

## The Challenge of Conductive Education

**Conductive Education is a system in which the education, treatment and care of handicapped children is concentrated in the hands of one highly trained individual - a conductor, in an intensive 24 hour individualised basis. Its spectacular success in Hungary poses a challenge to our multidisciplinary approach. It also challenges the medical model of teaching children with physical disability.**

---

**TONY JORDAN is Principal of Sandymount School and Clinic, Sandymount, Dublin.**

---

It has been fourteen years since Dr. Maria Hari, Director of the Peto Institute for Conductive Education in Hungary, first visited Ireland. While attending an International Cerebral Palsy Conference in Dublin, she spoke of Conductive Education and explained how it worked in Budapest. The general consensus at the conference was that the system would not transfer to the west. It was felt that each of the specialities like physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, teaching, nursing, child care work, was so structured and embedded in our multidisciplinary system, that to try to encapsulate them all into the one person (conductor) would be unrealistic and in fact impossible. There was also a general scepticism about the claims being made for Conductive Education. It was said that insufficient research had been carried out which would satisfy professionals as to its merits.

In 1985 B.B.C. television made a film called *Standing Up For Joe*. It told of a severely handicapped child, Joe Horseley, who was undergoing an extraordinary transformation through a process called Conductive Education. His parents had taken him to Hungary for treatment because they could find nothing like it in Britain. The programme provoked a flood of enquiries from all over the world, including Ireland.

### **To Hungary with Hope**

It seems extraordinary, but from that programme began a steady stream of families taking their children to Budapest for assessment and treatment. Within two years over 150 British families had done so and a British colony grew up there. Implicit and explicit in this exercise was a severe criticism of the existing attitude toward the services for disabled children in Britain. Statements were made and well publicised that "the people in Hungary want the children to succeed" (BBC film). It was suggested that people were more interested in defending the status quo, than considering conductive education with an open mind. The power of television once again became apparent and a huge pool of parental frustration, hope, anger and guilt was tapped. Parental pressure came into its own, and the professionals were put on the defensive. In Ireland too, parents took the initiative and a steady stream of families began to journey to Budapest. Publicity about it became constant, as the costs involved were large, and fundraising became an almost essential ingredient. Irish parents have not been overtly critical of the existing services here, so there has not been the tension experienced in

Britain between the professionals and those who are firm advocates of Conductive Education. Irish children have gone to Budapest for short and long terms and return to their respective local centres with no rancour. The various Irish centres are still in the process of studying Conductive Education, conducting pilot projects, visiting Budapest, holding seminars and making adaptations.

### **Bringing the System Home**

In Northern Ireland the situation has resembled Britain more than the Republic. More families have gone to Budapest; more public demands are being made. There is a "Buddy Bear" organisation set up which has conducted a spectacular publicity and fundraising drive. It has succeeded in drawing in the support of their three members of the European Parliament. It aims to set up a centre doing pure Conductive Education in Tyrone. They recently had Dr. Hari and a team of Conductors visit Northern Ireland to assess children locally.

In the Republic too, parents have been active and with the help of interested professionals an association has been set up. It is called the Association for the Promotion of Conductive Education (A.P.C.E.). It was launched publicly in late 1988 by the Minister for Social Welfare in the presence of the Hungarian Ambassador. Recently the Hungarian Government has begun to back the internationalising of Conductive Education. It realises that it brings very favourable publicity to Hungary and is a great source of foreign currency. It is planning a new international centre in Budapest which will train professionals from abroad as conductors. The cost envisaged is £100 million. The more foreign countries contribute to this cost, the more places will be allocated to the training of its own conductors. In 1987 the British government gave £326,000 to Birmingham University for research into Conductive Education. There is a project under way there at the moment to train conductors and seek to transfer pure Conductive Education into Britain.

### **What is Conductive Education?**

Conductive Education is a system in which the education, treatment and care of handicapped children is concentrated in the hands of one highly trained individual - a conductor. It is a total programme tailored to each individual child, 24 hours a day. It derives from Andreas Peto who was a professor at the training college for Teachers of the Handicapped in Hungary from 1945 to 1963. He had the opportunity to develop the efficiency of the education and training of conductors as the Director of the Educational Home for the Locomotor Handicapped.

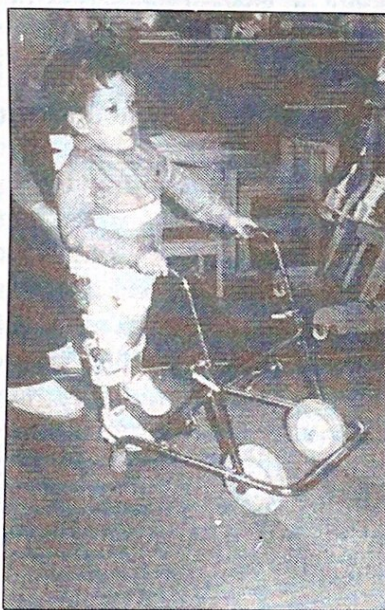
The theory behind it says that the control of damaged motor functions can be rerouted to undamaged parts of the brain - that you can find new ways to control the body. This approach is intrinsically different from the approaches used in the west. The Hungarians see brain damage as a learning disorder which needs remediation. Their approach is more an educational approach; they teach, 'lead out', the child to find ways and means of doing what is required. They use basic educational principles, motivation, rhythm, group dynamics, repetition and task analyses. They do not 'treat' children. They see the problem as an educational one and not a medical one. They are teachers not therapists.

In their book *Conductive Education - System for Overcoming Motor Disorder* (1986) Philippa Cottam and Andrew Sutton, who have pioneered Conductive Education in

Britain suggest six principles that need to be followed to reveal the real worth of Conductive Education.

### Principles of Conductive Education

1. Conductive Education can successfully be transferred out of Hungary only with the Peto Institute's active collaboration in passing on its knowledge and experience.
2. The system must be established, initially, at least, in an institution set up specially to receive it.
3. The work must be carried out at first in as Hungarian a way as possible.
4. The outcome of the work must be evaluated.
5. Then and only then, should Conductive Education be adapted to our indigenous ways, with the effects of any modifications very carefully monitored.
6. An account of the essence of Conductive Education, the active factors in its success, may be offered tentatively for generalisation to new contexts (Cottam & Sutton, 1986 p.212).



*Conductive Education - leading the child out to find new ways of learning.*

### Difficulties in the Irish Context

Whether in the Irish context this systematic approach is feasible remains very doubtful. Yet an Irish response is required to the current situation. A two-tier operation is currently in progress. Those who can afford it and gain admission are going to the Peto Institute in Hungary. The perception may be that others have to make do with an inferior service at home. This would be a most unhappy situation for parents of disabled children to face. It is one which should not be allowed to continue and need not. The specialised centres in Ireland - North and South - give an excellent service. But they will have to be more publicity conscious in defense of their own standards and successes. There are also positive elements to be gained from contact with Conductive Education. These must be incorporated into our system to benefit disabled children and their parents.

### References

- Conductive Education Conference Portlaoise*, (1978). Cerebral Palsy Ireland.  
Cottam, P.J. and Sutton, A. (1986). *Conductive Education*. London : Croom Helm.