

Special needs

One of the major themes of the requests for help that we receive is that of special educational needs (SEN) for the children. Some of the international MK schools have special needs teachers who can recognise the problems and recommend the appropriate course of action to help overcome the challenges posed. This is not the case though for many other MK schools that may be unable to recruit enough suitably qualified SEN teachers to keep the department consistently staffed. Other children are being taught in national schools where special needs resources are not widely available, and still others are on home education or correspondence programmes. In any of these cases without SEN teacher support the parents can be left wondering how well their children are progressing and whether they are missing something essential in their education. Some even wonder whether they are in the right place and consider relocation back to the passport country to get the help they feel their children need. This kind of move may be encouraged by staff in smaller MK schools who feel out of their depth dealing with SEN children, or by colleagues in the mission. Some of this thinking is related to the idea that somehow, somewhere else there is a “magic” solution or a quick-fix to the educational needs; there isn’t.

Proper assessment and provision of educational support takes time and patience in most of the passport countries. Children may well be subjected to a constant round of tests and visit a range of experts before anything happens. Because the provision of SEN help costs money, many government education authorities want to be completely satisfied that the expense is justified. This desire is understandable, since no organisation, even the government, has an endless supply of money, but it can lead to considerable frustration when a child with obvious needs is moved around the system for years before any meaningful action is taken. Home education has grown as a force in many Western countries for a variety of reasons, but in some countries one of the main ones is dissatisfaction with SEN provision. Parents are responding to slow SEN provision by taking control themselves and teaching their own children.

As we have said before (Educare June 2004) the small MK school or home education may be just what your SEN child needs. The environment of support and encouragement is something that most state schools will struggle to duplicate, even in the developed world. The keys to success are knowing where to get help, how to apply the necessary measures and how to monitor progress. Educare June 2004 mentions some of those sources of help: AERC across E & SE Asia, SHARE in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, MK schools with SEN teachers. Other possibilities are the MK advisers with your agency or Christian teacher networks in your passport country. There are two new developments that could be helpful in the longer term; one is from the Senior Volunteers’ Network in the UK who are setting up an SEN support team to advise by correspondence and make visits as necessary, the other is a parallel organisation to SHARE and AERC to work in Africa and the Middle East. Both of these are in their early planning stages.

If you don’t have a copy of Educare June 2004, let us know and we will send it on to you, as we won’t simply reprint all of that material in this article. The following article will focus on one specific educational need that we are very familiar with – that of Asperger’s Syndrome.

Asperger's Syndrome

Awareness of this condition has risen greatly over the past 10 to 15 years and there are now a number of good books available and some high profile television programmes have been made.

The condition is a form of autism, and was originally defined by Hans Asperger in 1944. It is different from the classic "Kanner" type of autism with its lack of responsiveness and severe language impairments resulting in silent and aloof people. Asperger's Syndrome (AS) children do develop fluent speech and desire to socialise with others, but have real problems with advanced social skills and conversation. Until recently, many of these people were simply classed as eccentrics or "nerds", maybe loners or obsessive individuals. Many of them were pushed to the margins of society because of the negative aspects of their behaviour and many of the more intellectual ones found (and still find) refuge among like-minded people in research science, university maths and science departments and similar organisations. AS shows the following features

- Lack of empathy: the person finds it difficult to understand someone else's perspective and feelings
- Naïve, inappropriate, one-sided interaction: if a subject interests them they will talk about it at length whether the listener is interested or understands them or not. When talking with someone with AS it can be easy to get trapped into listening to long monologues about maths or trains or brick buildings or
- Limited ability to form friendships: the AS person wants to socialise and make friends but struggles to do so and friendships formed can become uneven.
- Pedantic, repetitive speech: for the Star Trek fans, they can be like Mr. Data who pinpoints the exact amount of time a task takes down to the nearest second. Something about vague imprecision offends a deep-rooted sense of order.
- Poor non-verbal communication: they misread the body language of others and so miss the reactions that indicate boredom, the need to move on to another topic or reactions to inappropriate comments. Recent research seems to indicate that AS people focus on watching the mouths of others they are talking to and miss out watching the other non-verbal signals – a real disadvantage when a very large proportion of what we say is achieved with body language. They can also send the wrong signals as many of them find eye contact difficult. For AS people it breaks the concentration when listening to someone, giving the impression of not paying attention.
- Intense absorption in certain subjects: every AS person has at least one obsession
- Clumsiness and odd movements: they can also be very untidy with their clothing and possessions.
- Many show oversensitivity to certain sensory stimuli. Loud droning noises such as hand driers or vacuum cleaners can be painful, excess movement and bright colours in large supermarkets may be nearly overwhelming at times and for others it could be textures on touch that cause distress.
- Order and routine: all autistic people have a strong attachment to this. Changes to routine that are well signalled in advance are easier to manage than sudden changes – even for relatively minor things such as leaving the home 10 minutes earlier than normal to go to school.
- Underlying tension and struggles with self-esteem can lead to outbursts of anger, especially in the teen years. When this is linked with the strong sense of right and wrong that many of them have, there can be a great deal of guilt after such outbursts.
- A very literal use and understanding of language; "Let's toast the bride" for example may well be misinterpreted and cease to be a happy wedding wish in the mind of someone with AS!

- Close physical contact may make them feel uncomfortable at times.

There are also advantages in that they are orderly thinkers who sometimes have an unusual flair for finding different solutions. Einstein is widely reckoned to have had AS, and Bill Gates is another leading light from our own era. Their obsession with certain themes and interests, coupled with a determination to see a job done properly makes them ideal for certain roles – need a good cartographer, IT specialist, accountant? Maybe someone with AS would make a very good candidate. Strong senses of right and wrong and of duty also make them very reliable employees. Many of them become Christians: their thinking is very black and white, so if they believe something is right like this they will commit themselves to it wholeheartedly.

What can be done to help those with Asperger's Syndrome?

AS is a lifelong condition, but much can be done to help people who have it. What needs to be done is to maximise the benefits and overcome the challenges: they can learn to do the things that seem to come so naturally to those without AS. For example

- Teach them rules of conversation.
- Work on motor skills: persist with the necessary tasks such as tying shoelaces, handling cutlery properly, producing legible handwriting, riding a bike etc. Someone with AS will never play for an international team in any ball game, but consistent work on catch and throw and hitting with a bat will produce all round improvement in motor skills. This should be done individually as the child may be acutely aware of their lack of ability and suffer accordingly when made to play in a team.

Tony Atwood in his excellent book (reference below) also suggests

1. walking and running to improve upper and lower limb coordination
 2. adventure playground and gymnasium equipment to help improve balance
 3. hands on hands teaching to help with manual dexterity
 4. learn keyboard skills
 5. If rapid movements are a problem then supervise and encourage to slow the pace
 6. For immature grip, movement disorders such as tics, odd postures, involuntary movement or similar refer to a medical or occupational therapist
- All school staff and adults who know the child need to know about AS. This will enable them to manage situations properly. A child with AS needs to learn when to stop talking about their favourite themes, so it is up to the adults around to teach him or her. If a child asks more than two or three questions (or makes more than 2 or 3 statements) on a theme that the adult isn't interested in, then they need to step in and divert the conversation. This can be openly explained to the child who will then have the same message reinforced from many angles. It also prevents the adults from feeling trapped by the child and possibly seeking to avoid such trapping another time.
 - Any classmates should also know about AS and that it makes things difficult for the person with it. There is now an excellent book geared to younger children given as one of the references.
 - Teach them to watch for body language. It doesn't come naturally to someone with AS, so it needs to start with really obvious signals. One way to start is to use role play and engage the child in conversation. When the inevitable happens and they begin to talk too much about their pet themes, the adult can give a huge and conspicuous yawn – and then ask the child what they think that means. From there the child can be trained through role play, to look for steadily more subtle signals such as fidgeting, occasional glances at the watch, looking around, monosyllabic responses, glazed expressions etc. It takes a long time, but with persistence and patience, many can learn to recognise this body language and cut the irrelevant discussion down. They can in fact learn to become quite sensitive – because they have had to take time to learn and have been deliberately trained to do so.

- The children can be given role play and model strategies for social behaviour and language use. This may seem a bit artificial and robotic to someone without AS, but to a child learning to cope with a confusing world this is a necessary skill that they won't just absorb – it has to be deliberately and actively taught. One programme that has proved very useful is the Social Use of Language Programme (SULP) which has been recently updated.
- Pray. With God's leading parents can help their children through. With God an AS child can work through the challenges and find strength and ability beyond their own.

References:

Social Use of Language Programme (SULP): Revised Edition; Wendy Rinaldi

This easy-to-use assessment provides a three-step teaching framework to build and enhance language skills. It uses a multi-sensory approach that enables children and adolescents to understand fully the skills being learned, before practising and using them in real-life situations.

It develops social use of language in real-life settings and teaches each individual the basic social communication skills and self/other awareness. It is a teaching scheme that facilitates reassessment at any time to measure progress made and provides guidance and support on handling everyday situations.

Not cheap at £130 (€188 or US\$227 at current exchange rates), but worth the money to provide teaching material and ideas for teachers and tutors working with AS children.

Order from NFER Nelson on www.nfer.nelson.co.uk Available worldwide

All of the following are available from Amazon or many bookshops.

Asperger's Syndrome; Attwood, JKP ISBN 1 85302 577 1

This one is now *the* definitive guide to AS that is accessible to the ordinary reader. It has become a justified best-seller and if a school or organisation needs to start somewhere with resources it should be here.

Can I tell you about Asperger Syndrome; Welton, JKP ISBN 1 84310 206 4

A very easy to read guide geared to other children in the AS child's class. It can also be used by class teachers and other staff as an introduction as it can be read in about half an hour.

Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome; Harpur, Lawlor & Fitzgerald, JKP ISBN 1 84310 201 3

For the older AS student; it is what the title says.

Freaks, Geeks and Asperger Syndrome; Jackson, JKP ISBN 1 84310 098 3

Written by Luke Jackson who is a teenager with AS and gives the "insider's perspective".

How to Support & Teach Children on the Autism Spectrum, Sherratt, LDA

This is one of a number of very good publications from the LDA and is geared to use by tutors, teachers and teaching assistants.

If you wonder if your child has AS, we would like to hear from you and help in any way possible.

If you have your own family story like the one below and would like to share it with Educare readers please send it in.

It may be that you were labelled as a nerd, geek or eccentric yourself and recognise some of the behaviour challenges listed above. We'd welcome it if you'd like to contact us about that.

EFL for children and young people

An increasing proportion of missionaries' children are being educated in English even though it is not their first language. Schools, learning centres and home educators throughout WEC are expressing a need for help and advice with EFL teaching. We would therefore like first of all to make some general comments and recommendations for those working in this area. We will also recommend some teaching resources which are generally helpful for those teaching English to any language group or combination of learners. Later in the article we will look specifically at the challenges faced by Korean learners, since this is the fastest growing language group in WEC. We will refer to students learning in a second language as L2 learners.

1. General comments

Teachers need to have an awareness of the educational background and culture from which the students come. Some of them will come from a 'traditional' educational background in which lessons are much more teacher-centred than is current in the English-speaking classroom. This means that some nationalities will expect much more teacher talk, memorisation and learning by rote. They will be more used to fact-based learning and less used to analysing information and forming their own opinions. It may take time for them to adjust to a different style of learning – although learning by rote can certainly be used to advantage for picking up new vocabulary.

Young L2 learners will need a lot of support throughout the school day, especially if their English is very limited. Additional factors such as being new to school, and even new to the host country, make this even more important. They may at first need to be physically shown what to do and where to go. The children need clear, simple instructions to be given throughout the school day, every time there is a change of activity. These instructions may need to be given one-to-one as it cannot be assumed that they will understand whole-class instructions. The language used needs to be at or just above the students' level of comprehension. If the teacher can use the same word and phrases, the students will grasp the meaning more quickly. In the same way, a well-organised classroom with set places for equipment and classroom furniture will help the students to become accustomed to everything. Even if students appear to have a fair grasp of English, it is important to be aware that they may not be used to hearing the teacher's spoken version of the language. For example, they may have learned some English in Singapore but find an American or British accent more difficult to understand. From the outset, L2 students should be given classroom tasks along with the others, so that they feel part of the class and are able to practise their language while washing brushes, cleaning the board, tidying up etc with their fellow students.

Some topic areas studied in the classroom may be unfamiliar to the learners – examples are the weather, seasons and farm animals. School books were produced in the UK or the USA may well include work surrounding these topics which will not make sense to students from different parts of the world where the weather, seasons and animals bear no relation to those of their life experience. So some adaptation of the lesson materials will be required. It is important for the teacher to be genuinely interested in the culture and background of the students and to convey this in the lessons. The students should be encouraged to write/draw/talk about their own cultures and class work could involve appropriate history or geography projects. (I attempted to do this at BCS by teaching some Korean and Puerto Rican history.) It is an excellent idea to involve parents in this as they have unique knowledge and life experience to share. They could be invited to come in and share stories, music and practical skills such as cooking. This also has the knock-on effects of making the parents feel more involved in their children's education, and strengthening the relationship with the teachers

Practical ideas to help with English include the following:

Music and songs, which help to reinforce language already learned.

Individual listening – children listen to stories on tape. They could do a gap-fill or true/false exercise to help focus their listening.

Videos – show them a video clip without the sound, get them to answer gist questions such as ‘Is the man on the video angry or happy?’ play again with sound, give the children a cut up dialogue from the clip which they have to put in order, and then act it out, etc.

Home made books

Picture story sequencing

Divide a familiar story into pages and make up fun activities based on each page

Older L2 learners will still need clear instructions, and will also need opportunities to ask about language areas which they find difficult or in which further practice is needed. Again, as with younger learners, routine is important and helps them to become familiar with what is going on. Instructions should be given step by step, or could be written down as a reminder. Check whether the students have understood by asking them to tell the teacher what they are going to do. Try not to give too much detail at once and emphasise key words. Make sure that the atmosphere in the classroom is positive and encouraging so that students do not feel ashamed to ask questions or admit ignorance.

The following ideas will help:

- Use a wide range of visual materials to give information – examples are pictures, charts and maps, tourist brochures, cuttings from magazines and newspapers, different types of books, the Internet.
- Teach appropriate study skills such as note taking and summarising, creating a piece of writing, producing reports.
- When asking questions, start with factual ones including those requiring yes/no answers. Progress to more complicated or abstract ones later.
- Use pair work and group work in which each student has a role – this helps to diminish anxiety and gives the students practice in using problem-solving English.
- When introducing a new topic, find out what the children already know – extend this to include unique elements from the life experience of the EFL students.
- Use plenty of hands-on activities such as science experiments and the construction of relief maps.
- Questionnaires and interviews give speaking practice and also help to provide a basis for later written work.
- New vocabulary can be taught from pictures or real objects. Then use substitution exercises, where students take out certain words in a pattern sentence and replace them with new vocabulary.
- Students could keep a daily diary based on models provided by the teacher.
- Students could be encouraged to create a bilingual dictionary. They could use words and/or pictures for this.
- Use videos as for younger learners.

2. Teaching resources

There is insufficient space to recommend more than a limited number of resources, so I have picked out the Oxford University Press website (www.oup.com/elt) as one of the best available. It is possible to download the entire catalogue from this website (www.oup.com/elt/local/global/pdf_catalogue) or it can be downloaded in sections. The material is divided into British and American English, secondary and primary. I looked briefly at two sets of course books:

- 1) **Active Comprehension**, a series of four books containing activities to improve children's comprehension and writing skills. Advertised as an appropriate supplement to any junior English course. Contains factual and fictional texts, comprehension, vocabulary building and extended writing tasks. ISBNs 0-19-312001-1, 0-19-312002-X, 0-19-312003-8, 0-19-312004-6.
- 2) **Brainwaves**, designed for students learning English from age 9. Three levels, with basic grammar in Level 1, more complex in Levels 2 and 3, special focus on vocabulary, revision units, total of 72 teaching hours per level. One or two of the topic areas are a bit New Age and discernment would be needed – however, most English schemes have something like this which Christians would wish to screen out. The basic material is good and can be adapted.
- 3) A useful resource to help teachers is Coreen Sears' book, '**Second language students in mainstream classrooms: a handbook for teachers in international schools**', ISBN 1-85359-408-3. This book is American and contains specialist chapters on language in the classroom, strategies to support second language children, teaching language arts (English), supporting ESL students in mathematics, answering ESL students' needs for social studies and science.

It may be possible to run a series in Educare based on information from this book – please e-mail us if this would be helpful to you. If there is sufficient interest we will cover these areas in future issues of Educare.

Challenges faced by Korean learners.

The recommendation is that Koreans, as with all L2 students, learn to read and write in their own language first. When they learn English they will then have to adapt to a number of differences, but this is generally considered to be far preferable to learning English first and then having to adapt to Korean.

Korean is unrelated to other oriental languages, although it still uses some Chinese characters. There are seven dialects, of which the one from the Seoul area is known as 'standard Korean'. The speakers of some dialects find English easier. The Korean alphabet has 24 letters, 10 vowels and 14 consonants. In combination they make 40 sounds – 8 simple vowels, 13 diphthongs and 19 consonants.

Pronunciation is an issue and problems can arise as follows:

Vowels: *horse* and *phone* can sound like *hoss* and *phonn*

cup can sound like *cap*

work can sound like *wohk*, leading to confusion between *work* and *walk*

sit/seat and similar sound pairings are easily confused. (Koreans do not lengthen vowel sounds in the same way as English – instead they use rising or falling intonation.)

Consonants: confusion can arise as follows:

writing/riding

lock/log

r and l are represented by the same consonant in Korean – hence sentences like *velly velly dipikelt*.

v sounds like b

f sounds like p - *family*

z sounds like dz – *dzoo*

sh is difficult to pronounce

ch as in *church* is found in Korean but at the end of a word they add a vowel, hence *churchi*

th as in *mother* is pronounced d

Speech style, stress and intonation are very different. Koreans do not stress either syllables or words. In the following example in English the stress is placed in different places giving a different overall meaning to the same sentence.

John is at the dentist. (*Peter is not at the dentist, it is John.*)

John is at the dentist. (*He is not at home or elsewhere.*)

In Korean the change in meaning is not achieved by intonation but by the addition of a suffix to one of the words in a sentence.

In English, correct intonation is used to convey politeness. In Korean the polite mode is achieved by the use of different verb forms instead. This means that young Korean learners will need to be taught the use of correct intonation in English, or they could easily appear rude without intending to do so.

Writing, spelling and grammar There are implications for spelling stemming from the pronunciation differences already described. In addition, it is important to note the following:

Korean letters are phonetic symbols, and the phonetic value depends on the position in the word, the association with other letters, and whether or not it is doubled. There are no capital letters, but question marks, exclamation marks, full stops and quotation marks are used in a similar way to English. There is no possessive s – it is replaced by a noun suffix. For example, Gill's pen becomes pen Gill. Commas, colons and semi-colons can cause difficulties.

Word order tends to be subject-object-verb rather than subject-verb-object.

There are no auxiliary verbs (as in **have gone**) as only one word is used to represent the entire verb phrase. Verbs are divided into two categories, action verbs, describing what is happening, and adjectival verbs, referring to the state of things generally.

E.g. *A boy is going to school* (literally *boy to school going-be*) – action

This flower is beautiful (literally *this flower beautiful-be*) – adjectival.

There is no equivalent in Korean for *there is* and *there are*. Hence, *beautiful-be* and *going-be* are a kind of adjective including the verb to be. This means that a Korean speaker does not see the need for a separate verb part such as *is* or *are*, hence:

Tomorrow will hot and *Many foreigners exist*.

Tenses are expressed differently and this leads to examples such as the following:

It has been snowing since yesterday becomes *From yesterday to now snow coming*.

Tomorrow I am going to Scotland becomes *Tomorrow I to Scotland go*.

There are numerous other examples to do with verbs.

The expression 'to have something done' does not exist in Korean – hence,

I have had my hair cut becomes *I have cut my hair*.

Questions can cause confusion, as follows:

Don't you like carrots? No (I don't – English)

Yes (I don't – Korean)

Yes (I do – English)

No (I do – Korean)

Tag questions, such as *It's hot, isn't it?* Or *You can do this, can't you?*

are replaced by only one expression in Korean, like the French *n'est-ce pas?*

Phrasal verbs such as *to take up*, *to look at*, *to join in*, are difficult to learn and there is usually confusion with the word order. E.g. *I look up it*.

Nouns have no articles, so *the* and *a/an* have to be taught. Uncountable nouns, such as *news*, *advice*, *luggage*, do not exist so would be mistakenly referred to in the plural in English.

Personal pronouns have three forms, self-effacing, plain and honorific, reflecting the degree of respect to be shown to the person in question. They are not used where the meaning is obvious from the context, e.g. *I must wash (my) hair tonight*.

Adverbs usually come before the verb. Verbs of sense – look, sound, smell, hear and taste – are always followed by adverbs, not adjectives, hence: *That flute sounds wonderfully; He looks sadly*.

General points

Avoid too much teacher-centred work, as Koreans often feel inhibited when interacting with the teacher. Do not expect too much eye contact with the teacher as this is considered rude in Korean culture. Koreans are more limited than English speakers in their use of body language and facial expressions when speaking in public, as it is not considered acceptable to be over-expressive.

'What most Europeans see as openness, expressiveness and articulateness is seen as effusiveness and verbosity in the Korean culture.' (Michael Swan and Bernard Smith, Learner English).

We would welcome comments on the above article, especially from Korean speakers. We would also like general feedback. Please let us know if a similar article to the above would be useful for EFL teachers of other language groups.

Gill Bryant

March 2006

Book recommendation

Last year we ran a couple of editions on multilingualism. Another book on this issue that we are happy to recommend is

“A Parents’ and Teachers’ Guide to Bilingualism” 2nd edition by Colin Baker, published by Parents’ and Teachers’ Guides, ISBN 1 85359 4555 – easily available from Amazon

The book is laid out in a question and answer format and is thorough in the issues that it addresses. There are sections on family, language development, potential problems and overcoming them, literacy, educational and various miscellaneous questions. Colin Baker writes from personal experience of his own bilingual family, but also from working in a School of Education in Bangor University that specialises in bilingualism and bilingual education and is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society as a result of his work.

This is worth having and referring to for any multilingual family.

Educare is a ministry of WEC International; Reaching the unreached for Jesus