“The Science of Making Friends: The UCLA PEERS Program”

Courtney C. Bolton presented on the Program for the Education & Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS) based out of UCLA. She discussed the types of social deficits most commonly associated with individuals with ASD and the consequences of peer rejection. Bolton stated that peer rejection is one of the strongest predictors of mental health problems (anxiety, depression), juvenile delinquency, and withdrawal from school. The PEERS program is an intense curriculum which is used to help facilitate social skills. It incorporates coaching of the students, parents, role playing, and didactic lessons. Bolton reviewed empirically based evidence to support this program. This presentation was very informative.

“A Cross-Cultural Investigation of Conversational Turning-Taking” Hillary Ganek presented on auditory verbal therapy (AVT) and implications across cultures. AVT is a method used for children with hearing loss to use their residual hearing in addition to the constant use of amplification devices such as [hearing aids](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hearing_aid), FM devices, and cochlear implants. Auditory-verbal therapy emphasizes speech and listening. Ganek discussed the 1-3-6 plan where children are diagnosed at 1 month, fitted with hearing technology by 3 months, and provided with language intervention by 6 months. However, because the majority of children born with hearing loss are born in developing counties they do not have access to the 1-3-6 plan. She went on to discuss her study done with families from Vietman and the differences in conversations with their children. She found that in Vietnamese families the expectations are very different from the Canadian families she interviewed. In Canda parents were noted to engage children in conversation, allowing children to lead the conversion and have child-centered conversation. While in Vietnam the expectations were adjusted according the child’s age, children are not expected to ask questions, and the adults dominate the conversations. When planning intervention it is key to understand the language socialization across different cultures.

“Bilingualism in Children with ASD: What do we know…What can we do…” Myriam L-H Beauchamp presented information on the topic of bilingualism in children with ASD. She reviewed ASD and also gave definitions on the types of bilingualism. Beauchamp reviewed literature on this topic. In the past and in today’s practices healthcare providers are recommending parents to raise their children with ASD monolingually. New research indicates that bilingualism is valued and does not have a negative effect on the language development of children with ASD. In fact keeping children from learning a minority language of a parent can have negative implications such as: decreasing the minority language parent’s ability to communicate easily with their child, be excluded from family conversations in the minority language, inability to communicate to others in the community of the minority language, and demisted conversational opportunities. Her take home message was as clinicians we need to inform parents and other professionals in the field of healthcare that research now supports bilingualism in individuals with ASD.

 “Planting Two Trees with One Seed; AAC Supports for Problem Behavior in Children with ASD”

Dr. Pat Mirenda presented information regarding problem behaviors in children with ASD. She stated the importance of implementing a Functional Behavioral Analysis (FBA) before implementing supports. Specific steps of the FBA were discussed such as identifying setting events, antecedents, behaviors, and consequences. Dr. Mirenda also provided examples of research to back up many familiar supports; thus confirming their importance. These supports included Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, visual schedules, and within activity schedules. Intervention strategies and techniques were demonstrated to provide participants with ideas for therapy. She also shared information about Contingency Maps (which I was not familiar with) and explained how this tool could be effective in therapy. The presentation was practical, educational, and very entertaining.