

The IASSID Profound intellectual and multiple disabilities SIRG Colloquium for PhD-students.

This inaugural colloquium for PhD-students was held in Maastricht on the afternoon of Tuesday 1st and the morning of Wednesday 2nd August 2006.

Prologue.

The profound intellectual and multiple disabilities special interest group held its first roundtable in 2003 in Amsterdam and has met annually since then. These meetings provide an opportunity for members to network with each other, to discuss their research and to get to know each other more informally. The last meeting prior to the Maastricht conference was held in Bruges in October 2005. Towards the end of that meeting it was suggested that although experienced researchers were presenting their work to their peers there was less scope for more inexperienced researchers especially doctoral students to share their research with each other and also with those experts in the field who were also members of the group. Arising from this discussion it was decided to hold a colloquium for doctoral researchers which would consist of two half day sessions that would precede the opening of the E-IASSID conference.

Aim of the Colloquium.

The aim of the colloquium was to provide a forum where the students could explain their research in detail and where other students as well as more experienced supervisors could critique each student's work. Twelve doctoral students agreed to participate in the proceedings and five supervisors who were experienced researchers in the field also offered to participate in the colloquium.

The Proceedings.

The colloquium met in a lecture room in the University of Maastricht on the afternoon of 1st August and also on Wednesday morning 2nd August. Most of the first session was taken up by three students who were conducting observation studies and were all using video as a data collection method. Each student was at a different stage in the research process and each presented their research in the raw. Each study was discussed in depth, the main focus of the discussion being on how suitable video was as a data collection method and what were the pitfalls of using it. Other presentations included an in depth examination of how different qualitative methods can be used to obtain sufficient and appropriate descriptive data and a study that is examining the development of appropriate diagnostic instruments for people with PIMD. One research study was considering the development of a questionnaire to assess children in educational settings and a final is looking at the use of reflection by teachers of children with PIMD.

Conclusion.

The colloquium required students to present their developing work. The students were prepared to share both the strengths and the weaknesses of their work. The supervisors offered sympathetic and clear critiques of the students' work. For all concerned this meant that a genuine trust had to prevail during the meeting and I felt that this was achieved. The feedback from the meeting was positive, it seems that a process has been established whereby emerging researchers can be mentored by their peers and by more experienced researchers within the field. This has the benefit for the students that they receive expert advice. It would seem likely that as a result a larger cohort of researchers will be built up who can carry out robust research and who will be keen to carry out further research with people with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities.

In view of the success of the colloquium it is proposed to hold one on an annual basis, the next being in Dundee in May 2007.

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