head of the development of academia in intellectual disability studies in Australia. He was Editor-in-Chief of the *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, now known as the *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities*. He was on the executive of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability (IASSID) for 13 years and served as its president. This gave him an international network of colleagues for mutual influence.

The focus of the day was concepts of intelligence and concepts of intellectual disability. The development of the intelligence test in the 1900s has led to an excessive reliance on the result of a simple test to identify certain people. It is one thing to identify the need for additional support, services or funding for which identification can be helpful, but such identification can also lead to a loss of status, access to certain environments, such as employment, or entitlement to choice in society. The threat of doing harm has led to changes in the definition of intellectual disability over time, to include “having problems of independent functioning in at least two areas” in DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Diseases) (1994) at a time that no such reliable measure had been developed. The next (Vth) version of DSM is moving away from the measurement of intelligence to a measure of “need for support”, with further problems of reliability and validity of measures. Undoubtedly these concepts are mathematically correlated, but also make important and meaningful distinctions.

Further, intelligence is not a fixed human attribute but is an interaction of genetic faults and a lack of appropriate environment. Every decade the population becomes more intelligent as based on standardised testing (an average improvement of 34 points since 1950). The resilience model of understanding humans described by Alan and Anne Clarke (2003) is a combination of biological resources and social support. For example one additional attribute such as motivation can change IQ testing by 20 points! Accordingly we may be better to talk of competencies rather than a measure of generic potential, as implicitly measured by IQ.

Trevor helped set up the international working group on Quality of Life in IASSID in 1996. In an article he describes quality of life as: beliefs, goals, aspirations, knowledge of self and of how the world works. Nowhere is IQ mentioned. One can see how much of quality of life is dependent on an environment that gives choice. Social inclusion also provides stimulation and maximises choice. Accordingly intellectual ability is dependent on cognitive, social and quality of life components. Intellectual ability is therefore dominated by environmental factors, but also has major influences on that same environment. That is to say the broader qualities of ability have a valid belief, with the discovery of ways of retraining brain activities and promoting repair and regeneration of neuronal activity. Roy argued that we are too preoccupied with science, which approaches understanding from the top down, with an assumption of knowing which deconstructs function, as opposed to the study of biology, which looks at natural function and adaptability and thereby teaches us about potential and change in different environments.

Appreciating the more important things of life: Professor Trevor Parmenter’s Festschrift

Associate Professor David Dossetor, Child Psychiatrist with a special interest in intellectual disability and autism, Area Director of Mental Health, Children’s Hospital at Westmead.

Epistemology is the study of “why we are the way we are”. This is the motif that Vivien Riches hung on her wall while she was Trevor’s PhD Student, one of his earliest from some 30 years ago. A questioning of the theory and origin of knowledge is a measure of most significant academics. A festschrift is a book or academic meeting honouring a respected person, as was presented to honour Trevor Parmenter on 14/8/10 on his retirement as the Foundation Professor of Developmental Disability at the Centre for Disability Studies, Sydney Medical School, at University of Sydney, and indeed the first such professor in Australia. Trevor, who was born to a country life, started his teaching career in a single teacher school in regional Australia. 1970-73 he was a principal at Rowland Hassall School, Parramatta for those with learning difficulties, where he inspired both students and teachers alike in appreciating that you can’t measure someone by their IQ, as he valued all other traits of human valour. He first became a university academic in 1972 first as a Lecturer at Kuringai College of Advanced Education and then at Macquarie University where he became a Senior Lecturer in 1980, associate professor in 1988 and Professorial Fellow in 1990. He took up the Director of the Centre Disability Studies in 1997 and has certainly been at the forefront of the development of academia in intellectual disability studies in Australia.

Professor Roy Brown, Trevor’s visiting international friend and peer from Calgary, Canada, previously of Adelaide, described how much our concepts of intelligence have changed. 20 years ago we believed that brain cells couldn’t reproduce or adapt, and aging was a constant decline and loss of neuronal activity from birth. This is no longer true. The Children’s Hospital at Westmead School-Link Initiative
One can see how much of quality of life is dependent on an environment that gives choice.