



Editorial Comment

Angela J. Fawcett, Editor-in-Chief

It is a very great pleasure to publish this issue of the Asian Pacific Journal of Developmental Differences, now in its 9th year of publication, which is published by the Dyslexia Association of Singapore Limited. We have now revised our mission statement to cover a broader range of learning difficulties, recognising the increasing evidence of co-morbidity between many disorders, and no doubt this will be reflected in our publications. The response to the previous issues continues to be extremely gratifying, and we maintain these high standards in this issue and forthcoming issues. We are grateful for the support of the academics and professionals involved in resolving any issues arising, and ensuring our journal maintains high professional and ethical standards.

I am particularly proud of the scope and depth of the articles we are presenting in this issue, with content drawn from Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and India. In addition to the small-scale experimental articles which are typically submitted to a journal of this type, we are now receiving a number of interesting and exciting articles, which address new models of training, and their feasibility, systematic spreading of dyslexia awareness across the region, and the impact of individual motivation in secondary school students, as well as the impact of dyslexia in University. Many of the approaches presented here have been inspired by the pandemic, which has introduced a different method of working, building on the opportunities for remote access. It is extremely satisfying to recognise the flexibility and novel approaches which have been adopted in order to deal more successfully with a challenging period, which shows little evidence of ending in the near future.

In the first article in this issue, Chua Minqi, formerly from DAS, joins with Yeo Lay See to present an article on the impact of training in Enhanced Reading Comprehension Curriculum, an area of literacy traditionally considered to be one of the most difficult to improve. Here they consider the ease and flexibility with which therapists adopt a new curriculum, identifying teachers with experience of between 2 and 4 years as most amenable to change, incorporating more aspects of the comprehension curriculum in their teaching following training, and finding greater ease in incorporating these measures. By contrast, it seems that educational therapists with more extensive experience are less amenable to change having adopted a teaching approach which is

more likely to be fixed. The importance of recognising these individual differences in motivation to change are highlighted as key to successfully changing and enhancing any curriculum, with feedback from the staff involved seen as key in future studies.

The next article in this issue addresses an area which has had a major impact on provision for dyslexia worldwide. A key aspect of ensuring that support for dyslexia becomes embedded within a nation's custom and practice is to ensure the proliferation of awareness of dyslexia. Building on an initial survey of 1781 teachers that identified misconceptions on the nature of dyslexia and how children could be supported, the Dyslexia association of Indonesia, led by pediatricians Dr Kristiantini Dewi Soegondo and Dr Purboyo Solek, set out with their team to spread awareness across Indonesia. The task has been challenging, because of the nature of the country in terms of the geography and because of an existing lack of awareness of the issues involved. Adopting a bursary system which allowed those who demonstrated an interest and awareness to continue studying free of charge, the model adopted allowed the development and dissemination of a training course for teachers over a 5 year period. Initially delivered face to face, the constraints of COVID, led to online sessions, with 894 teachers trained. Finally, a small group of 7 teachers agreed to continue disseminating awareness more widely, the whole approach providing an effective model for a system useful in countries where resources are sparse and awareness low.

The next study originated in India, led by Dr Sushree Sahu with colleagues including Nandini Singh who developed and published DALI, a skill-based assessment for dyslexia, in a number of native languages. Here a small comparative pilot study is presented examining the usefulness of DALI in conjunction with curriculum-based assessment (NIHMANS) in identifying issues for dyslexic children. However, the NIHMANS battery was originally developed in 1991, is only available in English, and no further editions have been forthcoming, so the intention was to identify whether or not the DALI subtests could serve the same purpose for use with Hindi speaking children. A number of good correlations were established in this pilot sample for English spelling, Reading and Comprehension, and with Hindi spelling. Other subtests of non-literacy were found to correlate with English reading and comprehension, because the NIHMANS test uses passage-based reading, following the curriculum, which is not appropriate for the younger children in grades 1-2. So, for example, English comprehension correlated with fluency, rhyming, and picture naming, all typical components of modern screening tests present in the DALI. Use of the DALI is therefore recommended to augment the more traditional methods for bilingual children.

The impact of COVID has meant that many children have been home schooled or have engaged in remote schooling. In the next article in this issue, Julia Lee Ai Cheng presents a study on home based educational strategies for supporting children with SpLD during school closure. One aspect that has been highlighted as particularly problematic has been helping children with homework, which has become an even more extensive

problem during the pandemic. Here a number of strategies that are shared that have been successfully evaluated to encourage SpLD students to persist in their home-based work, including building motivation and self-esteem, interspersing academic activities with physical to maintain attention and sharing an external problem-solving mode with children to ensure greater success. There is no doubt parents will find these suggestions invaluable.

The next article from Joanne Tan Shi Huey from DAS, examines the impact of motivation on vocational decisions for secondary school children with dyslexia. This is an interesting approach, identifying that for these students, the role of the peer group and social media is less prominent than has been suggested in the literature for typically achieving children, and neither intrinsic or extrinsic motivation were significantly related to their vocational decisions. For this group of secondary year 3 and 4 children, the family was the most significant influence, and those who had a clear view of their vocational future were found to show high levels of competence, relatedness and autonomy. The importance of building these strengths in this age group of children with SpLD in order to ensure successful outcomes is highlighted.

An interesting approach is adopted in the following article, from Dr Damaris Carlisle, who investigates the successes and failures in the 1st year of tertiary education for students with a range of invisible disabilities. This is an area of key importance, given the growing awareness of the needs of these students in Singapore and moves to ensure greater engagement in the tertiary sector. The article is richly illustrated with the voice of the student, demonstrating a model of the impact of success and failure on the lived experience of the students. Research of this type is likely to be of growing importance in ensuring a level playing field for students with disabilities to ensure they have the best possible chance of fulfilling their strengths while combatting their weaknesses. Recommendations for policy and practice for this group are included here.

The final article in this issue from Dr Rexsy Taruna from Indonesia highlights the importance of phonological difficulties in the acquisition of literacy for children in a country where awareness of dyslexia remains patchy. Five children aged 7-9, a key age group for remediation, received a short targeted phonological intervention in 16 sessions comprising 960 minutes in total for each child. Using an individually based approach employing multisensory instruction in an intensive session designed to maximise engagement, explicit instruction was given via a puppet to ensure that the best possible outcomes were achieved. Significant improvements in phonemic blending, phonic and word reading fluency were achieved for all 5 children participating.

In conclusion, we hope that you will enjoy the breadth and variety of material presented here, and we look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible to join us on our online conference UNITE SpLD in June 2022.