



Media release

For release Tuesday 21 November 2006

Researchers engage preschoolers to unlock learning secrets: Early intervention the key to school success

The first day of school is a pivotal moment for children and parents alike, but a new Australian research program hypothesises that the foundations of learning success are set much earlier.

The Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne and the Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) have partnered to establish the ASG Early Intervention Research Program, a five-year study that will investigate how students can achieve learning success by studying children before they even start school.

With an estimated 10 percent of Australian primary-aged children experiencing academic under-achievement (and much higher in disadvantaged schools), the findings are expected to provide a framework for teachers and parents in how to intervene with children facing learning challenges and help children reach their full education potential.

The Program Director, Associate Professor Margaret Brown says, "There is evidence that intervention beyond Grade 2 is less effective, so early intervention strategies are critical. Previously there has been a misconception that 'real learning' doesn't start until primary school commences, but this project challenges that notion."

The ASG Early Intervention Program will be launched today by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Glyn Davis, and ASG Chairman, Dr Gordon Young at the University's Early Learning Centre in Abbotsford, a premier learning and research site.

ASG supports the need for early intervention, believing the early years to be critical to the positive education outcomes of children.

"Early intervention is preferable and far more sensible than producing band-aid solutions later in life," said ASG's Managing Director, Terry O'Connell, "all the research to date points to the importance of setting learning patterns in early childhood. We believe this research program will ultimately produce better outcomes for children and their families that will help both children and the community in the long-term."

With current debate about literacy standards in Australian schools, this project may challenge current practice. Dean of Education and one of the Principal Investigators of the Program, Professor Field Rickards comments, "The findings of this research will feed into our undergraduate and postgraduate programs and help shape the practice of the teachers of tomorrow. For our University, or any university, to produce the best quality teachers, we must produce teachers who have a sophisticated understanding of not only how children learn, but also why they face challenges in learning."

The study will draw on the expertise of four key academics from the Faculty of Education, and also be informed by a multi-disciplinary reference group comprised of professionals from the Department of Education and Training, the Royal Children's Hospital and the Catholic Education Office.

Further details about the program and a comprehensive range of supporting information can be obtained online at www.asg.com.au/asgeirp

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