February 2018

World Views

AER International Services and Global Issues Division

We are glad to present to you our third Global Issues Division Newsletter. It’s our most extensive yet so you will surely find information of interest. You will find articles about [teaching world cultures and geography](#_Teaching_Global_Concepts) to students at a school for the blind, learn about [a “blind museum” in Hungary](#_Invisible_Exhibition:_Interview), and understand more about services for people with blindness or visual impairment [in the Middle East](#_Services_for_Children). We will also have information about a [book study](#_Book_Club) of *Diversity and Visual Impairment*, a Global Issues [reading list](#_Recommended_reading_in), and information about [Empowerment Through Integration](#_Nonprofit_focus:_Empowerment), an organization seeking to change the narrative around disability in Lebanon and beyond. Our Division is growing in numbers and influence and we are excited for what is in store for 2018.



Kevin McCormack, COMS

Chair

kevin3dmack@gmail.com

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# Teaching Global Concepts to Visually Impaired Students at the Ohio State School for the Blind

Written by: Lisa Johnson, COMS

For the members of the AER International Services & Global Issues Division, it is interesting to learn about international projects and projects that involve international issues.  I recently learned about a project that an Orientation and Mobility instructor at the Ohio State School for the Blind (OSSB) is completing this year with her students.  Mary Ball-Swartwout works with elementary aged students, teaching them to travel safely and as independently as possible.  She has created an overarching project that she uses throughout her lessons.  Other teachers within the school collaborate and integrate this project into their own classrooms.  I sat down on December 11, 2017 with Mary Ball-Swartwout to learn more about this project.

Within this project, the students are studying many global concepts such as the massivity of the world, cultures, languages, the alphabet and braille, coins, flags and animals.  They are following the children’s book *A Ticket Around the World,* by N. Diaz, M. Owens, and K. Smith.  So far, the students have explored Australia, France, Costa Rica, and Greece.  In Australia, animals were particularly interesting because, as they learned about the kangaroo, their physical education classes taught them how to hop just like a kangaroo.  Additionally, they played with boomerangs and pulled in color concepts.  While learning about France they taste tested French pastries from a local French bakery and learned many French greetings.  When they studied Costa Rica, the Spanish teacher became involved with a scavenger hunt that was set up for the students.  In January, the students studied Greece, using tactile letters, they learned about the Greek alphabet, searched the building for high contrast cartoon images of Greek gods/goddesses, and learned that the currency is the same as used in France.  On a higher level, Mrs. Swartwout uses a tactile globe to help explain how far away and how long we would need to be on a plane to reach the country of study.  Furthermore, each month, the OSSB PodCast incorporates information from the country of study into its episodes (you can listen to the school podcasts at <http://www.ossb.oh.gov/OSSBpodcast.php>).

Not only is Mrs. Swartwout teaching all these concepts, but she is also collecting items from all the different countries to help teach the differences and similarities between countries.  In fact, I first learned about this project when she requested coins from around the world.  Additionally, she finds items related to each country to collect, use, share, and explore with the students.  She is building a tactile book for the school to explain, distinguish, and develop the conceptual ideas with the students for years to come.

The main goal for the project is to help the students gain an improved awareness of the world.  As she stated in our interview:

*“That is the big point of it, because even with the currency I thought so many people collect coins from different countries and then they just sit [somewhere]…and how we are able to just look or look at a picture [of currency and understand it], and that our kids can’t [do that].  [This way our kids are] able to feel [and understand] the weight and the size and all those differences.  So, I just thought it was one way to try to experience other areas of the world…We’re learning about all different types of things while we’re pulling in those mobility concepts of just getting out and moving and exploring the world.”*

Coming up in the next few months the students will learn more about Brazil, the Philippines, China and India.  Mrs. Swartwout is looking forward to teaching the students about the Chinese New Year and the tuk-tuk in India.

If you are interested in learning more, donating items, or congratulating Mrs. Swartwout for her interesting and delightful way of teaching, please feel free to contact Mary Ball-Swartwout at mswartwout@ossb.oh.gov.

# Invisible Exhibition: Interview with Tonya Utkina

October 17, 2017
Written by: Judith Querciagrossa, CVRT

When Tonya Utkina learned that I teach adaptive living skills to people who are blind, she lit up. Two years ago she and her family experienced a blind museum called Invisible Exhibition in Budapest, Hungary. Utkina found the exhibition to be a profound and worthwhile visit and believes that such an experience should be a part of every person’s education. She disagrees with the thesis Nario-Redmond (2017) proposed that disability simulations do more harm than good and result “in feelings of fear, apprehension and pity toward those with disabilities.” From Utkina’s point of view, the crucial factors to create a healthy simulation experience are complete immersion, substantial duration of the experience, and a strong focus on education.

JQ: I understand the Invisible Exhibition is presented in a tour format. Was there any preparation for participants before the tour begins?

TU: First, there was an introduction to braille where they let you touch letters and practice yourself. Then, a guide explains that the tour is one hour long, there will be complete darkness, and how to avoid harming yourself. The person that led the group was visually impaired himself and he also talked about different aspects of being blind.

JQ: Did the tour address the practicalities of how a blind person lives their life?

TU: That was the whole point of the museum. The tour was basically like an apartment. You would enter and there was a kitchen and the guide would go around the room and explain it. The guests follow each other and often hold each other’s hands because it is hard to orient oneself. The guide would say: “To the left there is a sink.” “Next is the stove.” “This is a chair.” “Go and touch everything.” That is how you are directed to move around.

JQ: What were the other rooms?

TU: You would go around the bathroom, explore that, and then go to the bedroom, They add a piece of street and have you cross at the light. Traffic noises are simulated and you can feel a car next to you. There was another room with a sculpture garden. You can feel the shapes of the sculptures, like details of a man’s head. The last room was a cafe where you could order a drink.

JQ: Did you wear a blindfold?

TU: No, it was completely dark. It was just black. It’s like you are in a cave and you don’t see anything. Total darkness is better than being under blindfold because there is no cheating. You are 100% immersed in the situation for one hour. It was the first time that I experienced it. It was mind blowing and I would think that some people might have a panic attack because it is such a powerful feeling when suddenly you don’t see anything. It’s hard. You don’t know where you are. You have to be really cautious. You feel so helpless. You want to hold onto something or someone so you don’t get lost. You feel so small because you don’t have power to do anything. But then, by the end, you adapt even after only one hour. Everyone’s experience is different but for me the whole idea of being in the darkness was quite a shock. I never realized quite what that means.

JQ: There is a controversy about simulating blind experiences because the sighted person knows their situation is temporary and the sense of permanent blindness can never be replicated.

TU: But one hour is a long time. It is not like 5 minutes. By the end of one hour you definitely have adapted and are feeling more comfortable in this environment. You feel powerless in the beginning but by the end you are beginning to get much better. Especially for kids, I think it is a great experience. They have no clue. Obviously they see people who are visually impaired on the street and they ask about it and you explain. But, it is one thing to talk about it and another to actually experience it.

JQ: Were you ever fearful going through the apartment, wondering where you were going to step next, for example?

TU: That was definitely a part of it. But it depends on the person. For me, I got adjusted pretty quickly, especially when I thought of people who have to live with blindness and how they manage to live their lives just fine. So, I thought, I can do it, too. It is manageable. It is somewhat uncomfortable in the beginning but I have been through much worse life experiences, so I realized I can handle this. But I come from a different culture so my experience may be different because of that.

JQ: Where are you from?

TU: Russia, and my husband is from Hungary, so what I say might not necessarily be true for people from other backgrounds.

JQ: Did you pay more attention to your other senses?

TU: Yes, absolutely. There was not a lot of smell but there was touching and hearing and listening. We were strangers in the group but everyone ended up holding each other anyway because it is hard for people doing this for the first time. So, you wanted to be careful but we bumped into each other anyway and it was ok.

JQ: Were there certain difficulties to being blind that came to your awareness from the experience?

TU: Pretty much everything was hard. I would think it would be di fferent experience for someone who is visually impaired because it is their life, so they have time to handle it already much better.

JQ: Did the Invisible Exhibition change your perception of people with blindness?

TU: From this experience I think you can lead a pretty normal life. When you adjust and figure out your way around, you discover you can be fine. You see it is hard for the person who has no vision to get around which is the whole point of this experience. But I guess for a person that lives with this for a long time, it is not an impairment but rather a condition. If you have this condition you have it. It is just a way of life. They just enjoy their life like everyone else and they are not suffering. That’s why this exhibition is totally meaningful. A lot of problems come from not treating people as equals which is wrong because it is the opposite. If a person needs help then they will ask you. They don’t need parenting. Treat all people how you would treat yourself. That’s why we need museums like this. It’s a place to learn that people with blindness are not so completely different from ourselves.

JQ: Did you see any benefits for the guide who worked at the museum?

TU: The guide had a job where he did what he could do best - talking about his life. And, it was a way for him to interact with people. From what I could see, this guide was not a real social person and he had to make an effort to interact with people. It looked like he had to overcome some difficulties in order to work with a group of people. For someone who wants to be more social, it is a great way to be with people.

JQ: Was there time for questions at the end?

TU: Yes, definitely, but the people were so immersed in the whole experience they really didn’t have many questions. The questions usually come later, after you leave.

JQ: Do you think the experience was in any way demeaning to a person with a disability?

TU: I didn’t see it. Why would it be? The guide was in his space, his own environment, like a fish in water. It was his life. It wasn’t the same for us who felt like helpless children, completely lost and saying: “Let me follow you. Let me hold onto you.” If anything, it was the opposite. I felt like I depended on him. That is the benefit of the whole experience because you kind of flip the coin. You’re on the the other side. You can see how it is to be dependent on someone. That is the point of doing this.

JQ: Do you think it would be a good idea to have something like this in the United States?

TU: I think so, but again, I am from a different country, a different background. In Europe people perceive things differently. Here people might expect entertainment. It is hard to say but if you do it as a self-sustainable project rather than for profit, why not do that? It would be great as an educational project for schools. For example, all 5th grade kids could go there every year.

JQ: I showed you the study done by a psychology professor, Nario-Redmond, who concluded that simulated disability experiences were detrimental. What is your response to this study?

TU: It may be that at least one hour is needed, as opposed to 10 minutes. Also, the study talks about wearing blindfolds or goggles. It was a completely different experience for me because it was total darkness. You cannot take off a blindfold and suddenly get out of it. The way they did the study was not a full experience. If you are only allowed to experience the beginning when it is overwhelming, because you are in darkness for the first time, you never get to the part where you settle down and start to find ways to get around. It takes time. I had to make a decision to try because I knew there is no way back. You are prepared by the guide that it will be one hour long and it will be complete darkness so you have to go through it.

JQ: Do you think that most of the other people in your group had a similar experience?

TU: Oh, yes, but they were all Europeans. I have this feeling that people in this country
sometimes say, “Oh, I don’t like this” and push a button and say “I want a new one.” Or, “Why would I make an effort”, especially if they paid for it. There is a culture of taking a pill to get better. But, museums don’t have to be entertaining.

JQ: It’s true, many museums have resorted to entertainment, especially for children. Experiential education, such as this, requires a willingness to go into the unknown, to “step into someone else’s shoes”.

TU: That’s why it’s important to do this. It is one thing for grownups to experience but it is a whole different league for children. Maybe kids will accept the experience better and be more tolerant. I can say that I personally think this experience is a great idea. I actually think that every single person should go through this. It makes you understand the world around you. The same should be done with other disabilities. Of course, not for just 5 minutes. The darkness gets to you and then for an hour you struggle trying to find your way. It is not something super pleasant but that’s how you actually figure it out. Learning any new skill leads to times of frustration. You want to cry but you have to pull it through to really get to the essence of it. That’s how you have the full experience. You don’t really learn it if you are just enjoying yourself, “Oh, that was nice.” It doesn’t work like that.

JQ: Uncomfortable experiences lead to growth potential.

TU: Yes, something is changing in you.

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Invisible Exhibitions website in English: <https://www.lathatatlan.hu/en/>

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# Services for Children in Countries in the Middle East

Written by: Valery Herring, COMS/TVI

As an orientation and mobility specialist (COMS), and a teacher for the visually impaired in the United States, I am familiar with several schools for children who are visually impaired, including: Overbrook School for the Blind in Philadelphia, PA; Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, MA; and The Maryland School for the Blind in Baltimore, MD. However, I was intrigued to learn more about schools and services for children who are blind, or who have low vision, in the Middle East after my daughter, a sophomore in college, spent a semester in Amman, Jordan studying Arabic.

The services in Jordan for children who have a visual impairment were hard to locate with a cursory web site search, but with some research I was able to locate a school run by the Arab Episcopal Diocese in Irbid, Jordan. The Integrated School for the Blind opened its doors in 2003. The school’s web site boasts that

“Blind children receive learning aids in class, such as teaching materials in Braille which are printed at the school on a special Braille printer. Of course, the school library also has books in Braille next to books for sighted children. There also are "talking computers" which the blind and visually impaired children use through their own voice output. It is hardly surprising that the children feel respected and secure at the school for the blind. The staff is confident that the visually impaired and blind pupils can learn to read and write just like the others and can also attend all the subjects on the curriculum” (“Jordan: Integrated School for the Blind,” 2018).

The school works to integrate children who are blind or visually impaired into a traditional classroom setting made up of sighted students, and encourage these students to learn from one another. This approach goes against Jordan’s usual strategy and assists blind Jordanian students who at times suffer within the system. The author of *Jordan: Integrated School for the Blind in Irbid* web site states that “parents in Jordan are ashamed of their blind children and hide them away at home. An integrated school in Irbid gives these children prospects for the future - through elucidation and a decent education” (“Jordan: Integrated School for the Blind,” 2018).

In Doha, Qatar there is a center for adults and older children, The Qatar Cultural & Social Center for the Blind. This Center focuses on the goals of further educating teenagers and adults to better prepare for life with a disability, and runs parallel to the goals set forth by rehabilitation centers in the United States that similarly work to assist individuals with a visual impairment or those who are blind. The Center focuses on:

* “Introduce Blind and Visual Impaired People through all possible ways such as exhibitions, cultural festivals, lectures, seminars, etc.
* Strengthen the human relationship between Blind and Visual Impaired People and the society.
* Educate the Blind and Visual Impaired People using all available resources.
* Help Blind and Visual Impaired People spend their spare time in carrying out useful activities.
* Overcome obstacles and difficulties facing Blind and Visual Impaired People.
* Strengthen relationship between the QSCCB and the other Arab and International Centers working in the same field” (“About QSCCB,” 2018).

Teachers and professors in Doha, Qatar begin educating young children who are blind or visually impaired at the age of five in the Al-Noor Institute for the Blind. Mr. Khalid Sayeed Al Sheaibi, Director of Public Relations & Community Service stated that the school was established in 2012 and, “contributes to improving the students' quality of life through excellence in specialized education. The Institute offers a variety of academic programs specifically catered to respective ages, abilities, and needs, as well as providing all means of medical, physiological and social care; creating a rehabilitation platform which enables children to build their own successful social and professional futures” (“A brighter future,” 2018).

Another school taking the lead in educating children and adults who are visually impaired, or blind is The Saudi - Bahraini Institute for the Blindlocated in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The school accepts students who are “blind or of very weak sight without having any other disability” and a “participant in the academic stage should be between 6 and 20 years old” according to the admission policy on the schools’ web site. According to the Headmaster the school instructs children with visual impairments in braille instruction and computer literacy and implements field trips, bicycle riding and similar activities to encourage out-of-classroom learning. It is unknown if the school offers training in the use of low vision aides, electronic equipment such as braille note, or orientation and mobility (<http://www.blindinstitute.org/> ).

My passion in educating people with a visual impairment has tweaked my interest in teaching in the USA, as well as in other countries. Though the materials, instructors, and facilities may be different; the focus on educating this population so that people who are blind or visually impaired may become independent is the same. A vast number of people in the United States fail to recognize that while our cultures may be different, and our nations may be miles apart, the process of assisting and educating individuals with visual impairments remains the same internationally.

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A brighter future for the visually impaired. (2018, January 18). Retrieved from [www.qatalum.com/Media/News/Pages/A-brighter-future-for-the-visually-impaired.aspx](http://www.qatalum.com/Media/News/Pages/A-brighter-future-for-the-visually-impaired.aspx)

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# Recommended Reading in Global Issues:

“The Legal Protection of Refugees With Disabilities: Forgotten and Invisible?” by Mary Crock, Laura Smith-Khan, Ron McCallum, and Ben Saul [https://www.amazon.com/Legal-Protection-Refugees-Disabilities-Forgotten/dp/1786435438/ref=sr\_1\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1508091635&sr=1-1&keywords=mary+crock](https://www.amazon.com/Legal-Protection-Refugees-Disabilities-Forgotten/dp/1786435438/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1508091635&sr=1-1&keywords=mary+crock)

“Disability and Human Rights: Global Perspectives” Edited by Edurne Garcia Iriarte, Roy McConkey, & Robbie Gilligan <https://www.vitalsource.com/products/disability-and-human-rights-global-perspectives-garcia-iriarte-edurne-v9781137390677?duration=180&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=shopping&gclid=Cj0KCQiAwKvTBRC2ARIsAL0Dgk0qFfHQ0x714eSwCThQUKpQFQhHLWNQsfdAqH7HHS5dcEgqI7F35igaAgP3EALw_wcB>

“My Path Leads to Tibet: The Inspiring Story of How One Young Blind Woman Brought Hope to the Blind Children of Tibet” by Sabriye Tenberken <http://arcadepub.com/arcadepub/arcadepub/titles/8446-9781611458893-my-path-leads-to-tibet>

“For the Benefit of Those Who See: Dispatches from the World of the Blind” by Rosemary Mahoney <https://pollabooks.com/products/for-the-benefit-of-those-who-see-dispatches-from-the-world-of-the-blind?utm_medium=cpc&utm_source=googlepla>

*If you would like to share more recommended readings in Global Issues for the blind and visually impaired, please send them to* *kevin3dmack@gmail.com*

# Nonprofit Focus: Empowerment Through Integration

<http://www.etivision.org/>

Sara Minkara is the Founder and CEO for the international nonprofit Empowerment Through Integration (ETI). ETI’s mission is to develop an inclusive society by transforming the social stigma against disabilities across the globe and empowering blind youth to be the authors of their futures and change makers of their societies.

For this purpose, ETI develops Empowerment and Integration programs all over the world in countries such as the USA and Lebanon. In Lebanon, for example, ETI’s programs focus on training blind youth in Life Skills as well as on creating opportunities to integrate them with sighted youth during the implementation of educational and inclusion-oriented recreational activities. The Empowerment Programs that ETI implements in Lebanon serve individuals from multiple backgrounds, such as Lebanese locals and Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

ETI’s Empowerment Programs in Lebanon include a total of 7 programs implemented during a 12-month program cycle. Life Skills Intensive Summer Program, Life Skills Extension Program (year-long), Camp Rafiqi, Professional Readiness Program, Social Projects, Parents Workshop and Community Celebration.

ETI’s Integration Programs, also known as “In The Dark” programs, aim to create a space for people to be vulnerable, reflect on their preconceived notions, their “isms” and their effect on our daily lives and interactions. The funds generated through these programs are used to support our Empowerment Programs in Lebanon. “In the Dark” participants are blindfolded to facilitate experiences that allow them to shed preconceived notions of themselves and others when interacting for the first time, thus allowing them to be blind to the labels of society.

ETI offers Integrations Programs to clients such as corporations, organizations, institutions, etc as packages or separate programs and the revenue generated in the promotion of these services assist the organization in supporting Empowerment programs with blind youth and their communities in Lebanon.

You may visit ETI’s website <http://www.etivision.org/> for more information.

# Book Club

We have received much interest from Division members and are moving forward with our first book club. We will be reading “Diversity and Visual Impairment: The Influence of Race, Gender, Religion, and Ethnicity on the Individual” edited by Jane Erin, and Madeline Milian <http://www.afb.org/store/Pages/ShoppingCart/ProductDetails.aspx?ProductId=978-0-89128-383-6>

We are sorting out details but if you are interested on learning more, please contact Pam Parker at Pam.Parker@wssb.wa.gov