

Blissymbolics Communication International (BCI)
15 October 2007

Announcing the Restructuring of BCI

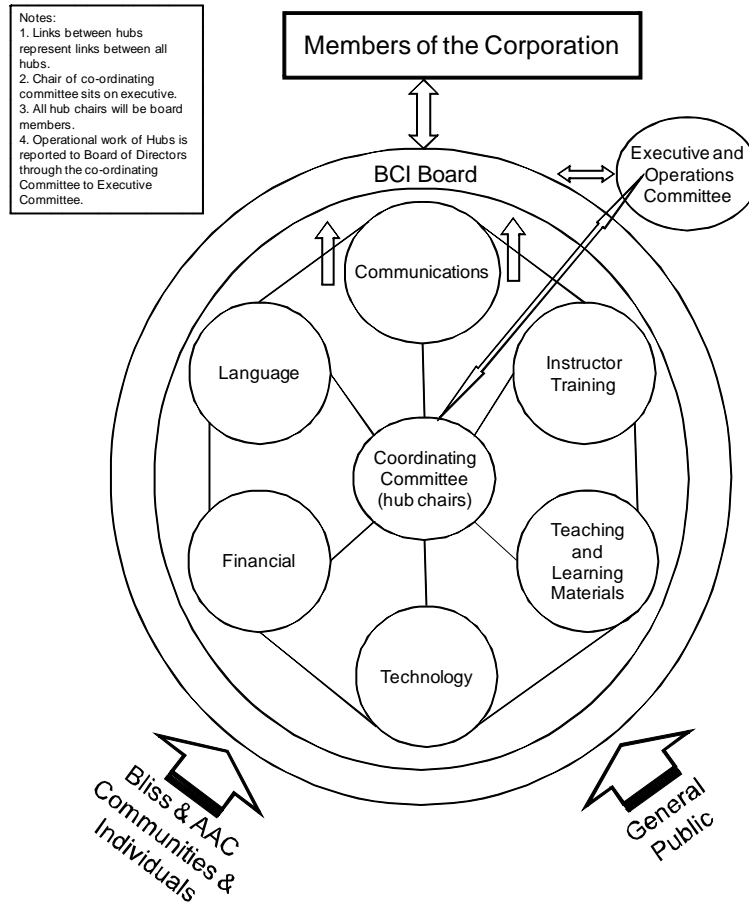
An international Think-Tank was held in Dundee, Scotland, in July 2007, to provide a forum at which specialists in related fields, through presentations followed by discussion with Blissymbolics experts, could help those in the Blissymbolics community plan for the future. My personal thanks go out to everybody who contributed to both the Think Tank and the Blissymbol Panel which followed (see end for speakers).

There was a consensus during the meetings that Blissymbolics has an important place within the AAC field and every effort should be made to maintain its unique capabilities for those with complex communication needs. The importance of further developing the Blissymbolics vocabulary and making it readily available was acknowledged. The need for greater transparency and improved communication between the various national Blissymbol groups was emphasized as key if BCI is to continue to support Blissymbolics worldwide.

As a result of the Think Tank, a proposal for a new infrastructure that would facilitate a more interconnected community to support Blissymbolics use worldwide was adopted by the BCI Board in September 2007.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed organization restructure and represents the formation of standing committees (called hubs) which oversee different aspects of the work of BCI. For example, BCI already has a Blissymbolics Development Secretariat to coordinate the development of new vocabulary, but there is no effective structure for the wide dissemination of new vocabulary; technology provides potential to 'write' Bliss words using a font, but BCI requires this to be coordinated – hence the existence of the language and technology hubs. Innovative teaching materials and instructor training have been developed in many countries, but these accomplishments are not readily accessible to other regions – hence the instructor training and teaching and learning materials hubs. In order to maintain communication between hubs, the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee, all chairs of the hubs form the coordinating committee. In addition, all hub chairs are automatically members of the Board of Directors.

Figure 1: BCI Organizational Structure



- The arrows depict communication paths, to and from the BCI Board to the Members of the Corporation (Members comprise former Board members and special appointments).
- The Executive and Operations Committee is a permanent Standing Committee of the Board with its own mandate. Links between Hubs represent links between all Hubs.
- The new structure that is proposed consists of 6 Hubs (work groups) whose work is coordinated by Coordinating Committee.
- The current Executive committee (Lang Moffat, Shirley McNaughton, Katherine Seybold, Peter Lindsay, Ingrid Mattsson-Müller and Miriam Running) continue with its current membership during the next year to provide continuity. The chair of the Coordinating Committee (Annalu Waller) becomes a member of the Executive Committee.

Progress to Date

The BCI board has appointed the following people to chair the different hubs:

- LANGUAGE – *Margareta Jennische*
 - Responsible for: Vocabulary Development
- INSTRUCTOR TRAINING – *Shirley McNaughton*
 - Responsible for: Sharing existing training resources and developing training resources for Bliss instructors
- TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS – *Vacant*
 - Responsible for: Sharing existing teaching and learning resources and developing teaching and learning resources
- COMMUNICATIONS – *Peter Lindsay*
 - Responsible for: Identifying and supporting the development of procedures and tools that facilitate communication among all people who wish to be informed of BCI activities or who wish to participate in them. Moreover, these procedures and should be transparent and be as easy as possible for novice and expert alike to use.
- FINANCIAL – *Gillian Hazell*
 - Responsible for: Coordinating funding proposals to support for the work of BCI
- TECHNOLOGY – *Annalu Waller*
 - Responsible for: Coordinating the development of technological resources and standards to support the work of hubs, the use of Bliss, and the communication infrastructure of the worldwide Bliss community

The chairs of the hubs are currently recruiting volunteers to form the core of each hub (members of hubs do not have to be Board members). The chairs have been asked to formulate a remit and initial workplan for their hubs. The different hubs are intended to communicate with each other and to this end some hub members may be designated to participate in another hub. For example, the Language hub is responsible for the maintenance and development of the Bliss vocabulary and will be looking to the Technology hub to support the work of the Blissymbol Panel and ways in which the vocabulary can be presented and shared. It thus makes sense to have a member of the Technology hub participate in the Language hub to ensure that the Technology hub understands the needs of the Language hub.

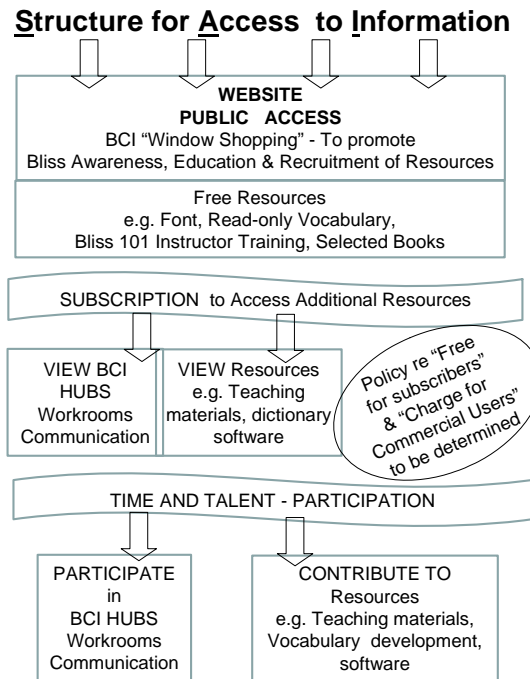
In order to coordinate the work of all the hubs and to have an overview of the hub projects, each hub chair will meet under the auspices of the COORDINATING COMMITTEE, which is currently chaired by Annalu Waller. The chair of the coordinating committee is a member of the BCI EXECUTIVE. This ensures that there is direct communication with the executive and the main board.

The BCI Executive is responsible to the main board of directors and has responsibility for: Legal, Business and Charity Matters; ensuring that Board policies and procedures are practised, and that work of Hubs reflects the Mandate and Vision of BCI; conducting of Board Meetings according to Bylaws; calling the AGM to report to the Board of Directors and Corporate Members.

Maintaining Communication

The challenge of maintaining communication between hubs is being addressed by the development of a web-based infrastructure which supports the interconnectivity of the Blissymbolics community. This task has been delegated to the Technology hub. Figure 2 illustrates the functionality which a web site structure will need to support both the internal and external communication.

Figure 2: BCI Organizational Structure



- Access to Information begins with the website (see top of illustration) where anyone can access general information regarding BCI and through which several free resources have been recommended to be made available.
- It is proposed that the next level of information access would be through subscription. With subscription, subscribers will gain access to information and resources provided by the HUBS. Policies regarding what resources will be free to subscribers and what resources will have a charge to commercial users is to be determined.
- The third level is participation either as a viewer or as an active member of the activities of one or more hubs. It is the area in which volunteers are welcome to contribute their time and talent and to take responsibility for furthering the work of BCI.
- It is proposed that we consider this type of involvement as a substitute for formal Affiliate involvement, and that we consider such terms as Associates and Friends of Bliss to describe the type of involvement.

An early prototype of a system which will provide the functionality shown in Figure 2 is being developed by the Technology hub and a project volunteer group of computing students. It is hoped that a working prototype will be open to evaluation by hubs before the end of the year.

Call for Volunteers

Although the hub chairs will be recruiting volunteers, we hope that anybody willing to be involved in the revitalising of Bliss will make contact with the relevant hub chair (see below). The success of BCI depends on volunteers – so please get involved.

What Next?

The early work of the hubs will focus on identifying workplans and may see the beginnings of hub projects. One of these projects is the development of the web site. Once the website is working well, BCI will launch the 'new look' BCI to the world.

Contact

We are attempting to contact as many people as we can to be involved in the development of Bliss in the 21C. If you know anyone who is using Bliss, or has used Bliss in the past, please give them a copy of this announcement and ask them to contact me (awaller@computing.dundee.ac.uk).

The contact details of the hub chairs are below:

- LANGUAGE – *Margareta Jennische* (Margareta.Jennische@neuro.uu.se)
- INSTRUCTOR TRAINING – *Shirley McNaughton* (shirleymcnaughton@hotmail.com)
- TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS – *Vacant*
- COMMUNICATIONS – *Peter Lindsay* (peterhlindsay@hotmail.com)
- FINANCIAL – *Gillian Hazell* (gillian@gmhazell.fsnet.co.uk)
- TECHNOLOGY – *Annalu Waller* (awaller@computing.dundee.ac.uk)

Best wishes,



Dr Annalu Waller
Chair of the Coordinating Committee
On behalf of the BCI Executive Committee

15 October 2007

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Scotland

Or log onto the current BCI website at <http://www.blissymbolics.org/bliss.shtml>

Appendix: Think Tank Participation

30 people representing 11 countries attended the Think Tank, some of whom have been involved in Blissymbolics from the outset, some of whom were new to the area. The presenters and respondents represented several countries and disciplines:

Chair: Annalu Waller, Scotland

Keynote address: Jinny Storr, presented by Shirley McNaughton

Paper Title	Author / Respondent
A reflection on the relationship of Blissymbolics with natural languages and picture based systems.	Ann Sutton, Canada / Shirley McNaughton, Canada
Blissymbols in Practice.	Sally Millar, Scotland / Margareta Jennische & Kirsten Lörstrom, Sweden
Adoption of Blissymbolics and Diffusion of Innovations.	David McNaughton, USA (read by Ann Sutton) / Rolf Black, Scotland
The Blissymbols Character Set and Font - Writing in the language of Bliss.	Michael Everson, Ireland/Peter Lindsay, Canada
Blissymbolics: Path to the Future	George Sutton, USA / Shirley McNaughton, Canada
Font Development	Peter Watson, Scotland / Trish Bailey, England
Bliss-Dasher - Efficient semantic writing with any muscle.	David MacKay, England / Shirley McNaughton, Canada
How BCI can help overcome technological barriers to Blissymbolics Usage on the Internet.	Russell Galvin, Canada / Kristina Ottosen, Canada
The Internet and Concept Coding Framework.	Andy Judson, Scotland / Kristina Ottosen, Canada
Blissymbolics - a Bridge to Communication.	Mats Lundalv, Sweden / Peter Lindsay, Canada