



## Editorial Comment

Angela J. Fawcett, Editor-in-Chief

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It is a very great pleasure to introduce the latest issue of the *Asia Pacific Journal of Developmental Differences*. This edition is characterised by a different approach in inviting a guest editor, Professor John Everatt from New Zealand, to review and recruit submitted articles. It is particularly apt to invite John because he has a very strong academic reputation in terms of bilingual research. This is of course a key aspect for dyslexic learners in the Asia-Pacific region. John has published widely on bilingualism including both theoretical and applied aspects and he is Executive editor of this journal. Moreover, I have worked with John for many years in my previous role as editor-in-chief of *Dyslexia: An International Journal of Research and Practice* where he has also served for many years as Executive editor. His work is characterised by sound academic judgement and attention to detail and it is a very great pleasure to welcome him as Guest editor to introduce the articles selected for the current issue of this journal.

## Editorial Comment

John Everatt, Executive Editor

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It has been a pleasure to edit this issue and I thank Professor Fawcett for the invitation. I am also delighted to be one of the editorial team for this journal. In my experience, the Asia Pacific region is showing rapid and exciting growth in many areas of research related to education. Hopefully, issues related to developmental differences will become one of those expanding areas of research and research-informed practice; indeed, the work published in this journal should help advance research on developmental differences in the region. The range of languages and orthographies within Asia and the Pacific region means that there is also great opportunity for research in one of the aspects of developmental differences that specifically interests me: i.e., the ways in which reading and writing development varies across different orthographies. In terms of developmental differences, this interest particularly focuses on how difficulties in the acquisition of literacy (such as for those with dyslexia) may vary across different orthographic and language contexts.

Given the focus of interest outlined above, it may not be surprising to find this as a theme running through many of the papers in the current issue – though it could also be argued to be an important feature across many papers published in the journal. Each of the papers in this issue focuses on an aspect related to literacy learning, and most consider this from the perspective of learning a language other than, or in addition to, English. However, English (the language of this journal) is also a focus of much of the work, either directly as part of the research conducted, or indirectly as part of the interpretation and background to the research. Although this leads to the risk of English-centric interpretations of findings, this contrast with the English language is useful since many of the current models of literacy development, as well as models that propose reasons for problems with reading and writing acquisition, have developed from studies of English speakers. Therefore, this contrast allows us to consider the data against these models, which provides both a framework for interpretation but also an assessment of the usefulness of the models. Studies of non-English languages and orthographies, therefore, should improve our understanding of the underlying mechanisms that support literacy learning, which should in turn inform the development of strategies to reduce learning problems that may be associated with the developmental differences that are the target of this journal.

The development of models that take account of different languages is also vital for work with the growing populations of multilingual (and multi-literate) children and adults. Again, research in the Asia Pacific region is well placed to lead the way in investigations of variations in learning between different multilingual cohorts. Models of multilingual learning also will inform teaching practice, as well as ways to support those who may struggle with literacy learning. We cannot assume that multilingual learning will simply be understood by a combination of monolingual models of learning. The languages (and possibly orthographies) that an individual is acquiring may lead to a range of differences in the way reading and writing develops, and this may provide potential opportunities for teaching that cannot be practiced within a monolingual learning context. Further research should help us understand and utilize these multilingual developmental differences.

The present issue of the journal comprises a set of three papers based on work in Singapore (the home of the journal) and work from four other countries within Asia or bordering the Pacific (Iran, Kuwait, New Zealand and Thailand). The papers cover a variety of issues related to the study of developmental differences. These range from considerations of children with early reading and writing problems to older children with an assessment of dyslexia; and from students with weaknesses in single word reading and spelling, to those with reading comprehension deficits. Papers also consider research questions related to negative behaviour and poor self-concept, as well as skills that can support reading, such as the ability to make inferences. The studies also cover issues that are more practice-based in focus; particularly educational assessment and intervention practices, several with the relatively novel perspective of targeting speakers

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of more than one language. They, therefore, cover a range of topics that should be of interest to those studying developmental differences within the region, as well as those from other parts of the world.

The first paper, by Almurtaji on 'Misbehaviour and educational achievement among Arabic children', is an example of research in a language that is relatively under-researched despite its importance; and despite the orthography having a long and influential history. In addition to its use in Arabic speaking communities, the Arabic orthography is used and experienced in many additional contexts as the orthography used in the holy book of the Moslem religion (the Koran/Quran) or as a representation of a language that has been influenced by the spread of Islam: for example, Persian languages typically use a modified version of Arabic – modifications being necessary since Persian belongs to a different language family from Arabic. The paper in this issue by Almurtaji focuses on a particularly educational issue: the influence of negative behaviours on learning in schools. Negative behaviours (either off-task behaviours that may interfere with learning, or misbehaviours that can also have negative social consequences) have often been seen as a problem for learning within a classroom environment. However, such behaviours are socially/culturally and contextually interpreted. Therefore, data that consider the effects of such behaviours across different educational systems, which stem from a range of cultural backgrounds, will inform our understanding of the impact of such classroom behaviours on achievement. Almurtaji's findings of relationships between certain negative behaviours and educational achievement (particularly in literacy) within the cultural and educational context of Kuwait is a useful addition to our understanding of what can influence learning across classrooms.

The second paper by Tan, Shen, Kong, See and Lan on 'Assessment of the effectiveness of a Chinese literacy assessment tool for school learners in Singapore', also focuses on a major world language: Chinese – again highly influential in the Asia Pacific region and beyond. Although English is the main language of education in Singapore, Chinese is spoken by many. Tan et al., discuss the need for a standardised literacy assessment tool for bilingual children from a Chinese background in order that specific difficulties in learning Chinese literacy can be identified. Consideration of Chinese as an additional language to that used within the public education system should also be a growing area of interest for those working in multi-language contexts. The work reported in this paper covers issues related to bilingual learners (Chinese-English) and assessments of literacy learning problems (dyslexia). The authors discuss a range of literacy measures in Chinese and data obtained from children in Singapore using such measures. Although further work is needed for a full assessment battery, the paper covers some important points about the development of such literacy assessment tools and how to measure Chinese reading and writing skills.

The third paper by Wong and Sathiasilan on 'Evaluating an early literacy intervention in Singapore', also involves research undertaken in Singapore, though this time focusing on interventions for children with early literacy learning difficulties who are at risk of dyslexia. The intervention targeted 5 to 6 year old children prior to their entry into the first year of primary school and, therefore, adds additional data to the important field of early intervention research. The authors discuss the benefits of a phonics-based intervention that uses Orton-Gillingham principles, and so mixes two of the main intervention strategies that have become relatively common in the field of supporting those with literacy learning difficulties. The language of focus in the work is English, given its use in public education in Singapore; and data showing the benefits of early intervention for English literacy is growing. However, showing benefits within different education systems adds to the generalisation of such intervention approaches, as well as providing practical tools for the Singapore context.

The fourth paper by Nair, Ram & Kurusamy on 'Evaluating reading and spelling performance of students with dyslexia using curriculum based assessments and teacher perception', is similar to the third in that it involves intervention research conducted with staff and students at the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS). The intervention also involved individualised teaching/learning procedures that followed Orton-Gillingham principles. In contrast to the previous paper, however, the intervention was targeted at older children with an assessment of dyslexia. Therefore, together with the previous two papers, this article adds to the current body of practice-based research on assessment and intervention – and does this within the educational (and language/cultural) context of Singapore. The paper focuses on data showing improvements in literacy areas across different groups of children undergoing the intervention, but also considers teacher perceptions of student progress, which provides a relatively novel perspective in this research.

The fifth paper by Mollaali & Sadeghi on 'A comparison of incidental and intentional vocabulary learning in English language learners with reading comprehension deficits', focuses on second language acquisition. In this case, the learning of English in the context of children brought up in Iran who will have Farsi as their first/dominant language and who will also be learning to read and write in the Arabic orthography used to represent the language. The learning of vocabulary is a vital component of proficient second language acquisition. Therefore, this study looks at ways in which such learning can be supported, though with the interesting focus on those who show evidence of struggling with reading comprehension. Why individuals show deficits in comprehending written text is still an important area of research on developmental differences, but vocabulary weaknesses may themselves be one of the reasons for poor reading comprehension. Therefore, Mollaali & Sadeghi's data indicating benefits from incidental learning of vocabulary should inform work with second language learners, but should also add to our understanding of how to support those with comprehension weaknesses.

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The sixth paper by Denston on 'The influence of a general literacy intervention on the psychosocial development of students with literacy learning difficulties', also includes intervention work focused on supporting reading comprehension, this time conducted in New Zealand. The work also considered whether an academic-focused intervention that involved explicit instruction of general literacy skills could influence the psychosocial development of students with literacy learning difficulties. Many children show negative affective and behavioural consequences of poor levels of literacy acquisition. Showing that appropriate interventions can not only lead to improvements in literacy but also reduce these negative consequences should lead to long-lasting positive outcomes for learners. Denston's findings that the level of the intervention's influence on self-concept was dependent on initial pre-intervention level of self-efficacy and resilience argues that these are relatively early developed characteristics and that a range of interventions strategies may be required to support both literacy and psychosocial development.

The seventh paper is the final one in this issue by Srisang, Fletcher, Sadeghi & Everatt on 'Impacts of inferential skills on reading comprehension in Thai (L1) and English (L2)' – (and I am again grateful to the Professor Fawcett for dealing with the review of this paper given that I am one of the authors). It returns to the issue of second language reading comprehension, and investigates whether the ability to make inferences during reading comprehension can show cross-language influences. In this case such influences were investigated between Thai (the individuals' first language) and English (the second language), which have very different orthographies. Making inferences while reading is an important skill, but has not been extensively studied within multilingual populations. Finding that such skills show cross-language influences suggests the potential for learning in one language to support the development of the same skills in another. Hence, faster development in one orthography may support the acquisition of the same skills in an orthography with which the student is struggling. Similarly, if a skill is easier to teach in one language/orthography compared to another, appropriate bilingual teaching strategies should show positive outcomes on learning when difficulties are encountered. Obviously, such teaching procedures need to be developed and tested, but such data show again how Asian-Pacific contexts are well placed to inform the field of developmental differences and multilingualism, both in terms of theory and practical teaching and learning strategies.

# EMBRACE DYSLEXIA

Raising awareness about **dyslexia** and to highlight the **strengths and challenges** that individuals with dyslexia face everyday.

Students with dyslexia are struggling in the education system each and every day. We believe that each student is **unique** in their own way and have the strengths that will see them through their education and into a successful career.

One way to provide **hope** is to raise awareness about dyslexia and to have role models for them to **aspire** to. Another is to have companies advocate for dyslexics in Singapore and to actively support DAS and its students.

**EMBRACE DYSLEXIA. SIGN THE COMMITMENT TODAY.**



**DYSLEXIA ASSOCIATION  
OF SINGAPORE**

HELPING DYSLEXIC PEOPLE ACHIEVE

The Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) is a vibrant organisation serving the specialised educational needs of over 2,900 students with learning differences. DAS has over 240 professional staff offering a wide array of services and operates 13 learning centres across Singapore.

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