

# Third Conference of the International Society on Early Intervention (ISEI) New York City, May 2-5, 2011

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From left to right: Dr. Darcy Walworth, Dr. Deanna Hanson-Abromeit, Dr. Petra Kern, Edel Musco, Anja Taita, and Dr. Dena Register.

In May 2011, Dr. Michael Guralnick, Chair ISEI invited the international community on early childhood to gather at the third conference of the International Society on Early Intervention in New York City to network and share information and ideas. Numerous research symposia, paper sessions, and poster presentations reflected the current trends of early childhood intervention around the world. Included in the conference program were two music therapy symposia led by Dr. Dena Register (U.S.A.) and Anja Tait (Australia) respectively. These research symposia and in-depth conversations with early childhood professionals provided excellent opportunities not only to educate about the research-based benefits of music therapy interventions for young children and their families, but also to reflect on commonalities and prospective collaborations.

To echo the current trends in early child intervention, colleagues who have attended the conference summarized selected presentations. We hope that this will give the *imagine* readers some insights and inspiration for their own work.

## **Symposium on the Impact of Music on Cognitive and Social Development in Early Intervention**

Darcy Walworth, Ph.D., MT-BC (USA); Deanna Hanson-Abromeit, Ph.D., MT-BC (USA); Dena Register, Ph.D. (USA); and Petra Kern Ph.D., MT-DMtG, MT-BC, MTA (USA)

### **Summarized by Dena Register**

The Symposium on the *Impact of Music on Cognitive and Social Development in Early Intervention* was one of two music therapy presentations on the congress program. Moderated by Dr. Dena Register, this session was comprised of four distinct, but related, presentations on the use of music therapy to impact the lives of young

children. The presentation began with a brief definition and overview of music therapy in order to ensure that the audience (primarily non-music professionals) had a basic understanding of the frame from which the various presenters were sharing their work. Dr. Darcy Walworth began by sharing results of her study that investigated the use of music therapy for advancing social skills for infants and toddlers. Following this presentation, Dr. Deanna Hansom-Abromeit shared her clinical experiences in preventive music therapy interventions to address language development in at-risk infants. This led quite naturally into Dr. Register's work using music interventions to support language and emerging literacy in early intervention. And, finally, Dr. Petra Kern shared three case studies, which demonstrated how music increases independent functioning of young children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

One common thread among the four presentations was the idea that young children need experiences that facilitate child-centered communication, healthy attachment to caregivers and peers, and opportunities to learn self-regulation. Video clips of each of the presenters' clinical work provided clear demonstration of how music facilitates these skills in natural, playful ways and allows for high frequency and high quality interactions among children and adults.

**Re-imagining Learning in the Early Years with the Arts**  
Anja Tait, BMus(Therapy), PostGradDipPrimaryEducation, RMT (Australia); Edel Musco, BFineArt, M.Ed. (Australia); and Petra Kern Ph.D., MT-DMtG, MT-BC, MTA (USA)

**Summarized by Anja Tait**

In this presentation, we each discussed the theoretical frameworks that inform our practice of involving families with the arts, and how this work is situated in the liminal space: The space between home, school, community and playground. We believe the arts in early childhood are full of joy, action and reflection. Arts interventions can address communication, social functioning and emotional wellbeing, and elicit an experience of enjoyment. Arts interventions are flexible, responsive, inclusive, collaborative, interactive and integrated.

Across the three case studies there were commonalities, including a) intentional learning for children, b) purposeful practice for adults, c) natural (everyday) environments, d) inclusion, e) collaboration, and e) reflection about process and product. We are concerned with measuring impact, both the observable and the intangible, including interaction, connection, involvement, and commitment. Across the three case studies there was also diversity, of art forms, disciplines, environments, research methodologies and methods.

From our work in schools, libraries and communities, our vision for learning in the early years, in practice, policy and research, centers around three key ideas: 1) everyday environments are natural and potent contexts for

implementing early childhood interventions, 2) arts interventions expand and enable learning opportunities for people of all ages, and 3) an interdisciplinary approach allows multiple perspectives and inventive collaborations that contribute new knowledge to the field.

This presentation was a bricolage, comprising three different but complementary perspectives that accommodate contradictions, and together create and present a rich picture of the field: The arts in early learning, early childhood development and early intervention.

**Practice-Based Evidence: Exploring an Overlooked Issue in Evidence-Based Practice Discourse**

Kofi Marfo, Ph.D. (USA); Christine Johnson, Ph.D.; and Helen Lunn, B.A. (Australia)

**Reviewed by Deanna Hanson-Abromeit**

This symposium included three presentations. In *Early Intervention's Evidence-Based Discourse: Beyond the Obvious and the Oversimplified*, Kofi Marfo, Ph.D., stressed the importance of being "confident in ourselves" as we become evidence-based practitioners. Using the West African word *sankofa*, which means "going forward by taking the best of the past with you," Dr. Marfo emphasized the importance of evidence and rigor, but also the value of experience and knowledge to do the right thing, recognizing highly qualified practitioners as the key to new knowledge.

Christine Johnson, Ph.D. and Helen Lunn, B.A. addressed the characteristics of an expert clinician in *Practice-Based Evidence: What Practitioners Say it Means*. Knowledge base, cognitive processes, the ability to internally integrate processes, and interpersonal relationships may be qualitative differences that identify an individual as an expert practitioner. Moreover, differentiation of practice levels could inform changes to curriculum, documentation of quality practices, decision support tools, and participation in decision and policymaking.

In *Charting New Waters through Acknowledging Expertise and Evidence*, Helen Lunn encouraged the recognition and development of expert practitioners through adequate pay, implementation of formal mentoring and clinical supervision models, increased number of expert practitioners as managers, a culture of reflective practice, and a continuous collection of feedback from patients and clients.

Each of these presentations had relevance to music therapy. As the vision of music therapy research and practice expands, it is important to review the past for value and meaning within the context of new ways of thinking and working. In addition, as music therapy evolves, the continuum of practice levels will demand greater differentiation. Embracing reflective practice and proactive advocacy for the training, retention and acknowledgement of expert levels of practice will guide the profession into the future.

### **A Fresh Look at Nature and Nurture with Respect to Early Intervention**

Kathy Hirsch-Pasek, Ph. D. (USA); Franz Peterander, Ph.D. (Germany); and James Blackman, M. D., MPH (USA)

Reviewed by Darcy Walworth

This symposium included three presentations focused on current research supporting the impact of nature or nurture on early childhood development. *Stressful Early Experiences and Early Childhood Intervention*, Franz Peterander, Ph.D., highlighted the vast amount of research supporting stress-free environments for early childhood brain development. The long-term damaging effects from a stressful environment in utero and during infancy can be lessened through targeted early intervention programs. This is compelling for music therapists providing early intervention services to infants and young children at risk of developmental delays from deprived environments. "Genetic Aspects of Recovery from Early Brain Injury", James Blackman, MD, MPH, explored the function of genetics in predisposition to survival, recovery from brain injury, and being at risk for diseases later in life. The ethical considerations for research designs surrounding knowledge of genetic predisposition for debilitating diseases were discussed. It was stressed that a nurturing and therapeutic environment enhances the outcomes of children and adults who experience traumatic life events with differing recovery trajectories due to the individual's genes.

In *Six Principles for Rethinking Language Intervention*, Kathy Hirsch-Pasek, Ph.D., the tenets of language development in the context of the environment were discussed. All six principles addressed had relevance to music therapy interventions in early childhood: 1) The amount of language addressed to children matters; 2) Children learn words for events and things that interest them; 3) Children learn best in interactive and responsive environments where they participate in conversations; 4) Children learn in meaningful contexts; 5) Children need to hear diverse examples of words; and 6) Vocabulary and grammatical development are not divorced—even for infants.

When music therapists sing songs to children during interventions, all six of the principles can be applied. Through a large repertoire of songs children are exposed to varied language and a larger base of grammatically correct words than might be used in conversations (principles 1, 5 & 6). Children are naturally interested in music and typically have a desire to sing along and learn the words of the songs (principle 2). A music therapy session is intrinsically interactive and responsive with the child participating in conversations, both verbal and musical (principle 3). The context of the music therapy intervention is meaningful as the child is addressing goals targeted for skill acquisition across domains (principle 4). In summary, as music therapists design and plan intervention services, it is encouraging to know there are communication, emotional, and genetic factors all working together to achieve optimal benefits for clients.

### **Virtual Home Visits: Providing Services to Children and Families via the Internet**

Barbara Fiechl, M.S. (USA); Sue Olsen, M.Ed. (USA); and Sarah Rule, Ph.D. (USA)

Reviewed by Anja Tait

Utah State University reported on a two-year research study about the effectiveness of technology as a tool for providing access and support for families isolated by seasonal weather. Many families reported that virtual home visits were equivalent in impact to face-to-face visits provided by early interventionists (e.g., occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech pathology). During virtual home visits families were involved in direct delivery of therapeutic interventions for their children's learning and development. Over time, families developed their capacity to provide for their children's special needs.

There were reported to be large start-up costs (computer equipment purchase and loan), but large cost savings (travel, personnel). I query how the computer literacy of participating practitioners and family members might have affected the perceived impact of the therapeutic interventions. Additional issues could be the stability of the software, and reliability of Internet connections.

The findings of the study reported in this presentation are relevant to my professional context, enabling access and support for staff in isolated locations in Australia. It was also relevant to initiatives in other remote locations, including families isolated by refugee status and location.

### **The Roots Literacy: Play and Language**

Carol Westby, Ph.D. (USA)

Reviewed by Edel Musco

This presentation focused on the importance of play, emotional literacy and language development for very young children. Westby made the following key points: a) stories are natural extensions of children's early experience of sharing of event structures, b) engaging in storytelling practices with the support of others enables children to develop understanding of what it is to act for a reason, c) competency with different types of oral narratives enables us to understand others in a variety of ways, and d) narrative training casually influences basic theory of mind skills.

Westby discussed strategies to help children who are ignored in social play. These include 1) support children to enter play, 2) support children's communication, 3) and help children build self-confidence. She recommends supporting children to enter play by teaching them the skills needed to enter play, and helping them find appropriate roles in the play. Westby supports children's communication by showing children how to get another's attention, and helping children to give clearly communicated messages. These strategies build young