

TRUSTEE CONFERENCE REPORT

Name: John Hendry **Date Submitted:** August 24, 2015

Name of Conference: World Conference on Special Needs Education 2015

Sponsoring Organization: Temple University

Theme (If any): International forum on the advances of assistive technology, pedagogy and teaching methods for students with disabilities

Conference Dates: August 17 – 20, 2015

Location: Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

Workshops/Seminars/Presentations/Keynote Speeches Attended:

(Include a brief Summary)

- 1) **Keynote Speaker: Professor Cynthia Northington-Purdie**

Corporal Punishment of Disabled Children

Corporal Punishment is still legal under various circumstances in many US schools. Research has shown that this type of punishment and other forms of punishment is disproportionately administered to children with disabilities. This is particularly evident among autistic children.

- 2) **Keynote Speaker: Dr. Kourtland Koch, Associate Professor**

Arising Issues Relating to Labeling of Children At-Risk With Developmental Delay

The presentation focused on the variation between jurisdictions when it came to identifying students between the ages of six and nine. Some jurisdictions use quantitative criteria such as standard deviation, while others used criterion-referenced tests with a set determination of the percent of delay that is present. The negative result has created situations of over/under identifying children with low-incidence disabilities. The dilemma is that final decisions are sometimes made based on funding availability and not best practices.

- 3) **Keynote Speaker: Dr. Leigh Ann Raneiri**

Strategies for At-Risk Students and Mental Health Issues in the School Environment

This lecture identified a survey-based research program in Pennsylvania schools that uses the data collected to create a variety of programs including school-based mental health strategies. The program works in partnership with the local community to provide preventative programs as well as awareness of the mental health issues facing our students today.

4) Dr. Jeff Graham, Associate Professor, University of Toronto
Adaptive eLearning Powered by DeckChair Tutor

This research technology is now being developed and tested at the University of Toronto. DeckChair Learning Systems presents a fully mobile eLearning platform designed to help students (particularly those with special needs and at-risk students) master concepts quickly in any course or grade including elementary, secondary and post-secondary.

Teachers can adjust content to remediate content and adapt questions to match the individual student's knowledge level. It is an eLearning tool for the mastery of core skills, vocabulary, rules and problem-solving procedures.

5) Obstacles Facing Mainstream Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

The focus of this workshop was the difficulties schools face in mainstreaming students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The thesis was to insure every student was mainstreamed into regular classrooms. However, it was agreed that that scenario was not always in the best interest of the student. Some of the obstacles discussed were funding constraints, push-back from other parents (fearing the presence of these students would take away from their child's attention in class) and lack of adequate training and classroom support for teachers.

6) The Needs of Families of Children with Special Needs

The needs of parents are sometimes overlooked when planning for the special education needs of at-risk students identified as exceptional. The discussions confirmed the issues appear to be consistent around the world. Parents want more direct involvement in the programs and services as well as the placement of their child, and are frustrated at the inability of schools to provide that level of participation. A universal concern surrounds the lack of transition planning at all levels. Transition planning is important for all students and absolutely critical for autistic students. There also appears to be the practice in many schools to manage special needs students and parents by rote...this is the way it has always been done. Parents often feel they are uninformed and always on the outside with little input.

The workshop also discussed the positive sides of special education programs where the majority of parents were happy with the programs, teachers and resources. It was agreed by all that on-going professional development and increased support for classroom teachers would go a long way to improve parental support and school experiences for special needs students.

7) Sexual Abuse Prevention

The workshop was an open forum to discuss the issue of sexual abuse of students, particularly at-risk students, and the need to provide more professional development for teachers. The training needed is in the area of identifying subtle signs that may indicate a student may be the victim of sexual abuse. Providing students with a variety of methods to recognize potential situations and how to react was presented and discussed. Constant vigilance is required to insure our most vulnerable students are protected. One suggestion was to openly discuss the issue with students thereby creating more awareness as well as creating a type of "buddy-system" to have students watch out for each other. A training program has been developed that is being used in some USA jurisdictions.

8) Helping Students with Test Anxiety

This workshop examined various techniques that can help students deal with stress prior to and during tests. It discussed how teachers can recognize and deal with physical symptoms, nervous activities and avoidance.

Note:

The conference was a working conference with no social activities or entertainment. Only one meal was provided on Tuesday, August 18. The conference resulted in a loss of wages during the four-day period; however the material and topics covered were invaluable in my professional development in the area of special education.