

# **Educare September 2006**

## **DYSPRAXIA**      **by Ann Bielby**

I work as a tutor for students with Specific Learning Difficulties at Sheffield University in the UK. This has generally meant students with dyslexia but more and more we are seeing students with dyspraxia. It has to be said that there is far more research into dyslexia and one of our experts here has noted that dyspraxia is where dyslexia was in terms of research twenty years ago but there are many things that we already know about it.

### **What is dyspraxia?**

'Dyspraxia can be defined as motor difficulties caused by perceptual problems, especially visual-motor and kinaesthetic-motor difficulties.'(Portwood 1996)

Or

Dyspraxia is a marked impairment in the development of motor coordination.

It is sometimes called 'clumsy child syndrome' but this can limit an understanding of the problems.

### **How many children have dyspraxia?**

5% of children and 4 times as many boys as girls.

### **So what problems can it cause?**

It is always important to remember that children are individuals so some of these problems might apply but not necessarily all of them.

1. Delay in early milestones such as crawling, walking, self-feeding or talking.
2. Problems with motor skills e.g. riding a bike or slow, poor or illegible handwriting.
3. Learning difficulties in reading, writing and speech. There can be difficulties keeping the place in reading and writing. It can be hard to look up at a blackboard and then back to a desk.
4. Difficulty in carrying out instructions - this could be due to finding sequencing difficult.
5. Disorganisation - this can include self organisation e.g. keeping possessions tidy and organised and also organisation of ones written work which might well be confused.
6. Problems with eye movements. This is linked with problems with reading.
7. Wrong pronunciation of new words or mispronunciation of words already known.
8. There can be problems around attention span and concentration difficulties.

### **So is this really dyslexia?**

There is an uncanny overlap and both include slow processing speed but:

Dyspraxia can include literacy problems.

Dyslexia must include literacy problems.

It is also important to remember that children can have more than one difficulty and that dyspraxia may be linked with other conditions e.g. Asperger's and dyspraxia.

### **So what does all this mean?**

When anyone looks at the above list it is easy to think that just as when you look at a medical book you imagine you have symptoms of an illness, looking at this list it is easy to think your child is dyspraxic. It is important to think whether their learning is being affected by their difficulties or are they coping well. It is also important to be understanding about their difficulties but not to allow them to use the problems to opt out of learning situations. Understanding that some situations are explained by dyspraxia rather than laziness also helps.

### **How can you help?**

Parents and teachers need to find ways round difficulties whenever possible.

Examples –

- If the handwriting is messy can the child use a computer?
- If the child finds it hard to remember instructions, break it down to manageable chunks.

When giving instructions, there are often other things going on for parents so they speak to another child at the same time or to themselves, e.g. 'I must remember to put that washing in the machine before we go' or 'I need to get ready myself.'

Don't give too many instructions at once, as in this example: 'Go and get your coat because we are going shopping. You will need to wash your face because of all that chocolate on it and comb your hair.'

Say: 'I want you to listen to me.' Maybe get them to look at you, say their name before you start. Saying a name often helps as a concentration tip.

Then simplify your instructions.

E.g. 'John, go and get your coat.'

When this is accomplished then give the next instructions such as.....

'Wash your face....'

'Comb your hair...'

- If there are difficulties with concentration, reminding the child to keep listening can help. It can also help to have a prearranged sign to help a child get back on task. This could be a little tap on the table.
- If the child has problems structuring their thoughts into a coherent piece of work you might need to help them with planning e.g. make a list or a spider diagram

Parents also need to have faith that these difficulties though persistent can be overcome as their children are often creative and original thinkers and with the right kind of support and understanding can be extremely successful learners. My experience with students is that the diagnosis of dyspraxia helps them understand their difficulties and come to terms with what was hard in childhood. One law student, this year, won a prize in his department and finally was able to show how able a student he is.

There is a wealth of information on various websites but remember the 'health warning'.

A. Bielby  
9/9/06

## References

Developmental Dyspraxia; Identification and Intervention: A Manual for Parents and Professionals, Portwood M, David Fulton publishers, ISBN 1 853465 739  
Coping with Dyspraxia; Eckersley J, Sheldon Press ISBN 0 85969 920 X  
How to understand and support children with dyspraxia, Addy L, LDA, ISBN 1 85503 381 X

(We have referred before to the LDA who publish on both sides of the Atlantic and have a wide range of references and resources for special needs children, their parents and teachers. Find them on [www.LDAlearning.com](http://www.LDAlearning.com) )

Other useful websites are  
[www.dyspraxiaireland.com](http://www.dyspraxiaireland.com)  
[www.dyspraxia.org.nz](http://www.dyspraxia.org.nz)  
[www.canchild.ca](http://www.canchild.ca)  
[www.dyspraxia.com.au](http://www.dyspraxia.com.au)  
[www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)

We would welcome information on any useful resources in other languages. If you know of them could you let us know more for us to share with others in the next Educare.

It is worth noting that in some countries dyspraxia may be called by other names. In North America it is often called Developmental Co-ordination Disorder; the Canadian website named above has some very useful information on this. The terms apraxia or developmental apraxia of speech (DAS) may also be used. Apraxia really means the inability to perform some fine or gross motor skills and so overlaps with our definition of dyspraxia, but some may use the terms interchangeably. DAS is a more specific condition and a quoted definition is given below

*Developmental Apraxia of Speech (DAS) presents in children who have no evidence of difficulty with strength or range of motion of the articulators, but are unable to execute speech movements because of motor planning and coordination problems. This is not to be confused with phonological impairments in children with normal coordination of the articulators during speech.*

While children with dyspraxia may well have speech articulation difficulties, the two conditions are not the same and shouldn't be confused.

## **ONE YEAR AT A TIME**

It's Friday morning and the primary school children are lined up in tidy rows in front of the school building. One youngster is leading the pledge, bellowing into the microphone in a voice that can be heard for miles around: "I'm a Turk; I'm right, I'm hard-working..." And our little towheads are there enthusiastically adding their voices to the bedlam.

Before our daughter started school, we were told by friends, "Don't send your children to local schools. Everything is done by rote memory; they'll never learn to think. You don't want them studying Islam. Etc., etc."

The objections were not without some validity. But we felt there were positives too. We wanted our children to grow up in Turkey feeling at home. We wanted them to interact naturally with their neighbors. We didn't want them to feel like they were forever outsiders. So we decided to try the local schools – one year at a time.

So for the next 12 years, one year at a time, we had at least one child in the local Turkish school system. All three of ours went to state schools for primary level. The older two then moved on at age 11 to private middle schools that were partly English-medium. The youngest was the only one to get in on the newly-opened MK school. And all three went off to Black Forest Academy in Germany for high school.

There were negatives: class size was bad, occasionally horrendous, with as many as 62 students in a class. Rules regarding religion classes changed frequently and though our children were not required to take the classes, they did have to sit through the teaching. Our middle child did not learn to read English until he was in middle school (age 11). And the cultural input was occasionally alarming, such as the time when one son came home singing his favorite song: "Ataturk never died, he lives forever in my heart!"

But would we do it again? Yes – one year at a time. Academically our children did not suffer in the least. Learning to read Turkish is so easy (it's phonetically written and very regular) that the early grades have lots of extra time to work on maths and other subjects. Even our non-readers were on track when they eventually went to Black Forest. We monitored the situation with religion classes closely, but never felt seriously threatened – at least our children were not mocked for having a religious belief! Our children actually grew up in a very sheltered environment: drugs were not an issue then (more of a problem now) and issues of sex were delayed perhaps a couple years compared to what they would have faced in the 'home' country.

Obviously the suitability of local schools will change drastically from place to place. In some countries it would not be at all viable. Even in Turkey smaller population centers may be considerably more problematic. But I would like to see more of our workers give local schools a try, particularly for children who can start from the beginning. International schools and even MK institutions can so often leave children with negative attitudes regarding the country and local people. They can also be prohibitively expensive. And they tend to make us immobile – families are limited to living in places where the desired education is available.

Local schools will not be the solution for everyone. Poor quality, overcrowding, security concerns, discrimination, legal restrictions, or a myriad of other issues may force us to look for alternative answers. But we should at least include this in our initial list of options.

Many years later my wife asked our middle child what he thought of our having sent him to Turkish schools. He looked at us somewhat puzzled: "What else would you have done?" he responded. "I wouldn't have wanted to have grown up here as a foreigner."

Mike, September 2006

## **EUROTCK**

A conference aimed at European third culture families and agencies as well as anyone else with their welfare at heart will take place next year. This will be the first European TCK conference of its type since Eurocomet in the 1990s. We know that a good number of Educare subscribers will be there, but we would welcome more as we are planning to hold workshops on a very wide range of issues such as educational planning including home education, re-entry debriefing, preparing TCKs for overseas assignments, Europeans in international education, child protection, special educational needs, multilingualism and more. A conference like this also provides a great place to network with others in the same situation.

The dates are from the 15th (11:00 – 15:00 registration) to the 19<sup>th</sup> March (12:00 finish)

It will be held at Mosbach in Germany.

There is a lot more information on the website [www.eurotck.net](http://www.eurotck.net) and this site has a direct link for registration details if you decide to come and join us. **See you there!**

## **ICEC**

This is another conference in Germany scheduled to take place shortly after Eurotck, and is aimed specifically at educators. A number of the Eurotck delegates will also be there and we can recommend this one to any teachers, administrators, and agency office staff. The dates are from 31<sup>st</sup> March to 3<sup>rd</sup> April and it will take place at Kandern in the Black Forest just north of Basel. More details are at [www.acsi.org](http://www.acsi.org)

There will also be 3 other venues at different times for ICEC,

8<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> November 2006 in Bangkok,

3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> January 2007 in Brazil

5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> April 2007 in Kenya.

Check the website for more details.

If you are sending your children to a national school or if your children have special needs, get in touch with us. We welcome correspondence of any type and are keen to receive articles for future Educare editions. E-mail to [SteveGill@mkea.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:SteveGill@mkea.freeserve.co.uk)

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