

Plenary Session 1

Early Childhood Development and Education and Supporting SEN Students

Date: 7 Oct, 2016

Time: 13:45 – 15:15

Session Chair: Prof. Nirmala Rao

Speaker 1: Prof. Linda Siegel

Title: Understanding Dyslexia and Other Learning Disabilities

Abstract:

Homelessness, anti- social behaviour, and adolescent suicide have all been shown to be a consequence of undiagnosed and untreated specific learning disabilities (SLD). This presentation will outline the major types of SLD, (dyslexia, dysgraphia, mathematics disability) and explain the cognitive challenges of these learning disabilities.

Cognitive deficits include, but are not limited to phonological processing and working memory for numbers and/or words. The strengths and abilities of these SLDs will be discussed. Depending on the individual, these abilities may include music, sports, artistic work, drama, and/or visual spatial skills. Finding and encouraging these abilities can prevent the negative effects of the loss of self-esteem that are often a consequence of having an SLD.

Appropriate measures for assessing the presence and severity of each type of SLD will be outlined. Achievement tests are necessary and sufficient for establishing an SLD. Extended psychoeducational testing is not necessary.

It is of utmost importance to provide appropriate intervention as soon as possible. The Response to Intervention (RTI) system provides a good model. It is a 3-tier model. In this model, students are assessed early in their school career (ideally in P1). If they are found to be at risk, they receive some intervention, usually more intensive classroom instruction. If they experience difficulties in this intervention and are still not performing at expected levels, they receive small group intervention in a withdrawal (from the classroom) program. If, after this intervention, they are still not performing at expected levels, they receive intensive, individualized intervention.

Evidence will be provided that young children at risk for reading difficulties can be detected in kindergarten and/or P1 and that appropriate intervention can prevent most cases of reading difficulties.

Furthermore, accommodations are essential for the student with SLD to progress in elementary and secondary school and institutions of higher education. Accommodations include access to a computer, to a screen reader, speech recognition software, extended times for assignments and examinations, a scribe, and/or examinations taken on a computer.

As a society we can do much to prevent the negative effects of having an SLD and make the world a better and safer place for all of our students.

Speaker 2: Prof. Frank Oberklaid

Title: Science of Early Childhood Development and Intervention: Implications for Policymakers and Professionals

Abstract:

Science tells us that the foundations of health and wellbeing are established in the early years, well before a child starts school. The early environments experienced by young children are powerful determinants of cognitive and social-emotional development that impact on outcomes right throughout the life course. There is a growing robust evidence base that a range of conditions throughout the life course and into adult life – mental health problems, family violence, criminality, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, poor literacy, chronic unemployment and welfare dependency – have their origins in pathways that begin in the early years. Investing in the early years to promote and enhance early child development in all children, and intervene early with children and families exhibiting early signs of dysfunction, can thus improve outcomes in multiple domains, and represents a sound economic investment. These research findings challenge governments, agencies and professionals to develop policies that facilitate high quality early years' environments, and ensure a well-coordinated service system focused on prevention and early intervention. The implications of this research extend beyond the early years to all of society. This presentation will review and summarise the science and discuss its implications.