

DIGITAL SCHOOL FOR PUPILS WITH MENTAL DISABILITIES

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Background

Centre de La Gabrielle is a private nonprofit organization, founded by the French federation of mutual companies for civil servants, MFP (Mutualité Fonction Publique). Founded in 1972 as a social initiative of the Mutualité Fonction Publique, **Centre de la Gabrielle** is, today, an organization that assists 450 children and adults with development and learning disabilities.

Centre de la Gabrielle aims at developing new solutions in order to provide social inclusion for the target group. In the aims of developing new solutions focusing on inclusion, **Centre de La Gabrielle** has initiated a partnership between its association: **Association Informatique et Handicap**, created in 1996 and focusing on IT and disability, and the **school of Centre de La Gabrielle** which with 13 specialized teachers provides education to 130 children and adolescents between the age of 6 to 20, with cognitive impairments associated with disorders.

To promote, the use of digital technology, and ensure a pedagogical, educational, professional and therapeutic support to children, adolescents and adults with intellectual disabilities, the partnership has enabled to develop a classroom dedicated to the use of current Information and Communication Technology (ICT): **digital school for pupils with mental disabilities**.

Based on fairness and justice, the **digital school for pupils with mental disabilities** provides pupils with mental disabilities the same tools as others in mainstream schools: computers, video projectors, and an Interactive Digital board to learn differently. **Centre de La Gabrielle** intend to contribute to a better "inclusion" of pupils with disabilities in today's mainly digital society.

Activity Report

Some pupils are not able to use a pencil, a keyboard or a mouse. The introduction of ICT, thanks to the **digital school for pupils with mental disabilities**, brings many benefits to pupils with disabilities.

The classroom has been equipped with 10 laptops, a video projector, a digital camera, a color printer and Internet. The pupils quickly took this tool as a game but also and especially as a mean of standardization usually reserved for adults and pupils without disabilities. Since then, appeared a craze enabling a time of much greater concentration.

In 2011, the **Association Informatique et Handicap** in full consent with its members has equipped the school with an Interactive Digital Board. 2 touch sensitive screens allow these pupils draw, write and move images with their fingers. The screen, unlike the adult, does not show any disapproval and at the same time a written exercise may be hardly decodable while the visual screen is clean and readable. Educational softwares have been acquired to allow autonomous work around basic skills such as time learning, use of money, reading, counting etc.

Finally working with the Interactive Digital Board, allows pupils to work on oral language by allowing them to express what they understood and restore it from a very attractive tool. This is a true collaborative tool.

The **digital school for pupils with mental disabilities** prepared the pupils to obtain 2 certificates validated by the French Education System: the Computer and Internet Patent and the Road Safety School Certificate required for registration at driver's license.

Conclusions

Introducing ICT in the **school of Centre de La Gabrielle** through the project **digital school for pupils with mental disabilities** has following consequences:

- Provide additional tools to mobilize the skills of these pupils facing difficulties: the pupils, who are usually unable to focus their attention beyond a few minutes, can focus much longer than traditional media and do enjoy it.
- Establish the principle of fairness and justice: provide pupils with mental disabilities the same tools as other pupils in mainstream schools.
- Allow a change of point of view: trained in new technologies and holding a Computer and Internet Patent, pupils with disabilities are no longer characterized in the computer field by their disability but by their "digital" ability. They participate in the digital society: surfing on the internet, using emails, participating in social networks.

The classroom has become a place of resources, work and fun where pupils are applicants and stakeholders. Each pupil has now access to this classroom, and can use a computer as most of children, adolescents or adults do.

References

Centre de La Gabrielle's Website : <http://www.centredelagabrielle.fr>

Article about certifying training for the computer and Internet Certificate (B2I):
<http://www.centredelagabrielle.fr/spip.php?article102>

Labels 2013 - "Rights of care users": <http://www.sante.gouv.fr/l-aih-association-informatique-et-handicap-pour-vivre-avec-le-numerique.html>

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