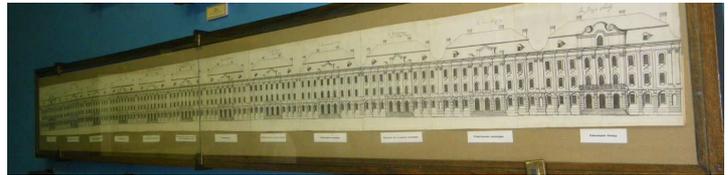


From the Regional ISEI Conference in St Petersburg 1-3 July 2013: "Early Intervention to Promote Child Development and Mental Health: From Institutional Care to Family Environment".

This conference, organized by the International Society on Early Intervention (ISEI) and the World Association for Infant Mental Health, attracted around 500 delegates from 42 nations. During the three days, more than 100 symposia and sessions were provided, in addition to three plenary sessions.

The plenary sessions took place in St Petersburg's University Main Building built in the early 18th century as 12 colleges, each for one of the nation's ministries. The 12 buildings were integrated into one long facade that spanned an entire block.



Other sessions were held in the Pavlov building, i.e. the Psychology Faculty. In this historical building, the organizers had installed computers and projectors in 10 rooms and engaged simultaneous interpreters. Just impressive! It was a special experience to listen to the mix of Russian and English languages.



Dr Riftak Muhamedrahimov told in his introduction plenary that the Russian Federation consists of 83 constituent entities including 200 ethnic groups with 83 languages. Children with disabilities or mental health problems have traditionally lived in orphanages, but nowadays these decrease in number due to the belief that children should live in families.



Dr Elena Koznevnikova was the second organizer of the conference and the very engaged "frontman", i.e. leader of the changes in the Russian system during the last 20 years. She told how it all began with the support of families with children with Down syndrome, the influence of Karl Grunewald and the normalization principle (living normal lives), and the education of families. Nowadays, the Early Intervention Institute in St Petersburg is one of the leading organizations to develop and disseminate advanced methods for working with families with young children in Russia and CIS countries. During the years, SIDA, L r rh gskolan Stockholm, Ersta Sk ndal, Stockholms l ns landsting and more Swedish organizations have provided support. Today Larissa Samarina is the head of the institute and there is a manual establishing standard requirements for Russian early intervention. It should be functional, provided in natural environments, family centred and interdisciplinary. More information on www.EII.ru.

Dr Arnold Sameroff from the University of Michigan presented the importance of the social context of early intervention. A longitudinal study across 30 years showed that IQ and mental health are stable over time. Unfortunately, also risk factors seemed quite stable.



However, as children's development in first hand is dependent on the amount of risk factors, the environment should be the focus of interventions. Not least, the attitudes of parents are essential for child development.

Dr Michael Guralnick, the chair of ISEI, talked about connections between mental health and peer relationships for children with developmental delays. Around 8% of non-delayed children suffer from mental health problems whereas the number is 25% for delayed children at 36 and 48 months. 60-75% of even mildly delayed children in preschool ages show peer competence difficulties. Peer relationships are critical to promote a child's development and mental health. Parents are essential to foster peer competence; they should support inclusive preschools, promote establishment of the child's peer social networks, and establish horizontal parent-child interaction patterns.



Dr Eva Melin from Stockholm University also talked about peer relations. She defined *social participation* as Belonging to preschool, inter-subjective interaction that leads into acts of acknowledgment, situation dependent autonomy, and involvement. How children carry out activities is for example influenced by the teachers attitudes to children's roles as subjects or actors.

Dr Joy Osofsky from the Louisiana State University in New Orleans presented lessons learned from children exposed to trauma and its implications for early intervention. She used the expression "derail the normal developmental trajectory", i.e., the children get off the track when exposed to adverse childhood experiences. Data from more than 17 000 patents reveal staggering proof of the health, social, and economic risks that result from childhood trauma, which have long-term consequences, far more than depression, e.g. heart diseases. The Adverse Childhood Experience Study (ACES) can be found at <http://acestudy.org/>.



I myself contributed with the presentation of Delphi processes used to identify ICF-CY categories for participation-focused code sets for pre-schoolers. When developing code sets, the opinions of all involved have to be considered and each code set has to be adapted to the specific everyday life situation. For child functioning, the immediate family is most essential.

International Society of Early Intervention.

To get more information about the ISEI, you can apply for a free membership:

<http://depts.washington.edu/isei/membership/memberapp.php>

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