Student Ambassadors Bring EagleEyes to Iceland!

While the people of Reykjavik, Iceland may only be getting about four hours of daylight each day in January, they certainly aren’t being kept in the dark. Anna Soffia Oskarsdottir found out about EagleEyes technology via the EagleEyes website, www.bc.edu/eagleeyes. One communication led to another and soon individuals and families of Fulloroins fraedsla fatiendra, a special education center for adult education, wanted to try the system out for themselves.

For Paul Tamburro ’02 and Amy Gips ’04, two undergraduate students at Boston College, the chance to demonstrate the system meant a three day adventure to a place that they never imagined they would see.

Arriving at 6am after an all night flight, Paul and Amy were shuttled to a hotel where they quickly checked to make sure that the EagleEyes and Camera Mouse equipment worked in its new environment. Soon after, they headed to the center where they began a series of demonstrations to school staff members, government agency representatives, technology experts and people from neighboring centers. Between the first and second day, the students gave a grand total of about 30-40 trials to potential users!

When asked about their greatest challenge of the trip, Amy and Paul cited the language barrier. While the people at the facility all spoke English, it was uncertain if the EagleEyes/Camera Mouse users understood all of the instructions. Fortunately, there were teachers nearby to translate instructions into Icelandic.

Highlights of their trip included learning more about the techniques that the Icelandic facility uses to help the people at the center to communicate. Some people were using what is called a “Bliss Board,” a system of symbolized pictures that help people with language expressive disabilities to communicate.

Additional trip highlights included Anna Soffia’s tour of the area, including the hot springs and a wonderful dinner at Halla Stefansdottir’s house, which Amy described as a “Bliss Board,” a system of symbolized pictures that help people with language expressive disabilities to communicate.

Boston College and Children’s Hospital Boston Launch Project TEAM

What is Project TEAM? Project TEAM (Technology, Education, and Medicine) is a major new collaborative effort between Boston College and Children’s Hospital Boston. The project will create a unique environment for preschool children with cerebral palsy and severe communication challenges by giving them access to the latest advances in assistive technology, education, and medicine.

The goal of the project is to prepare participants in the use of advanced technology which will allow them to be integrated into neighborhood schools. Each participant will spend four to six months in a technology-rich classroom through early intervention and the use of cutting edge technology, the project hopes to help these children jump ahead, preparing them for a future of inclusion and educational success.
EagleEyes in Iceland

(Continued from page 1)
scribed as “Delicious food, good conversation and a great introduction to Icelandic culture.”

Amy Gips ’04 and Paul Tamburro ’02 with Sigurjon Gestsson at Fulroins fraedsla.

Circuit Boards and Other Connectors

Boston College faculty member Bill Ames has been contributing his unique expertise in analog and digital systems to make important improvements to the EagleEyes technology. A former Hewlett-Packard engineer, Bill joined the BC faculty seven years ago and now teaches a course in Digital Systems. In recent years, Bill built a custom circuit board for the EagleEyes system that offers a number of improvements over the use of existing commercial hardware, not the least of which will allow the system to be produced at a substantial reduction in price.

Additional improvements to the system include: battery power, which eliminates the need for the system to be plugged into the wall; portability, which allows the system to be plugged into a standard USB port; and a tiny system of lights which makes for easier amplification adjustment.

The new EagleEyes system currently is being evaluated by a company in England that is interested in producing the technology on a commercial basis. At perhaps a quarter of the original price, the new circuit board will help the technology reach more users and, ultimately, help more people to communicate.

While the news of the new circuit board is good for potential users, it also underscores how much collaborative efforts within the EagleEyes Project have contributed to its success. By uniting researchers, teachers, Campus School students and BC undergraduates, EagleEyes has spawned improvements in both education and technology while simultaneously building important cross-functional relationships.

Project TEAM

Continued from page 1
developing skills in the use of assistive technologies, educational computing, and related computer activities designed for individual needs. Collaboration among the interdisciplinary staff of Project TEAM, the public school personnel, and the child’s family will assure that effective linkages are developed and that curriculum-specific goals are consistent between settings.

The launch of this program marks the onset of a one-of-a-kind intensive and innovative environment for students with severe communication challenges. Through early intervention and the use of cutting edge technology, the project hopes to help these children jump ahead, preparing them for a future of inclusion and educational success.

For further information, visit the website at www.projectteam.org.

Students Help Children of Afghanistan

Actions speak louder than words. For Krissy Zitola and Lindsay Peterson, two severely disabled Campus School students who are unable to speak or walk, this old saying is especially true. That’s why the pair teamed up to create note cards that were sold to raise money for the children of Afghanistan.

Continued on page 3
In Step with South Shore Educational Collaborative

As EagleEyes and Camera Mouse technology is adopted into curricula both nationally and internationally, usage of the system is evolving. South Shore Educational Collaborative (SSEC) has been using the technology since September 2001. In a recent interview, The B.E.A.T. talked with two teachers at SSEC, Susan Donovan and Jennifer Edge, to get a sense of how the school is working to maximize their students’ learning potential through the use of assistive technology.

B.E.A.T.: Would you tell us a little about SSEC?

Jennifer: SSEC is a non-profit, multi-purpose educational collaborative serving nine towns in the South Shore of Massachusetts. We offer occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, counseling, adaptive physical education and assistive technology for students age 3-22. Additionally, we have a community adult program that provides many of these services for adults.

B.E.A.T.: How many students do you currently have using EagleEyes and Camera Mouse?

Susan: Altogether about six or seven.

B.E.A.T.: How have students responded to the technology?

Jennifer: The most dramatic impact the technology has had on students is that it has allowed them to make choices by using software programs such as Clicker 4. The ability to make choices really opens up ways in which students can be engaged in their learning environment.

B.E.A.T.: How long does it take for students to adapt to using the technology?

Susan: It really depends on the student. Some are able to pick it up in the first few sessions and some require more time.

Jennifer: Sometimes it also depends on how intuitive teachers are in gauging where the interests of the student lie. Some students are interested in playing aliens and others are more engaged by programs with symbols or pictures.

B.E.A.T.: How has the technology been incorporated into SSEC curriculum?

Jennifer: We try to incorporate the students’ classroom work into the EagleEyes/Camera Mouse sessions wherever possible. We also try to get creative by combining assistive technology solutions. This might involve using a commercial software program with EagleEyes or using a scanning system along with a switch. It’s important to try lots of different strategies in order to find out what works best for the student.

Susan: Ultimately, having a reliable tool for communication is what is really important. As the saying goes, “Just because you can’t speak doesn’t mean you have nothing to say.”

“Just because you can’t speak doesn’t mean you have nothing to say.”
- Dr. Diane Bryen

Student Spotlight

Recently featured in the Boston Herald, Krissy and Lindsay used EagleEyes technology to paint note cards with their eyes. Three copy shops donated the costs of printing the note cards and the cards were in turn sold by friends and family, with the proceeds sent to a fund to help the children of Afghanistan.

In the end, the project raised $1100. A special thanks to Marialice Curran for the design and coordination of the project. And, thanks to all who contributed!

Joanna is a 36 year old student at the Holly Bank School in West Yorkshire, England. She has been using Camera Mouse for the past 10 weeks. Since starting to use the system, her care-giver, Lance has noticed subtle changes in Joanna’s behavior. She has become more communicative and more interested in her environment. Lance foresees that the technology will improve Joanna’s quality of life by giving her an outlet, as well as by increasing her independence.
Campus School Hosts Semi-Formal

Wednesday, April 10th was a special night for many of the students at Boston College’s Campus School. Lindsay Peterson, 19, was no exception. Her slight frame dressed in a shimmering blue, Lindsay was escorted to the festivities by her BC EagleEyes Buddy, Joe Forte.

Lindsay, also known as “Lindsay Monet” for her fondness of the “eye-painting” program using EagleEyes technology, was one of the pioneer users of EagleEyes. Her Buddy Joe, a junior at BC, has been working with Lindsay on a weekly basis for the past few months. Joe said that he was surprised when Lindsay, using EagleEyes technology, asked him to the semi-formal, but that his response was immediate: “Of course!”

The semi-formal began with the escorting of each student through a festive archway. Music set the scene and students who were able, danced with family and friends. Each student had his or her picture taken by a professional photographer. The evening marked a night of fun and celebration for Campus School students.

It Only Gets Better!

Last year, CM Solutions, a technical start-up company in Dallas, Texas obtained an exclusive licensing agreement with Boston College to market Camera Mouse products. While this was good news for the company, no one seems to be resting on their laurels. Instead, CM Solutions has invested in additional research and development of the product, making a number of key improvements.

First, the company developed a new USB version of the product that allows it to be plugged directly into a USB port. This feature makes the system now compatible with laptops. Additionally, the product can now be used with an off-the-shelf web camera. These new features reduce the existing price of the Camera Mouse system by 30-50%.

Perhaps more importantly, CM Solutions has improved upon the usability of the system.

Nick Daley, President, explains: “The original version of Camera Mouse doesn’t have a click-and-drag function. We’ve solved this problem by creating a task bar, called Click-Selector™, which allows the user to change the way the mouse will be used. Now users can choose from the following mouse functions: (1) click-and-drag, (2) right click, (3) single click, (4) double click, and (5) no click (turning the click function off altogether). The versatility of the new version offers the user an experience that is much closer to that of using a hand-operated computer mouse.”

Another improvement, called Cursor-Comfort™, enables the user to reposition the cursor on the screen so that their head is in a more comfortable position to control the cursor.

Further details about Camera Mouse products can be found at www.cameramouse.com.