

NEUROPSYCHOLOGY IN THE SCHOOLS

Professional psychologists pay increasing attention to children in the education system who have sustained head injury or have other neurological conditions. Paediatric neuropsychology is a young field in this country, and is available primarily through some of the major hospitals in some of the capital cities. A symposium at the 1991 Adelaide APS conference attempted to bridge the gap to the school.

The heterogeneity of neurologically impaired children has tended to exacerbate the relative neglect of their needs, failure to mobilize political and community concern, and unsystematic management and coordination of post-hospital intervention. More children are surviving brain trauma of various kinds, and living to enter school or to return to school. Hence the issue becomes more pressing, and efforts to meet demand become more visible.

Improvements are occurring in our knowledge of the developmental consequences of neurological insult and our skills in reintegrating affected children into classrooms. There is increasing awareness that such children may have quite different needs from those of other special needs groups which are well-targeted within the education system.

Yet the nature of the challenge may be unfamiliar to schools, teachers, guidance officers, and educational psychologists. Schools which gather qualitative data on children's performance across grades may be unable to supply useable premorbid data. Teachers may believe that developmental delay will be self-righting. Traditional psychoeducational practice may be inadequate: Management of behaviour problems may be based on attention-getting or motivational grounds when the issue is quite different, and standard intelligence testing measures may show normal function without detecting attentional or executive dysfunctions.

Collaboration between hospital, home, and school provides other new challenges of communication between professionals, between teacher and psychologist, and between neuropsychologist and educational psychologist. Educational and neuropsychologists debate several issues, such as whether executive dysfunction can be retrained.

This special issue on neuropsychology in Australian schools may stimulate further discussion. Letters to the editor and brief professional commentaries are welcome, in addition to further empirically based reports of work in progress.

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