Special Education Network in Asia (SENIA) holds 9th annual conference

SENIA 9: Educators, specialists and parents unite to promote autonomy for students with special education needs in international schools.

The 9th annual Special Education Network In Asia conference was held from February 24-25, at Concordia International School in Shanghai, China. Over 150 delegates from ten different countries and 48 organizations and international schools were represented at this conference hosted by The Essential Learning Group of Shanghai. This year’s conference theme was “Autonomy: Promoting Independence.”

SENIA was started by a group of International School teachers in China in 2002. The intention was to create a network forum for any professionals working with children with special educational needs in Asia. Tanya Farroll, from Western Academy of Beijing, attended this year’s conference as one of the founding members; “SENIA has grown so much in the past 9 years, from an original vision of providing professional development opportunities for special needs educators in China and now it encompasses many schools in Asia.  It has been wonderful to see how the vision of a small group of people has now grown to over 150 participants at the last SENIA conference in Shanghai and all supported by volunteers who shared the same dream."

The event’s main highlight was keynote speaker, Dr. Stephen Shore. Stephen Shore grew up on the autism spectrum and entertained participants with his stories and real-life experiences as a person with autism. Dr. Shore helped participants understand students with autism and help define how these same children must learn to advocate for their own needs in the educational and work place settings. Dr. Shore held a book signing after the conference and sold out almost immediately. His books are entitled, Understanding Autism for Dummies, Beyond the Wall, Ask and Tell, and Living Along the Autism Spectrum.

Dr. Loraine Spenciner, also a keynote speaker, shared her experiences of traveling the world and observing how schools are implementing the Response To Intervention (RTI) model.

SENIA participants were also able to attend a full day of pre-conference workshops as well as 90-minute workshops put on by fellow teachers, parents, and specialists in the field on the official conference dates. According to one attendee, “(the)Workshops were very professional and provided excellent learning opportunities and sharing of knowledge. I am new to SEN and I came away with renewed enthusiasm and passion. It helped me to make sense of my existing knowledge and to build on this with the wealth of new knowledge acquired at SENIA 9.”

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of SENIA is the networking that takes place. “So many of us who work with children with special education needs feel alone,” explains Lori Boll, this year’s conference chairperson. “It’s refreshing to meet with others who are knowledgeable in the field and who truly care about the learning needs of each and every child. After this conference, I no longer feel so alone.”

This year’s conference was hosted by The Essential Learning Group, a multi-disciplinary group of professionals whose main focus is supporting families and children with special education needs.

Members of SENIA have just elected their first official Board. The following seven individuals will now work together to ensure that SENIA’s mission statement is carried out; SENIA is a network of educators, professionals and parents across Asia dedicated to supporting children with special learning needs. Working together, we will provide a network to combine our strengths to help raise awareness and advocate for the children in our lives.

*Ericson Perez*, Brent International School, Manila

*Lori Boll*, The Essential Learning Group/Concordia International School

*Tanya Farrol*, Western Academy Beijing

*Dr. Reed Rhodes*, Beijing Community International School

*Monte Rosen*, The Essential Learning Group, Shanghai

*Kim Choi*, Parent, Shanghai Community International School

*Salomon Malca*, Parent, Brent International School, Manila

Article written by Lori Boll, lori.boll@elgchina.com