



Editorial Comment

Angela J. Fawcett, Editor-in-Chief

It is a very great pleasure to publish this issue of the Asia Pacific Journal of Developmental Differences, published by the Dyslexia Association of Singapore Limited, which is now in its 9th year of publication. In recognition of the broader manifestations of dyslexia now identified, and modifications in the criteria for diagnosis, DAS have extended their reach to include a wider range of developmental differences, including a range of co-morbidities and this is now clearly reflected in DAS revised mission. We continue to be grateful for the support of our scientific board of reviewers and the international editorial board drawn from both academics and professionals, to reflect the aims of the journal. This enables us to resolve any outstanding issues satisfactorily and ensures we continue to maintain the highest international standards of ethics and professionalism.

I am delighted to present a rich assembly of papers in this issue, published to coincide with DAS UNITE SpLD International conference 2022. Here we are able to draw on key international researchers in the area, whose keynote presentations were so well received by participants in UNITE SpLD 2021. An internationally recognised expert on visual aspects of dyslexia, Professor John Stein from Oxford University, presents an update on theoretical aspects of dyslexia, and how these relate to practice, in the first article on Developmental dyslexia – a useful concept? This addresses established and recent evidence of visual differences in processing in relation to understanding causative aspects of dyslexia, that are often overlooked in language-based research. This article sets the scene for a series of studies of dyslexia across the age range, evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on progress.

The second article, with authors Shakthi Sathiasilan and Yiyao Weng from DAS as well as myself, considers the impact of the DAS Preschool Intervention Programme (PELP) on struggling learners. In this study, the progress of a group of 'at risk' learners who undertook intervention, was compared with a control group who received a pre and post-test only, and normal preschool support, over a 20-week period. The PELP had previously been positively evaluated with a group of this type, but earlier studies had not included a control group. This design allowed the authors to successfully disentangle the impact of maturation from the process of remediation. The control group improved on spelling and sentence copying, but the intervention group showed significant gains in

phonogram knowledge, phonemic awareness, high frequency words, reading and spelling. This is an important study indicating that it is never too early to start providing systematic support towards improvement for children in this group.

COVID-19 has completely changed the lives of families across the world, and so it has become increasingly important to recognise the need for change under these circumstances. Access to learning has needed to move from face to face to online, creating the need for new methods of assistance in learning. An internationally acclaimed author, the leader of a Positive dyslexia movement in the USA, Thomas West, who proudly asserts the strengths of dyslexia, heads up this section which looks at differences in the way that dyslexics learn, and their outstanding potential in areas where others may struggle. In the next article in this section, an analysis of progress in the DAS Main Literacy Programme in the early days of COVID during 2020 is presented by Sharyfah Nur Fitriya from DAS. This large sample of 1280 children continued to make significant progress in reading, spelling and writing, so that despite the many changes from face to face to online teaching, the programme has remained effective.

Interestingly, a further analysis of a group of 1000 children drawn from Fitriya, 2021, (prior to COVID), identified key factors in success or failure for these children. These key factors included home resources, and the length of time and consistency of attendance, with strong implications drawn for learning in the changing education system post-COVID. Finally, in this section, an analysis of parenting during COVID from Eugene Lim Wen Jie and Heidi Chong, considered the heightened stress associated with supporting a child with special needs for fathers during this period. Based on a series of questionnaire studies, the authors identified significant issues for fathers of all children, with work-life balance the most significant for fathers of children with special needs, rather than the measure of financial stability and resilience which had an additional impact on fathers of neurotypical children. Interestingly, the highest stress was found for fathers of younger children with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the next article, authors Yee Ning Tan, Tharshini Lokanathan and Quin Yow from Singapore University of Technology and Design, consider the impact of mobile assistive technology on the self-esteem of students with dyslexia. A sample of children from grades 2-6 were provided with Lexicaid, designed with support from dyslexia experts, to aid single word reading through the capacity to create flashcards, use text to speech scanning, access definitions, and highlight key words. Use was monitored at home over a period of 6 weeks, with questionnaires on motivation and self-esteem delivered at pre and post-test. Measures of reading and spelling themselves showed no significant impact of the support, although consistent improvements in literacy skill were found for the intervention group, but not the controls, whose performance remained fairly static over this period. However, significant changes in self perceptions of reading and spelling competence, as well as in motivation to read was found at post-test in the intervention group. There is considerable potential for further development of support of this type, which can allow struggling readers to gain a measure of independence, with a

longer period of support likely to produce a more significant impact on aspects of literacy itself. Nevertheless, simply improving the motivation to read and enhancing self-esteem can in itself lead to major gains over time.

Finally, an article from Hani Zohra Muhamad from DAS in conjunction with Hannah bte Shafiq Abdullah from Temasek Polytechnic. In this insightful qualitative study, the author uses a series of questionnaires and interviews to address the importance of language in the development of literacy in children with co-morbid language and literacy disorders. With the aim of creating a manual on teaching children with combined disorders, the study showed that some DAS educational therapists were not aware of this pattern of difficulties, and that whatever their background, educational therapists found it more difficult to support children with mixed disorders. Strategies used to support these children ranged from those successful in the classroom, to those designed for use outside. Overall recommendations included the need for additional training in these aspects of support, which will be addressed by the forthcoming manual.

To cap this interesting series of articles, this issue also includes the abstracts drawn from UNITE SpLD 2022 Conference.

Overall, I am sure you will agree that this issue of the APJDD presents a rich panoply of information for those involved in special needs, whether in terms of theory, practice, or both. It has been a great pleasure to review this interesting collection of articles, with their great depth and breadth of coverage of the area. I look forward to reading further articles from these authors, from both internationally established and future experts, with the continued development of their expertise over time. Don't forget to join us all for UNITE SpLD 2022, which will again be available for attendance on line, with an opportunity to engage with the speakers, and continued opportunities after the event to catch up on those sessions you have missed.

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