

# Shifting the point of emphasis to lend a hand to all

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## ***What made me do it differently***

“Many things can wait; the child cannot. Now is the time his bones are being formed, his mind is being developed. To him, we cannot say tomorrow; his name is today.”  
Mistral (1889 – 1957)

Throughout my career these words have been my driving force, as I have desperately wanted to ensure that children receive the best possible help in the here and now. I had a desire to develop structures, which will create the circumstances necessary to fulfil this.

I have been given the opportunity to work in a variety of settings to introduce Conductive Education. These have included the state special-education system, independent special-education projects, projects set up and run by parents, support for parents to set up their own projects, work with multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and ‘no-disciplinary’ teams – and any one who expressed an interest towards my work and wants be part of it.

Since stepping upon the path of learning as a child, I have always examined issues, concerns and problems from many different angles, not just from those which were taught or given to me. I had an insatiable and unstoppable curiosity to try to understand and see the truth from many different points of view. This has been one of the most important elements of my teaching and because it is innate in me, it makes sense to expect my students to find their own new solutions and be able to problem-solve in ways never thought of before.

In the mid-eighties when my journey really began to carry Conductive Education to the West, I had to face many unexpected setbacks. I had to realise that important factors essential for sufficient service-delivery were compromised by the restrictions of different project structures, by policies, and by lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of management. I was often restricted in my ability to use my knowledge and experience, to utilise and work with my full creative power, which is fundamental to be able to teach

in a conductive way. When I worked like this my dissatisfaction with my work reached a level that was more painful than the fear of stepping into the unknown to try and do it my way.

I was thirsty for like-minded conversations. I wanted to create a fertile ground for work where we could all share and grow. I knew that I had to deal with new problems, which genuinely needed to be addressed, solutions had to make sense; they had to be sustainable and realistic.

One day driving home from work it suddenly became clear to me that I had to stop doing what I was doing. After a whole night spent wide-awake and trying to overcome my fears, I was ready, but I was on my own. It was 1998 when I first took the leap from being a conductor contracted from my business Conductive Education Support Services (an independent training and consultancy service) to setting up the Conductive Education Support Centre to serve the real needs of people in the here and now.

It was hard to make this first step but help came from two significant directions essential for completion of the vision to materialise. By making those steps I became richer and stronger in many ways and I was reassured that working from the heart was meant to be my way.

Over those ten years while I was supporting those who wished to be part of the conductive movement, I had many unanswered questions.

### ***The turning point***

The real turning point for my practice came in 1992 (eight years after qualifying as a conductor). I was conducting an initial consultation and a mother was handing her child to me to hold when it struck me that she needed more help than the child did. She was saying to me 'I bought my child to you to help him'. I felt and knew that she was really meaning 'Please help me; I need help'.

From then on I shifted my focus towards the parents. I understood that if I wanted to help the child first I had to help the parent. If I could not reach the parent, then my support for the child would be significantly reduced. I had to find more ways to support parents. The child's success was at stake. Children depend greatly upon their parents and the parents' behaviour and attitude determine whether their child makes that step up to the next level.

A very important factor that I began to understand over the years is that I can have access to the child only if the parent allows me to. I have seen many times that parents were lost, misguided, confused and hurt and consequently unable to attend regularly. Often they have stopped attending sessions altogether. Their children had been doing so well but this was unexpectedly taken away from them because their parents did not get the right kind of support.

Due to lack of support, parents may be denied the opportunity to realise that small changes within the home structure would have made a significant difference in their child's abilities to manage themselves better. For this reason they could not become the kind of parents who learned to take charge and by doing so increase their certainty about the future.

Parents may not know that they were and always will be the most important people in their child's life. Parents always know their children better than anyone else. At times they just need to be guided in the right direction to be able to support them better.

My mission was to put into practice what I had learned over the years and to listen. To really listen to the people.

### ***Shifting mind zones...***

#### ***That first important phone call***

“The beginning is the most important part of the work”

Plato

Conductive Education for the child begins when the parents first phone the centre. The teaching starts at this point and not in the classroom, as some may expect. It is vital that the staff who deal with the initial telephone call understand this. They must have clear guidelines on how to respond to the first contact and how to take appropriate details. Their behaviour and attitude sets the scene and reflects the level of service and care of the conductive establishment. This is when we begin to form parents' mindset towards understanding how Conductive Education works and what is necessary in order for it to be successful. Staff must demonstrate skills to pitch the information at the appropriate level for the parent.

Some parents know exactly what they want when they phone. Others phone because they have exhausted all their resources; they often say 'I don't know why I am phoning you, I just need to talk to some one'. Sometimes people want to understand more about Conductive Education so staff has to be able to deliver explanations on several levels. Some may phone with a certain attitude and want to challenge us about the system.

Grandparents might make that phone call – asking whether their grandchild could attend the centre because they have seen an advert or because they have heard how beneficial it is, even though the mother herself is not ready to seek help. In these instances staff must be able to guide the grandparents and advise them to take into consideration matters such as relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, how to create and respect boundaries within the family and communication issues.

At this first conversation the staff must be able to give something valuable for parents to hold on to. Partnership begins here. Building trust, respect, and active exchange between conductors and the family is a fundamental starting

point before consultation. Parents as much as children have to feel that they will be guided, we must bring the feeling of success into their lives and strengthen it with every contact we have with them.

### ***The Questionnaire***

The questionnaire is included in the pack sent out after the first phone call. It is important to reach parents before we meet them face to face. When they read the information, parents are in an environment familiar to them. It invites them to take part in a conversation, which has to be on-going and brings active exchange and guidance to mind. It creates a sense of commitment to the journey that they have embarked upon.

This questionnaire serves two main purposes.

1. It helps parents sit down, take time out and think about the answers, maybe in ways in which they never thought of before, it helps them to organise their thoughts and to clarify their understanding of their child. This is a teaching tool to help create a mindset of exchanging, observing and looking at important situations (how the child sits, stands, moves around, transfers, washes etc.). The questionnaire aims to help parents to look at their child in terms of total support rather than partial adjustments. Once parents have understood where they are they are able to move on. If they do not recognise the problems as they arise they will not be able to explore possible solutions.
2. The questionnaire helps *us* understand what is important for the parents, how much they understand about their child and what their aims are for their child.

Perhaps this will be the first time that parents have written these things down and by doing this they make a formal commitment to their wishes and their hopes. It provides something that we can always go back to and remind them about when we talk about necessary follow-ups, changes of life-style etc. at home.

### ***Initial Consultation***

When I trained, the focus at initial consultation was mainly on the child and was conducted mainly from the child's point of view. We observed the child, read the child's emotional state, attitude and performance towards the social and physical environment, as well as observing the child's physical abilities. The whole room was set up to find out as much as possible about the child's ability and attitude to learning.

“Although initially, Conductive Education was designed to deal with the child who is involved, but within that context of provision, we can extend the ideology and implement it in a wider context”. (Szathmáry, 2002).

Today, our consultations oscillate in a dynamic way between child and parents, which encompasses how we can immediately have a positive effect on the whole family life. The consultations are geared to find out as much as we can about both the child and the family and direct our influence to both.

“If we only focus our attention on the child, we would miss a very important perspective of our work, we must not forget that our ultimate aim is to facilitate the multi-dimensional lives of each concerned. Dysfunctions manifests and eventually sets in when connections are abate or stopped on some level altogether.”. (Szathmáry, 2002)

Consultations are handled in a non-threatening, inspiring manner. This is the time for us to create our rapport with the parents and the child and to introduce our teaching style and our expectations. This is when we begin to establish what is important, what we believe, this is when we highlight what can be easily changed at home and can start straight away. We give a very clear indication of what standards the parents can expect from us. We observe and facilitate parents as much as observe and facilitate the child. We give confidence to parents on how they to hold their children, how they talk to them, how they manage them (for example, in terms of getting them dressed, encouraging them to defy the odds etc.). We introduce strategies and problem-solving tasks, which will carry children to the next level.

It is important to acknowledge and compliment them on their child’s abilities. Recently we had a four-and-a-half-year-old boy for a consultation. When we told the parents that their son was very bright they went very, very quiet. After a few moments’ pause, the Mother said, with tears in her eyes, ‘Thank you’. She said, that she had always felt he was bright but, because nobody had ever acknowledged it or saw his potential, she found it very hard to believe this. We also ask parents to bring photographs of their child from birth to date with them to the consultation, which gives us some idea of how the child was as a baby – but by talking to the parents and by looking back at the time the photographs were taken, healing starts. Obviously we can also see how the child has changed as he/she was growing up. It is important to give honest compliments about the children, about their appearance, their determination – anything which is true and will help parents to appreciate their child and help the child to learn to love themselves.

## ***Maintaining momentum, building new connections...***

After the child settles into appropriate tuition classes, it is vital to do at least two things to help the parents:

1. Let parents have time out to take a break, take a breather and do things for themselves while they know that their child is well looked after. Encourage them to find something for themselves to enjoy, to gain nourishment so that they can be strong to be able to support their children. The majority of parents are exhausted to the limit, emotionally, spiritually, psychologically and physically. The gift that they can give themselves may not be something big, maybe just to enjoy the simple beauty of life, maybe a walk along the beach, a walk in the forest, to sit down for afternoon tea, read a magazine or a good book, or just take time to be alone.
2. Encourage parents to make real physical changes at home. Rearrange, or sometimes help them to create space for the child. Invite them to design a living environment, which represents their expectations and beliefs and consequently facilitates the child's orthofunctional development and growing up. We help parents to utilise existing furniture in a creative way. We guide them to start thinking about purchasing the right kind of furniture. We help them understand that if their home looks like a medical unit for children with special needs, then 'disability' is emphasised. Our aim for children is to recognise themselves as unique individuals, therefore the environment must represent and strengthen that individuality.

## ***Conductive Education at home***

“It is a task of paramount importance to lift the individual out of this state of inactivity and to put him back into an everyday life”  
(Hári, 1990)

Hári clearly emphasises one reason why we do not encourage running Conductive Education 'task series' at home. The task series carry the blue prints of possible solutions for everyday functions and are designed to act as a compass, which guides the child towards future progress. Many things need to be taken into consideration and must be in place in order to fulfil the complexity of a successful task series. It is a powerful tool which carries the manifestation of essential skills to materialise and be available for functions.

The home environment provides the ground for a different purpose of nourishment for the child. In our home we are the most sensitive, this is our private territory and there is a limit to how much we allow “strangers” and outside influences to take part in it. Therefore running conductive education

task series at home could have an affect similar to that experienced when a very strong “medicine” is administered. It could be invasive and could confuse purposes with a demand to shift boundaries to an unnatural level. It may be uninteresting and irrelevant to the child. Children could react by resistance or total shut down. This consequently has a downward spiral effect on the life of the whole family.

There are certain circumstances when ‘task series’ can be done at home, but there are conditions attached to this, which cannot be dismissed. Conductive Education Support Services encourages and offers regular home visits to guide parents how to make that transition between inactivity towards active participation in everyday life.

Professor Petö put primary importance throughout tasks series on explaining to children and teaching them why we practice each task and how that task can be translated and used in every-day functions. At the Conductive Education Support Centre children are facilitated to perform at an optimum level according to their needs. In order to establish this way of existing as a norm, to speed up the learning process and to facilitate more refined performance with reduced help, we must extend this provision into the child’s whole waking hours. Active, conscious problem-solving has to be their way of existence – as it is for all of us – in order to learn to perform adequately in response to the ever-increasing demands of life. There are endless issues and areas that can and must be looked at during such home visits. Conductive Education at home, opens up a whole new exciting chapter in supporting children and families in the conductive pedagogical way in their here and now.

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#### *References*

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