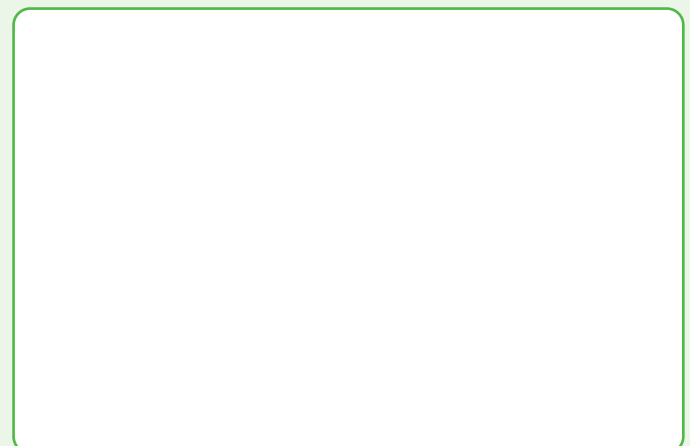
<http://www.tcd.ie/Communications/pressRelease.php?headerID=534&pressReleaseArchive=2007>

## NATIONAL CHOIR COMPETITION FOR SPECIAL SCHOOLS

The National Choir Competition for Special Schools has become one of the major highlights of the school year for many special schools of pupils with mild general learning disabilities. The 2007 competition had to be unavoidably deferred from its' usual December slot. However, due to popular demand, it was rescheduled to Thursday, April 10 and was held in the Mullingar Arts Centre. A dozen choirs from special schools around the country took part. The standard of choral singing in this competition continues to improve each year. It makes for a wonderful day's entertainment as each choir presents a repertoire of songs from musical categories such as gospel, religious, traditional, folk, pop and rock 'n roll.

St. Augustine's School Choir from Blackrock, Dublin emerged as the overall winners for 2007. The choir members and their music teacher/conductor, Sylvia Cunningham, were jubilant in their victory. They had come second on two previous occasions and were wearying of the "bridesmaid jokes".

The 2008 National Choir Competition for Special Schools now resumes to its' usual slot and will be held on Thursday, 4 December in the Arts Centre in Mullingar. All enquiries on the competition should be made to Carmel Bradwell, St Ultan's School, Navan – (046 –9021831) or Mary O' Malley, St Francis School, Portlaoise (057-8621847)



*St Augustine's, Blackrock - The triumphant choir at the recent National Choir Competition for Special Schools*

*Rosemary Fahy, Treasurer of the IATSE and teacher at St. Ultan's Special School, Navan.*