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PERSPECTIVES

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Theme Editors' Summary

DYSLEXIA ACROSS THE WORLD

by Leonore Ganschow and T.R. Miles

The focus of this issue of *Perspectives* is "dyslexia across the world." It is an exciting time for those who teach or do research on dyslexia. The rapid expansion of communication opportunities as a result of the internet and world-wide travel has contributed to the movement toward international cooperation. In this issue, the editors have asked educators from various parts of the world to discuss their views about dyslexia. Shortly before the multilingualism/dyslexia conference in Manchester, England this past June, coeditors Tim Miles from the U.K. and Le Ganschow from the United States sat down together to map out the themes for this special issue. As they brainstormed about what might be most interesting, informative - and perhaps provocative - for readers of *Perspectives*, they decided on the following themes:

- an introduction to the two major umbrella dyslexia associations: the European Dyslexia Association (EDA) and The International Dyslexia Association (IDA), with its newly formed International Affiliates Subcommittee;
- a discussion of the status of dyslexia in several countries not represented in EDA or IDA;
- an overview of the similarities and differences in dyslexia across languages;
- a review of music and dyslexia, to reflect a unique perspective on dyslexia that has cross-cultural implications;
- a critique of issues in identifying and classifying dyslexia across the world.

Dyslexia Associations

In the first paper, Gyda Skat Nielsen describes the work of EDA. Among other things, she explains how

and when EDA was started, its current membership, its goals, past and present activities, and its publications.

In the second paper the chair of IDA's International Affiliates Subcommittee, Charles Haynes, and its president, Harley Tomey, describe how The Orton Dyslexia Society came to change its name to The International Dyslexia Association. They also describe the work of the International Affiliates Subcommittee and provide information about how to become an international affiliate of IDA.

Dyslexia in Other Countries

Educators who are now working (or have been working) in Hong Kong, Russia, India, Japan, South Africa, and Chile report on dyslexia in their respective countries.

C.K. Leong, former Board member of IDA and presently on its Council of Advisors, recently spent two years in Hong Kong as professor and founding dean, School of Languages, Hong Kong Institute of Education. He describes ongoing research on written language disabilities among Hong Kong Chinese children and calls attention to the need for changes in government policy. In the mid 1990s, Joan Stoner served as head of a U.S. delegation of educators who visited Russia. In her article, she and Russian colleagues Drs. Malateev and Kutzushkina describe Russia's progressive (and aggressive) treatment of individuals with dyslexia in the earlier years. Two papers follow about the scene in India. In the first of these, Dr. S. Ramaa, who works in Mysore, describes the progress that has taken place since the 1980s; in the second, Dr. Bobby Kurian, who is a psychiatrist in North Wales and travels back to his

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Dyslexia Across the World

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home province of Kerala several times a year, emphasizes the need to develop collaboration between educators in the UK and educators in Kerala. In Japan, according to Professor Jun Yamada, dyslexia is thought by many to be nonexistent. He explains why dyslexia might be *camouflaged* in Japan and how educators are now beginning to recognize the educational needs of those with dyslexia. Edna Freinkel from South Africa reports on her contacts with those interested in dyslexia at universities and state education departments in four areas of South Africa. She addresses issues of incidence, definition, facilities, and literacy. The last article in this series is by Bob Shaw, associate dean at Brown University, who spent a year in Chile on a Fulbright grant. He reports on the high level of awareness of dyslexia among the general population (though there is a lack of support at the college level) and the considerable research that has been conducted in Chile since the 1970s.

Dyslexia across Languages

Elaine Miles challenges some of the assumptions that educators in English-speaking countries may make about the

source of language differences for individuals with dyslexia. She directs the reader's attention to *transparent* languages, such as German and Welsh, in which phonemic discrimination is not the primary problem for individuals with dyslexia. She also discusses possible sources of difficulties for these individuals in China. She warns us "to be very aware of the different assumptions that are fundamental to different languages."

Music and Dyslexia

People in some countries of the world recognize that part of the dyslexic picture includes difficulties with musical notation. Violet Brand, chair of the Music and Dyslexia Committee of the British Dyslexia Association, describes the position in Great Britain, where accommodations are made for musically gifted people with dyslexia when they take qualifying exams. Ms. Brand draws parallels between difficulties with literacy skills and learning to read music, presents stumbling blocks to learning to read music and makes suggestions about ways to begin

instruction and instruments to consider for children with dyslexia.

The Issue of Definition: Some Problems

Marcia Henry, Le Ganschow, and Tim Miles tackle the challenging topic of definition and the development of international criteria for dyslexia. Marcia Henry begins by providing a brief summary of the development of the term *dyslexia* over the last 100 years. She suggests that definitions evolve over time and recommends that researchers heed the warning by Tønnessen to treat a definition as an hypothesis. Le Ganschow describes several issues to consider in developing criteria for dyslexia that will be accepted internationally and some current initiatives in this direction. Tim Miles argues that the identification of dyslexia with poor reading has been an obstacle to progress.

About the Theme Co-Editors

Leonore (Le) Ganschow is professor emeritus, Department of Educational Psychology, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio and served on the Board of Directors of IDA from 1992-1998. She currently serves as acting editor of the IDA publication *Annals of Dyslexia*, and newsletter editor for the International Academy of Research on Learning Disabilities (IARLD). She is guest co-editor of a forthcoming special issue of *Dyslexia: An International Journal of Research and Practice*, that focuses on bilingualism and dyslexia. Dr. Ganschow has published more than 50 articles and book chapters on learning disabilities and, in particular, foreign languages and at-risk learners. Her address is 8570 E. Bakely Circle, Minocqua, WI 54548; phone: 715-588-3754; fax: 715-588-2754; e-mail: lganschow@aol.com.

From 1963 to 1987 **Tim Miles** was professor of psychology at the University of Wales, Bangor, where he is now professor emeritus. He is editor of *Dyslexia: An International Journal of Research and Practice* and has published numerous books and papers on dyslexia and other subjects. His books include *Help for Dyslexic Children* (with E. Miles), *Dyslexia: The Pattern of Difficulties*; *Dyslexia at College* (with D.E. Gilroy); and *Dyslexia: A Hundred Years On* (with E. Miles). Co-edited books include *Dyslexia Research and its Applications* (with G.Th. Pavlidis); *Dyslexia and Mathematics* (with E. Miles); and *Dyslexia and Stress* (with V.P. Varma). Professor Miles' other interests include philosophy of mind and philosophy of religion, where he has published *Eliminating the Unconscious: A Behaviourist View of Psychoanalysis*, *Religion and the Scientific Outlook*; *Speaking of God: Theism, Atheism and the Magnus Image*; and jointly with P. Harzem, *Conceptual Issues in Operant Psychology*. In 1996 he and his wife Elaine were awarded The Orton Dyslexia Society Award for International Leadership. He is a founding member of the British Dyslexia Association and currently serves as one of its vice presidents. His address is Dyslexia Unit, School of Psychology, University of Wales, Bangor, LL 57 2DG, UK; phone: (0) 1248 383842; fax: (0) 1248 383842; e-mail: t.r.miles@bangor.ac.uk.



TWO VIEWS ON DYSLEXIA IN INDIA

by S. Ramaa and Ninan Kurian

Dyslexia In India

by S. Ramaa

Awareness about the existence and nature of learning disabilities was new in India at the beginning of the 1980s. Now the situation is somewhat different. Many parents, teachers, psychologists, special educators, psychiatrists, speech and language therapists, as well as pediatricians, discuss learning disabilities in different forums and situations such as at school, in remedial education centers, when tutoring is given at home, and in clinical settings. Learning disabilities has become one of the areas of research in these disciplines in India. Solid work on LD has been carried out in some Indian languages, and a database now exists for understanding the problems of children with LD and strategies that are helpful in improving their academic performance and overall adjustment. Some remedial education centers run by voluntary organizations in some important cities are also providing good services to children with LD. Regional/national seminars/conferences/workshops on LD have become a regular feature in India. Sensitization programs and short-term training programs to teachers, parents, and others interested in LD are also going on to some extent. Some universities and institutes that offer teacher training programs in special education also deal with LD to the extent the scope of the course permits. A review of research on LD in India during the past two decades by Ramaa (1999) reveals new trends.

Since only a few special schools or remedial centers exist in India for children with LD, in most of the studies the subjects have been drawn from mainstream schools. Almost all of the studies share a common set of criteria and additional or modified criteria, depending upon the type of LD or language in which the study was conducted. The numbers of

children who have been screened range from 300 to 1500 and the percentages of incidence range from 3% to 8.5%. Kannada and Malayama have had the least incidence. However, writing disabilities in English have caused a large number of problems presumably because of the irregular nature of English orthography. The professionals and policymakers are alarmed by the prevalence figures and are emphasizing the need for special

universally. Error analyses of spoken languages, reading and writing in Kannada and Malayalam as well as English has been carried out in a detailed and systematic manner. These analyses help teachers to plan remedial programs not only for children with LD but for any child who commits such errors. The techniques employed in analysis of the errors in these languages may be used in other languages that share common features. For example, the observations made through the analysis of the errors committed by children with LD in arithmetic in Kannada-speaking children may be useful worldwide.

Some investigators have developed effective remedial programs for children with LD in spoken language, reading, and arithmetic in the Kannada language and in reading comprehension, arithmetic, and writing disabilities in the English language. The principles, techniques, and strategies employed in the programs have been validated. The same ideas also are applicable in the development of programs in other languages.

Though good progress has been made in research on LD in India, a lot needs to be done. The quality of teacher training programs needs to be improved, as does sensitivity to children's needs by professionals, teachers, parents, and the general public. Policymakers need to give sufficient weight to special education programs for students with LD. Universities and institutions such as the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the Regional Institute of Education (New Delhi) and the Rehabilitation Council of India (New Delhi) need to give the highest priority to research and special education programs relating to LD.

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The diagnosis of underlying factors – neuropsychological processes, information processing skills and cognitive developmental deficiencies – help not only in understanding Indian children but children with LD universally.

educational programs for these children.

One of the challenges for those who carry out studies in Indian languages is the lack of availability of tools for the identification and diagnosis of academic problems. Some investigators have made serious attempts to construct such tools or adapt existing ones, particularly in Kannada, Malayalam, and English. This is an important contribution to the field of special education in India.

The diagnosis of underlying factors – neuropsychological processes, information processing skills and cognitive developmental deficiencies – help not only in understanding Indian children but children with LD

Two Views on Dyslexia in India

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Dyslexia In India

by Ninan (Bobby) Kurian

India has many different languages and dialects. Some people are totally illiterate; others are fluent in more than three languages. Hence, there is considerable difficulty in assessing literacy rates and the effects of illiteracy. Seemingly, those who are fully literate number less than 50%, though some states, like my home state of Kerala, have a high literacy rate (more than 90%). English is the medium of education at universities and of communication in large businesses. Learning the English language is a high priority and of great advantage.

Children learn languages at different levels. In preschool they have one language; in primary school, two; in secondary school, three. The construction, structure, and sound systems vary a great deal from one language to another.

Dyslexia is still very much an unknown and ill-understood entity. Very few schools and teachers have any awareness of it. To put a measure to it, if one hundred thousand schools exist, one thousand schools (or 1%) may be aware of such a problem; one hundred schools (.1%) may deal with the problem; and ten (or .01%) may

take an active interest in remedial teaching or other specialized efforts. In the next century when India is expected to reach 89-90% literacy rate, one can imagine the enormity of the problem in a country with a population of a billion people.

Like many other problems, the three "A"s – awareness, acceptance, and availability of resources – are the key factors in dealing with such a huge problem. Awareness can be promoted through teachers, if the problem can be made understandable and at least one teacher in every school receives special training in assessment and management. Acceptance can be achieved if the selected teacher can talk to parents in a language they can understand and can offer remedial methods. Availability of resources is possible through public trusts, governmental and non governmental organizations or individuals and schools. All of this is possible if we unite the people working in the field of dyslexia under one banner of the *Dyslexia Society of India*, which could be empowered by The International Dyslexia Association to have enough courage, strength, status, and popularity. I believe that as more people become interested in dyslexia, the government will take notice, which will invariably affect and

change the lives of that percentage of children with dyslexia among the one hundred million children of school age at any time in India.

*Dr. S. Ramaa is reader and in-charge of special education at the Regional Institute of Education (NCERT) in Mysore. Her main responsibilities are teaching post-graduate students, guiding research, coordinating inservice teacher training programs and developmental activities, and providing consultation services to teachers and parents. Over the past four years she has served on the editorial board of *Dyslexia: An International Journal of Research and Practice*. Her address is Regional Institute of Education (NCERT), Mysore, India, 570 006; phone: (0)821-514411; fax: (0)821-515665; e-mail: riemcal@blr.vsnl.net.in*

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Omni Shoreham
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LaPosada Hotels
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