

Educare June 2006

DYSLEXIA

Our experience

When I think back over our experiences, one image repeatedly comes to mind: that of my daughter, when she was six years old, literally wrestling with her reading book. The process of learning to read in French required so much effort that she was unable to sit still as she tried to decode the text in front of her. Today, now sixteen years old, she reads well, having learned how to compensate for her difficulties. But the problems associated with dyslexia still remain a challenge.

A few years later it became clear that our son was also dyslexic. At that point, we had the opportunity to move away from France and continue our ministry in Gibraltar. The schooling was in English, although a significant amount of the playground language was in Spanish. It was only when we returned to the UK that our son really made progress.

This of course raises the question of how dyslexic children cope in a bi/multi-lingual situation. (There have been studies done on this subject*.) I would have to say that, for the most part, the benefits for our daughter have outweighed the problems. We left France six years ago, but she has retained the ability to speak good conversational French. However, when we left France, our son was already struggling and would almost certainly have been held back and made to repeat the year; he was only five years old.

Even when my children were quite small, I suspected that there was a problem. Our daughter was bright and articulate, yet struggled to put pen to paper! My son had difficulties with co-ordination and speech; it became clear that he could not always process what he was hearing, yet he was very creative. Initially, my worries were not due so much to the fact that I am a qualified teacher, but more because I was a 'concerned' mother! So my first advice would always be that if you do not feel happy about your child's progress, follow it up!

For us, it meant having dyslexia screening done in the UK. It was costly and you do have to think about what the results will mean for your child; knowing the problem is only the beginning!

Having returned to UK in 2003, I decided to take a year's course on assessing and teaching dyslexia. I now do small amount of tutoring of dyslexic children.

I hope that the following information will prove useful, but please feel free to contact me if you need more details.

* E.g. article by Felicity Patterson in 'Dyslexia Review' Journal (Dyslexia Institute Guild 2002)

Defining Dyslexia

'Many people have very different views on what dyslexia is. Definitions vary across cultures and professions. In fact there is no right or wrong answer as there is no accepted definition for dyslexia. - Quoted from the website www.beingdyslexic.co.uk

Defining dyslexia has never been straightforward. There are those who would question current thinking and those who deny its existence. In the UK, amongst educationalists, the term 'Specific Learning Difficulty' (SpLD) is frequently used because this eliminates some of the problems of definition.

Dyslexia is to do with the **way** people process information and how that affects their ability to learn. It is often called a 'learning difficulty'; however, it could more accurately be described as a 'processing difficulty' or a 'difference in learning'. Research has shown that dyslexic people have tiny differences (predominately in the language areas) in the structure and function of different areas of the brain. The result of this can be that language information is processed differently, leading to inaccuracies. These differences can affect visual and/or auditory processing.

The Dyslexia Institute have come up with following helpful definition:

"Dyslexia causes difficulties in learning to read, write and spell. Short-term memory, mathematics, concentration, personal organisation may also be affected. Dyslexia usually arises from a weakness in the processing of language-based information.

Biological in origin, it tends to run in families, but environmental factors also contribute. Dyslexia can occur at any level of intellectual ability. It is not the result of poor motivation, emotional disturbance, sensory impairment or lack of opportunities, but it may occur alongside any of these. The effects of dyslexia can be largely overcome by skilled specialist teaching and the use of compensatory strategies." The Dyslexia Institute, 2002

Dyslexia may affect academic progress across a variety of subjects, as follows:

- Reading
- Writing
- Spelling
- Expressing thoughts
- Sequencing
- Differentiating left from right
- Orientation
- Short term memory
- Time management
- Organisation

Indicators of Dyslexia in Children

It is helpful to talk about 'indicators of Dyslexia' rather than 'symptoms'. The following list has been reproduced from the website of the British Dyslexia Association:

'If a child has several of these indications, further investigation should be made. The child may be dyslexic, or there may be other reasons. This is not a checklist.

1. Persisting factors.

There are many persisting factors in dyslexia, which can appear from an early age. They will still be noticeable when the dyslexic child leaves school. These include:

- *Obvious 'good' and 'bad' days, for no apparent reason,*
- *Confusion between directional words, e.g. up/down, in/out,*
- *Difficulty with sequence, e.g. coloured bead sequence, later with days of the week or numbers,*
- *A family history of dyslexia/reading difficulties.*

2. Pre-school.

- *Has persistent jumbled phrases, e.g. 'cobbler's club' for 'toddler's club'*
- *Use of substitute words e.g. 'lampshade' for 'lamppost'.*
- *Inability to remember the label for known objects, e.g. 'table, chair'.*
- *Difficulty learning nursery rhymes and rhyming words, e.g. 'cat, mat, sat'.*
- *Later than expected speech development.*

Pre-School Non-language indicators.

- *May have walked early but did not crawl - was a 'bottom shuffler' or 'tummy wriggler'.*
- *Persistent difficulties in getting dressed efficiently and putting shoes on the correct feet.*
- *Enjoys being read to but shows no interest in letters or words.*
- *Is often accused of not listening or paying attention.*
- *Excessive tripping, bumping into things and falling over.*
- *Difficulty with catching, kicking or throwing a ball; with hopping and/or skipping.*
- *Difficulty with clapping a simple rhythm.*

3. Primary/Elementary school age.

- *Has particular difficulty with reading and spelling.*
- *Puts letters and figures the wrong way round.*
- *Has difficulty remembering tables, alphabet, formulae etc.*
- *Leaves letters out of words or puts them in the wrong order.*
- *Still occasionally confuses 'b' and 'd' and words such as 'no/on'.*
- *Still needs to use fingers or marks on paper to make simple calculations.*
- *Poor concentration.*
- *Has problems understanding what he/she has read.*
- *Takes longer than average to do written work.*
- *Problems processing language at speed.*

Primary/elementary school age non-language indicators:

- *Has difficulty with tying shoe laces, ties and dressing.*
- *Has difficulty telling left from right, order of days of the week, months of the year etc.*
- *Surprises you because in other ways he/she is bright and alert.*
- *Has a poor sense of direction and still confuses left and right.*
- *Lacks confidence and has a poor self image.*

4. **12 or over.** As for primary/elementary school, plus:

- *Still reads inaccurately.*
- *Still has a difficulty in spelling.*
- *Needs to have instructions and telephone numbers repeated.*
- *Gets 'tied up' using long words, e.g. 'preliminary', 'philosophical'.*
- *Confuses places, times, dates.*
- *Has difficulty with planning and writing essays.*
- *Has difficulty processing complex language or long series of instructions at speed.*

12 or over non-language indicators:

- *Has poor confidence and self-esteem.*
- *Has areas of strength as well as weakness.'*

British Dyslexia Association 7-03-06

Getting Help

Each situation will vary, according to your location and the education system that your child is following. However, there is a wealth of information available (almost too much!). For reliable information try the following websites:

www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk The British Dyslexia Association

www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk The Dyslexia Institute

www.interdys.org The International Dyslexia Association

www.iamdyslexic.com This one of my favourite websites; written by a teenage dyslexic lad.

Finally, beware of 'cures' for dyslexia. However, there are some things that we have found especially helpful:

- Coloured overlays or tinted glasses made a big difference to our children's ability to concentrate.
- Omega 3 Oil, taken daily, also helps with concentration.
- Multi-sensory, cumulative teaching.
- 'Word Shark' and 'Number Shark' computer programmes, written with dyslexic children in mind. Published by White Space Ltd. Email: sales@wordshark.co.uk

There are also a number of other useful resources available, let me know if you would like more information on heleni@lufnet.co.uk

One last thing ...our children agreed to being mentioned in this article but it is a sensitive subject; they do not always like to be labelled. The best thing that we can do for our children is to help them find the positive within the challenge of dyslexia.

Helen Ison – June 2006 (Helen works with Arab World Ministries and is a teacher who has also qualified to work with dyslexic children)

University Study for EU Citizens

The rules on residency for UK students who have lived and studied overseas have caused problems and anxiety to many families over the years. Many parents have interpreted the 3-year residency rule very rigidly and have returned to The UK when the eldest child is no older than 15 to guarantee home student status at higher education level later on. Others have been caught out coming back later or applying from overseas and have been classified by universities and loan companies as overseas students. This classification means that students have been liable to pay heavy academic fees of £7000+ per year and that they do not qualify for the normal favourable government sponsored student loan scheme. The result has been that many British families have returned because of children's education just at the time that their overseas ministry has become most effective. For those caught out by the ruling it has meant delaying university entrance or not even going. A very few have had relatives cover the huge expenses they incur by going to university and paying these overseas rate fees.

NONE OF THIS IS NECESSARY!

WEC has not had a failure yet on this level and we have established a procedure based on an agreement with the Inland Revenue and successful precedent. Our own experience was with our eldest son who returned to the UK at 16 after completing International GCSEs in Senegal. After completing his A levels in 2 years we did have to confirm that he was a UK resident by asking WEC for an official letter stating that we were temporarily resident overseas at their request. After sending this there were no problems with either the student loan company or the universities. Our experience has been duplicated again and again by other members of WEC, including those who have completed A level studies or equivalent overseas. There have been cases where we have had to appeal against initial decisions to wrongly classify applying students, but we have always won in the end. The same is true for other mission agencies.

The key is to be able to prove that you are normally resident in the UK. The following things can be helpful

- Owning a property, although this is not essential, nor is it a guarantee that residency status will be automatically granted.
- Having the tax and National Insurance position sorted out with the Inland Revenue and being a National Insurance contributor.
- Regular return for home leave and contact with education authorities, but don't complicate the picture by talking about overseas residency – be clear that you are on a non-permanent overseas assignment at the request of your organisation.
- Evidence that your income is relatively low, and that is true for almost all mission agency families. The purpose of the residency rules is to prevent wealthy UK passport holders from bypassing UK taxes and then using the system to gain low-cost higher education for their children. Mission personnel are clearly not in this category.

Global Connections have released guidelines on their website. We recommend that any UK parents on overseas assignment look at these before making premature decisions to return to the UK to avoid heavy academic fees at university. (Go to www.globalconnections.org and type in "tertiary education and temporary residence overseas" into the search facility, then open "forum papers" and download the tertiary education file.) We are also very happy to provide a sample "generic" letter that WEC uses and can be adapted if your mission or organisation doesn't have one – but most of the bigger agencies do. We are also happy to advise in individual cases, as there will be some families where there are cross-cultural marriages or sponsoring groups in other countries where the situation is not clear cut.

EU residents? EU residents have the right to study in other EU countries under reciprocal agreements. Hence English-language educated EU residents can study in the UK or Ireland for the same fees as home students. Our son is in student accommodation with an EU student educated in South Africa who is doing just this – he is paying academic fees of just £1175/year which is the same as a UK student*. This raises possibilities for many Continental European and Scandinavian students currently in English language MK and international schools. The important thing is that, as with UK students, they must be able to prove residency in their passport (EU) country and that living overseas is a temporary assignment at the request of the mission or organisation.

Academic entrance requirements

If this could affect you as you have children learning in English it is important to know that the entrance requirements may be higher than the qualifications many of these schools offer. In particular, the High School Diploma, plus SATI scores are not enough in themselves. From a US-system school, students must present 5 SATII and/or AP qualifications relevant to the course of study. The universities stipulate exactly which ones for each course and the required scores and grades. Students in schools that offer A level, AICE or International Baccalaureate have a more straightforward situation in that they simply have to get the grades specified by the university in the appropriate subjects.

The same level of qualification is required across Europe, although some countries that continue to generalise in the early years of university may be less specific about which AP courses are needed. One advantage of the specific degree studies in the UK is that university study is relatively short – and therefore less expensive. Some specific courses such as medicine or architecture are longer, but it is normally 3 years for most bachelor degrees or 4 for languages and some engineering courses with a placement year built in.

For a fuller treatment of international education, comparisons and compatibility refer to the March 2004 Educare. If you don't have this, just e-mail us and we can send that on to you.

One last category is British students whose parents have long-term residency in another EU country. Recent rulings appear to have made the situation more flexible for them and even seem to raise the possibility of a UK student loan.

(*unless the UK family income is below a reasonable threshold – most mission families are below this and are eligible for a reduction on fees)

Euro TCK Conference

Coming up next year is the first conference aimed at European third culture families and organisations since Eurocomet in 1992. It will be held at Mosbach in southern Germany at The Mill (OM Centre) from the 15th to the 19th March 2007.

The TCK Forum of Global Connections in The UK is organising the event, but is consulting with similar groups across Europe and will draw speakers from all over the continent according to their gifting.

Plenary conference themes will be

- TCKs and contemporary European culture
- Families under fire
- TCKs on TCKs
- Prayer for the World

- Devotional Bible messages

There will be a choice of workshop themes where we hope to discuss long enough to reach some definitive conclusions rather than just airing issues.

- Preparing children to go overseas
- Debriefing TCKs on return
- Cross-cultural marriage and parenting
- Multilingualism
- Special needs children in a third culture setting
- Europeans in international education
- Third culture children in the Muslim world
- How to teach families about the needs of their third culture children
- Educational planning
- The role of the sending church
- Caring for children - the houseparent role
- Child protection policy

The cost will be €160 (€170 for later registration) with a €50 deposit. Registration will take place from September onwards.

A website will be set up soon with more information, but if you would like to know more now contact mk_tck@yahoo.co.uk There is also information on the Xenos site at www.xenosmk.org

Special needs resources

Following our article on Asperger's Syndrome in the last Educare, there has been a considerable response. Most of this was about individual children, but we can also now recommend the following additional resource for parents.

Parenting a child with Asperger's Syndrome; Brenda Boyd, Jessica Kingsley Publishers ISBN 1843101378

Full of a wealth of advice, based on personal experience, about how to understand and help your AS child develop and overcome some of the problems associated with the condition while recognising that it isn't all bad news. Reviewers give this one very good reports, justifiably so in our view. It is easily available from Amazon or bookshops. If you are away from normal suppliers ask your family or a friend to send it out to you.

A valuable resource for ESOL/EFL is this book

Second Language Students in Mainstream Classrooms; Coreen Sears, Multilingualism Matters publishers, ISBN 1 85359 4083

Coreen Sears is the Head of the ESL department at the International School of Brussels. The book has plenty of practical suggestions on how to make the classroom work with ESL students as well as mother-tongue Anglophones there. Since this is the case in almost all of our MK and international schools, this book is a welcome addition to the resources available.

Cultural Sensitivity in MK Teachers and Carers

We would welcome your contributions on this issue. On travelling one of the recurring themes has been that MK school staff often lack cultural awareness and sensitivity. This is particularly an issue when relating to families who are not of their own and/or majority school culture. Particular concerns centre on ethnocentricity, ignorance of education systems other than their own, unwillingness to learn from or listen to other cultures, imposition of the majority culture curriculum

regardless of its relevance to particular students, not understanding mother tongue needs, inflexibility of thinking and school planning and more. The sources of the problem are well recognised – if the majority of the staff, especially the “management” level, are from one country then their view of how a school should be run will dominate. Couple this with a constant turnover of internationally inexperienced staff who come from mono-cultural backgrounds and culture shock on arrival and the scene is set for the problems listed.

We believe that management decisions and policies are part of the answer. School leaders and governing boards need to deliberately internationalise, not viewing this as a threat or an impossible challenge, but as a golden opportunity to enhance the experience of all of the students and the school staff. It should also be viewed as a necessity given the increasingly international nature of mission agencies and our MK schools. The encouragement is not just to have the word “international” in the name, but to be genuinely international in policy, curriculum, teaching styles and outlook.

Another major factor also has to be training. We run the pre-field orientation course for MK staff each year at WEC’s international headquarters. What a great opportunity this is when staff from several different countries heading all over the world gather together like this. We believe that training like this is essential for many reasons including the international experience that they receive. One of the major blessings in this is the fact that no one nationality is over-represented, so the “minority” groups are not swamped, but are part of an international whole. There are other similar courses such as the TCK-PFO over in the USA, but we would welcome more courses being set up and strongly recommend that EVERY teacher, administrator, houseparent or other MK worker should attend one. This would be a challenge, not only to all the sending agencies, but also to the receiving MK schools. The rewards though are well worth the effort and we would ask everyone concerned to make pre-field training like this a requirement. Workers without this preparation are inadequately trained!

Let us know about your experiences. If you are parents struggling with your international school, school head teachers/principals who would like to see better trained staff or sending agency leaders who can’t see how this “extra” training could be done then contact us.

You can contact us on this or any issue of concern on SteveGill@mkea.freeseve.co.uk

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