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Dyslexia Review

Volume 33, Number 1,
Spring/Summer 2023

The Journal of The Dyslexia Guild



The launch of International CReSTeD

A report from India

Welcome

Welcome to the Spring/Summer issue of *Dyslexia Review*.

It hasn't been much of a spring here in the UK, with relentless rain and very little sun, but to take our minds off this, we have an international feel to this issue of *Dyslexia Review*. Amita Amlani Kenyon, a specialist teacher and assessor, tells us about her amazing work for the Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexic Pupils (CReSTeD) and more specifically her ground-breaking trip to India to form the foundations of an international arm of this council. Staying with the international theme, we can also read about dyslexia and how it is evaluated and assessed in different parts of Europe. Martin Bloomfield describes *The Dyslexia Compass* project, and how there is still a lack of international agreement on how to identify and measure dyslexia.

Also in this issue, our Kathleen Hickey scholarship winner, Melissa Whitley, updates us on her experiences so far on the Diploma in Specialist Teaching for Literacy-related Difficulties, and Glorious Samkelisiwe Mqadi, a student on the Enquiry Module, part of her MEd, shows us how useful mentoring can be. I think this is true whatever your setting is and her article provides food for thought as she describes her research outcomes.



We also focus on another research project that looks at Higher Education and how diversity is managed. Gill Porter has explored this issue as part of her Masters in Disability studies and reflects on the outcomes of her work. In a similar vein, Tim Deignan, an educational consultant, describes the development of a guide for dyslexic students who are producing dissertations with the aim of enhancing accessibility at this all-important time in students' lives.

You may remember in the last issue, I looked at the Woodcock and Johnson IV tests of cognitive abilities in detail; this article prompted one of our members to write a personal view of her use of this battery. If you are tempted by this purchase but still anxious about the huge outlay involved in buying this product (and why wouldn't you be?), have a read of Karen Anderson's personal account to help you decide. If you do go ahead with this purchase, don't forget to take advantage of your Guild Member discount from our Dyslexia Action shop.



Cover: Spring/Summer issue.

As well as our usual book reviews, with generous reader discounts to go with them, I also take this opportunity to urge you to save the date of 6th July. This year, we are having an online conference and we hope to appeal to those of you who often cannot make our usual live event. We have some exciting speakers who will be talking about specialist teaching of children with English as an additional language, the perennial issue of maths anxiety, the science behind visual difficulties and a workshop around a free app that helps with adult literacy and teaching but which may have other uses. I think you will agree that there is something for everyone and for APC holders, part of this attendance will count towards SASC accredited CPD hours. Lots to think about, so happy reading.

Dr Anna Smith
Editor

We would like to point out that in the article in our previous issue entitled Focus on Spelling through word structure, meaning and sound (p.14) 32 (2), on page 15, middle column, where the trigraph <ugh> is discussed, as in the word <cough>, the letter <u> should have been emboldened along with <gh>. We apologise for this printing error.



Spring/Summer issue:
May 2023

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Published by:

Dyslexia Guild/Real Group Ltd,
Centurion House, London Road,
Staines-upon-Thames TW18 4AX
Tel: 01784 222342
Website: www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk

Designed and printed by:

Headlines MK Ltd,
4 Milnyard Square, Bakewell Road,
Orton Southgate, Peterborough PE2 6GX
Email: info@headlinespp.uk.com
Tel: 01908 014890
www.headlines.uk.com

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ISSN

0308-6275

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Opening Up India for Neurodiversity, and creating ICReSTeD



Amita Amlani Kenyon,
Specialist teacher & Assessor,
writes for *Dyslexia Review*

At least one in 10 people in the UK may have dyslexia and although this number is difficult to verify (Houalla N, 2022), a significant proportion will be able or gifted. India has a population of 1.4 billion (Worldometer, 2023), with a much less developed diagnostic infrastructure than the UK, and therefore stands to lose out, with a significant proportion of students unable to maximise their potential in India's workforce. Each year this represents a lost generation; something that India has a moral and economic duty to address. As a part of its role as Executive Director for UNESCO Executive Board (2021), India has agreed that it will act upon the contents of 'The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016' from 2021 to 2025 (Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Dept. of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2016).

Closing this gap in attainment is going to be a major challenge, and with this in mind we decided to help put in place a programme of support for all schools across India to help kickstart the journey by enabling schools to screen, evaluate, and provide intervention for literacy difficulties. This programme will be targeted at independent, charity and state schools.

Our stories

My parents are of Indian Heritage and came to England from Kenya when I was eight months old.

About 15 years ago, after a successful career in technology, I switched careers and became a Specialist teacher and Assessor for Specific Learning Differences, and am passionate about making a difference in the lives of children. More recently, I have begun to think about how to give back, with a strong sense of purpose about how I might make a difference in my homeland.

Roslyn Anne McCarthy (Ros) has worked in Education all her working life, and this includes working as a Specialist teacher and Assessor for Specific Learning Differences for the past 30 years. She also acts as a

consultant for CReSTeD, where she assesses and advises schools on best practice for those students that require additional support. She cares deeply about the welfare of the young people she works with and has worked in an advisory capacity for a school in India.

Our mission

Our mission is ambitious, and ultimately intended to raise standards and enable schools across India to be recognised for the quality of support they make available to students with Specific Learning Differences. Equally important, is the goal to enable parents to make informed decisions about where to educate their children, selecting the best institutes with the right blend of academic rigour and learning support. We want to help close the gap that would otherwise mean that many students are left unsupported. As part of this mission, we wanted to establish a Centre of Excellence for Specific Learning Differences in India at Atria University.



How did we prepare?

It took nearly four years to prepare, starting in March 2019. By March 2020 we were actually ready to roll out our pilot project in Southern India, just when the Covid-19 pandemic started to hit, and this meant a complete rethink of our plans.

We managed to use these intervening three years to explore many additional educational opportunities, the potential for additional fundraising, a deeper understanding of the education system, government policies, and establishing a broad team of advisors.

To make progress during the pandemic, we decided that our programme could initially be started remotely. This then meant preparing materials, so that we were able to do dry runs of our screening and evaluation processes, on a remote basis, for schools we initially identified as good candidates.

The next obstacle we faced, again due to the pandemic, was the loss of our pilot site. The school we had initially selected and worked closely with for months in Southern India, was no longer able to fund their part of this project, and for extended periods the children and teachers were sent home, without remote access.

To keep the project moving forward we met with many overseas principals, school boards and trustees, using remote sessions to India, and some face-to-face meetings in London. These interactions really helped to solidify our thinking and we made many good contacts. We also improved and fine-tuned our proposition, and managed to convince a number of school principals of the detrimental impact on students left unsupported. With the general lack of awareness around learning support this unsurprisingly proved to be a major challenge.

A key aspect of the success of the whole project was finding a local sponsor at Atria University, as well

as the UK educational organisations, including CReSTeD, Imperial College, Patoss and Dyslexia Guild, and ultimately gaining the support of the Indian government. Several fund-raising attempts were made along the way, and some amazingly met with success!

By December 2022 we also managed to assemble an impressive board of advisors, and the idea of a new organisation was formulated, affiliated with CReSTeD, which we named as the International Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexic Pupils (ICReSTeD), to reflect the overseas scope of our mission.

Reorientating our objectives

By December 2022 our two key objectives for our first visit were to establish the programme of support at the university in Bangalore, and at our nominated secondary school in Mysore. However, two weeks prior to leaving the UK it became apparent that it would be unlikely that our programme would go ahead at the university, as the key directors were called out of town during our stay to follow up on urgent work.

By now, as you can imagine, we were quite used to dealing with late surprises! These setbacks meant rethinking plans with the university, and after some discussions we decided to run a series of remote and onsite workshops for schools, aimed at principals and their learning support staff, to explain the full scope and impact of the work to be carried out at the I CAN Secondary school in Mysore, and how they might benefit. These workshops were also intended to be used as an opportunity to explore their specific challenges, needs and interest levels in relation to Specific Learning Differences.

Travelling to Mysore

We landed in Bangalore on 7th January 2023, and on the 8th Ros and I set off on our journey to the beautiful city of Mysore

(also known as the yoga hub of India), filled with excitement, nerves, apprehension, and some jet lag. The journey by taxi took over four hours, travelling southwest of Bangalore to the foothills of the Chamundi Hills.

Establishing our Pilots at the I CAN Primary and Secondary Schools

On 9th January we started work with the I CAN Primary and Secondary schools and ran our programme over the following two weeks. Even with good planning we found ourselves having to work very late into the nights and during the weekends, and were grateful for the wonderful support and cooperation from all the staff, students and parents throughout our stay.

We gained a complete understanding of the schools' existing Learning Support structure, scheduled classroom observations for each of the key year groups and arranged sessions for raising awareness for Specific Learning Differences. This was then followed with training for staff to enable them to carry out Level 1 group screening, which included tests for speed of writing, reading comprehension and spellings. The staff were then able to administer as well as score the student tests for each of their classes.

Additional training was then offered to carefully selected staff, to enable them to carry out Level 2 Educational Evaluations independently. This part of the training relied on the nominated staff having the opportunity to observe, at a distance, two Full Educational Evaluations, which were administered by Ros and myself. To conclude our programme, all staff were gathered and trained to demonstrate how two individual students that were screened at Level 2 might be best supported.



A key aspect of the success of the whole project was finding a local sponsor at Atria University, as well as the UK educational organisations, including CReSTeD, Imperial College, Patoss and Dyslexia Guild.



Some light relief

During our first weekend at the I CAN Schools, we were invited to help out with preparations for the weekend events such as 'The Children's Food Markets'. This included making marigold garlands, a very popular flower in India representing the sun, symbolising brightness and positive energy. All of the food was brought in from the children's home farmlands, and all money raised was used to support the school. Watching the children happily take part in their sports days, as well as observing and being able to taste some of the children's culinary skills, was also a real treat for us.

On the evening of 17th January Ros and I visited the stunning Mysore Palace, built in the 19th century by British architect Henry Irwin, which was just a short taxi ride from the school. This is a working palace, the home of the Prince and Princess of Mysore, together with their son, who coincidentally attends the I CAN school.

Our stay in Mysore was a very rewarding and uplifting experience, and these breakout sessions introduced some fun and much needed relief from the heavy workload. It felt very much like Ros and I were part of a much bigger family! The kindness of the staff, and all the wonderful children at the schools, made our hard work so worthwhile.

Establishing a Centre of Excellence at Atria University

The second phase of our stay focussed on establishing the ICReSTeD Centre of Excellence at Atria University in Bangalore. With this in mind, it was decided that all workshops be hosted and run from the university campus.

We spent two weeks on campus, and it was during our stay here that we were able to see first-hand the much talked about number of educational institutes that are housed in Bangalore.

In every street, every corner, so many schools, colleges and universities! What really stood out throughout all of our stay was the importance and cultural emphasis on education. Bangalore is considered one of the main educational and technology hubs in India and is the second most student-friendly city after Mumbai.

During our first week on campus, we generated marketing materials and reached out to many school principals and learning support departments. We met with university staff and students to understand the current learning support structure and challenges. We were also able to assess if any of the existing staff might be suited to take on responsibilities to help scale the programme across to other schools in India during subsequent visits.

One of the highlights of this week was a demonstration of the university's impressive course learning platform, 'Xcelerator', which enables each student to have a completely customised education journey, based around their preferred learning styles. Ros and I carried out observations across a number of courses, to better understand how course materials were being delivered. We also met with lecturers and students to understand how students were coping with the course delivery and how they might make it known to the staff if they were struggling, and how lecturers might identify students that were falling

behind. We found these sessions extremely helpful. We concluded by agreeing that ICReSTeD could use Xcelerator to develop course materials as well as automating areas of assessment and report writing. Other discussions included the idea of using Machine Learning to analyse data, which we would be looking to collect whilst working on this project.

At the end of the first week, I was asked to present our programme, and strategic goals, to the Vice Chancellor of Education, the government minister responsible for 500 universities across India. Our presentation went very well (despite problems with the presentation equipment) and was received very positively, with several side meetings and hushed discussions with advisors taking place. We concluded by agreeing to continue to work together and to plan a presentation of our programme to all 500 universities.





During our second week at Atria University, we began running our workshops. All of these were held face-to-face on campus, with eight school principals and their learning support staff travelling in to attend. We had a number of schools that also wished to attend but could not on these dates and these we intend to follow up with separately. As a part of these workshops, we were able to present our goals, and describe the programme of work in more detail, citing the work done at the I CAN Schools as our proof of concept.

These sessions were highly interactive, with attendees able to help us understand their specific needs and challenges. We were able to walk away from the workshops with a clear understanding of priorities and follow-up actions based on these inputs.

On our final weekend I had a chance meeting with the Director of the Ryan International Group of Educational Institutes, responsible for over 150 secondary level schools across Mumbai, Dubai, and Australia. We discussed the project objectives, and we agreed to follow-up conversations to consider extending the project for the schools under his control.

At the end of our two weeks in Bangalore, Ros and I left the university filled with a feeling of optimism and a great sense of achievement, which was

reciprocated by all those at the university. Together, Ros and I had whole-heartedly shared our combined knowledge with those we met in India. Had we achieved all that we set out to and had hoped for? Was this to be the end of our journey? Despite many setbacks and having to pivot around a pandemic we do feel that we achieved much of what we had set out to do, partly through planning, and partly through good fortune. The director of Atria University remarked that “we have achieved over and above what he expected”.

So what happens now?

We agreed with the director of Atria University that during the next few months we would regroup, collect all our thoughts and observations, and explore how we might best continue the work through to scale, and secure appropriate funding. We also plan to reach out to all levels of educational institutes across India, Dubai and Australia with the aim of extending our programme of support beyond Mysore.

We also plan to reach out to all levels of educational institutes across India, Dubai and Australia with the aim of extending our programme of support beyond Mysore.

We plan to continue to work closely with those universities and schools identified during our first visit, which includes schools in the south-central Karnataka state of southern India. Atria University and ICReSTeD will be working closely together to secure additional funds from larger corporates and small to medium sized businesses in India.

Now back in the UK and still reflecting on what we were able to achieve, I'm reminded how fortunate we were to be able to meet with so many professionals who shared the same level of passion we both have for the work that we do here in the UK. We left India having established our proof of concept at the I CAN Schools, and our centre of excellence with Atria University, and with the knowledge that we now have an extended family who continue to give so much of their energy to promote the dreams of children.

Acknowledgements

This vision would not have been realised without the continued support and encouragement from close friends and family, and the kindness, hospitality and trust placed in us from all those at the I CAN schools and The Atria University. Without this we would not have been able to turn this project into such a positive and affirming experience, and for this we thank you all.



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