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Madras Dyslexia Association

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Technology is an important aspect of our lives. We use technology so much in our routine that we take much of it for granted. Imagine for a moment we had no technology; our lives will actually come to a standstill. It's not a privilege or luxury anymore, but a necessity.

In the area of Learning Differences technology has worked as the fulcrum of change. New ideas, which use innovative tools, are catering to people who struggle to read and write the printed word.

Apps suitable for mobile phones, tablets, laptops, desktop computers and even Kindle, the e-book reader, cater to specific learning needs of the user.

These technological tools help children and adults to overcome and, in many instances, adapt their Learning Difference to survival skills.

The argument has always been children should be taught the rudiments of language before they have access to technology. Increasingly, it is apparent children can learn the same rudiments with access to technology.

The editors

Talking Books – They Read to You and It's Free!

Most often our children lose the pleasure of the story in their struggle to decipher the word, put it together, read and understand it. Halfway through the struggle they give up. They may read when an adult assists one-on-one, and this happens only for textbooks and exams at school. Can they read independently? Can they read for pleasure?

They can with the help of assistive technology. Books can be downloaded on to a desktop computer, laptop, tablet, mobile phone, assistive technology devices and mp3 players. The moment you download the book it reads to you and highlights the text it is reading. The speed of the voice is adjustable.

This technology is available for free from **Bookshare India**. Bookshare India is an online digital library. Most established and well-known publishers stock their books here in English, Hindi and Tamil. Textbooks, fiction, non-fiction, higher academic and technology books of all major publishers are available.

Who can become a member? Individuals and institutions

How to become a member? Contact coordinator at MDA: Harini Ramanujam: 044 2815 7908/6697 or

N Venkataraman: phone: +91 9443309001 or visit www.bookshare.in

6-Day Training Programme for Main Stream Teachers

24th April (Friday) to 30th April (Thursday)

Time: 9.30 am to 3.00 pm

No session on Sunday

Therapists and counselors can also enroll for this programme.

For more details email us at: ananyamdachennai@gmail.com

The Changing Profile of Technology in Dyslexia

I work in the area of assistive technology, so I encounter, various kinds of technologies that are being used to help children with special needs. Dyslexia is no exception, and today, in a smart-phone and tablet driven connected world, there are no end of apps that are available for children with dyslexia to develop skills and have access to education.

The role of technology in dyslexia has, in my opinion, gone through 3 phases so far. Pre-2005, most technology was “low-tech” – for example, the use of black-on-yellow text to enhance readability, the use of cardboard “windows” to help children focus on one sentence at a time; the use of audio books to help children process information in the form of sound instead of as words and text. In today’s world of iPads and apps, we may tend to look down on these low-tech tools, but bear in mind that there was as much high-quality research that went into these tools. And they have the advantage of low cost, and non-controversial approval of all.

The second phase was the wave of apps that came out, in 2010-2013, coinciding with the increasing pervasiveness of touch computing. A lot of these apps were straightforward translation of low-tech tools into the computing world. For example, it is possible to download apps today which will take a website as an input, and then present it to a child with dyslexia one sentence (or one phrase) at a time, to help them read. Similarly, there are software functionalities within most devices today to “read out” content to a dyslexic child – often in very natural synthesized voices. And there are an enormous variety of applications to help children learn words and language, in the form of flashcards.

This generation of software did not lay claim to any great technological sophistication, and in reality, it is possible for a team of smart engineers to re-create many of them in a few weeks.

But the third generation, which we are beginning to see just now, belongs to a different class. This technology is leveraging algorithms designed for entirely different applications – developed by the Googles and Stanfords of the world – to the world of special needs. One of my friends, Navanit Arakeri, has built an app called Spell Better. This innovative application automatically detects and corrects spelling

mistakes in a child’s writing. Sure, we have all seen this in our word processors. But what makes Spell Better stand apart, is that it helps correct mistakes which are normally not made by persons without dyslexia – such as phonetic (preshus - precious), real-word mistakes (peace - piece), word boundary errors (verynice - very nice), skipped letters (probley - probably) and irregularly conjugated words (throwed - threw).

Navanit’s career was in Microsoft in Seattle, where he was a Product Manager, before he decided to move back to Bangalore and work on technology for persons with disabilities instead.

My own work has also focused on this dimension of technology. I work mostly with picture languages – the universal ability for everyone to understand and relate to pictures, means that we can use them as a conduit for teaching language and communication. I built a technology called FreeSpeech, which allows entire sentences to be visualized pictorially as a ‘map of words’. The interesting thing about FreeSpeech is that the technology that it uses, really is rocket-science.

It uses the cutting-edge of machine translation, artificial intelligence, and natural language processing to achieve what looks like a very simple operation – the conversion between the world of pictures, and the world of words.

I think it is very gratifying to see that assistive technology for persons with dyslexia is attracting a new breed of engineers, technologists and inventors today. As it should: with 15% of the world’s population having some degree of dyslexia, inclusion – in the field of literacy, in the field of education – is no more a luxury but a necessity. It is heartening to see that it is going to happen, not in a hundred years, but probably before the decade is out.

To learn about Avaz — Invention Labs’ award-winning invention that helps people with speech disabilities to communicate, visit: <http://www.avazapp.com>

Ajit Narayanan, CMD, Invention Labs

www.inventionlabs.in

Dyslexie – Easy-to-read font for Dyslexics

Most traditional fonts are designed for aesthetics. It makes the text look beautiful. But it's hell for a person with dyslexia. Traditional fonts have features, which confuse dyslexics. For example letters e, a, c, h, n, u, l are tough to read since they appear to merge into other letters or look similar. For example: each each, help help, hunt hunt, lung lung. Both the traditional and

Dyslexie font are in 12pt regular. The readability of the Dyslexie font, for a dyslexic, is much better. Use it at home and in school. Teachers can set handouts and question papers in this font. Best of all you don't have to buy it. It's FREE!

Where is it available? You can download it for free here: <http://www.dyslexiefont.com/en/dyslexia-font>

Technology offers New Channels of Communication for Dyslexics

This article first appeared in The Times of India, 9 Feb 2015 edition and has been edited for private circulation.

Dyslexia is a language processing disorder that can hinder reading, writing and spelling. Special educators say that technology has come as a boon to children with learning differences as it helps them express themselves with confidence. For example: Smart phones and tablets, which are programmed with speech recognition application make report submission easy as there is no manual typing or writing involved.

Sulata Ajit, Director (Special Education) at Sankalp an institution that caters to children with learning differences said that since dyslexics are more confident verbally, using speech recognition

applications will boost their confidence. Apart from making life easy for dyslexics, technology has made teaching them easier.

"We use tablets with a software 'Awaz' to help children with Autism communicate better. The tablet has icons and words, which they can use to convey messages without difficulty." The technology was developed by Invention Labs in Chennai.

Dyslexia can hamper the ability of those suffering from it to share their ideas and knowledge when they have to read or write about it. Said special educator Vilasini Diwakar of Madras Dyslexia Association. "Using tablets will make coping easier for dyslexics as they can perform better by swiping the words on screen than wielding a pen or typing on a keyboard." She said.

Quotation

I would ask the teacher to be sure that this is the program—this is the job—that he or she is called to do. Don't just teach because that's all you can do. Teach because it's your calling. And once you realize that, you have a responsibility to the young people. And it's not a responsibility to teach them by rote and by threat and even by promise. Your responsibility is to care about what you're saying to them, to care about what they're getting from what you're saying. If you care about the child and care about the information, you'll handle both with care, and maybe with prayer. Handle them both with prayer.

Maya Angelou

Author, poet, dancer, actor, singer and civil-rights activist

I Can - A short story

Here is a story about a mother and her daughter. They lived in a hut. The mother, Meena, worked in the nearby fields to earn money. The daughter, Dipu went to school.

Every day, the mother monitored Dipu's activities. Meena, though uneducated, saw to it that Dipu's pencil was sharpened, books neatly arranged and her homework done. Meena wanted her daughter to study well and Dipu did well too. Dipu silently watched her mother doing the chores before sending her to school. Meena fetched water from the well situated in the backyard. Dipu noticed her mother carrying a big pot and a smaller pot, which had a leaky hole.

One day Dipu said, "Amma, you want me to do everything in an organized way. But you are not practicing what you are preaching. Why do you use a leaky pot? By the time you come home half the pot is empty. The water is wasted"

Meena smiled and said, "Dipu come with me to the backyard and see!"

Dipu went and saw beautiful flowers on both sides of the path that lead to the well from the hut. Dipu was so happy to see the flowers. But she was not sure what that has got to do with the leaky pot. Meena explained.

"I could have mended the pot but I thought of doing something different. I had scattered some flowering

seeds along the path. In the morning while fetching water I would hold the leaky pot closer to the right side and in the evening to the left, so that both the sides were watered. In due course the plants grew and flowers blossomed!!! If I expect others to do something good, I too should do something positive. I always thought I CAN... and see I could make a broken pot help me make a beautiful garden!!

Dipu learnt a better lesson at home from her dear mother!!!!!!

Moral of the story: Never see anything as being defective or having flaws. Infact no one or nothing is perfect in life...just like the leaky pot in the above story. It is how we make use of the imperfections to our good that really counts. It's important to be sensitive towards everyone and everything around you to make the world around you a better place to live in...for yourself and for the others around you.

Revathy Sankaran

Well-known Tamil film actor/TV anchor, story-teller



Resource Rooms in Schools – Best Solution

MDA revived its initiative to set up resource rooms within schools so children can seek help in their own school. The first school where a resource room was set up was at Ramakrishna Mission Matriculation School, Bazullah road. Both the junior and senior school teachers were trained to teach children after MDA faculty did the screening. Around 20-30 students of the school are getting remedial help under MDA supervision.

Next was Vanavani Matriculation School, inside IIT campus. Two teachers from the school trained with us and now help 15 students in the Primary school in

the afternoons. Seeing the success of this programme, the Principal and Management of the school have decided to run this as a full-time centre and also help some of the senior students.

Amritha Vidyalayam and Olcott Memorial School followed soon.

Both schools have a full time remedial centre and help primary school students. A former teacher of Bala Vidya Mandir Adyar, has taken up responsibility of remediating the children pro-bono and is assisted by three teachers trained to teach dyslexic children.

Roots, a private centre in Taylors Road, now has around 12 children from nearby schools. Students from both junior and senior schools are remediated by faculty trained by MDA.

On the anvil is, Nandavanam, a centre in Neelankarai. An initiative of New Gen Knowledge Works as part of CSR, it will cater to children in schools in and around ECR.

Schools in Sowcarpet, Kattangkalathur, Thirmizhizai, and OMR have all shown interest in setting up a resource room and the process has been initiated. Our aim is to provide children in and around Chennai access to remediation which will help them lead fulfilling lives.

Vilasini Diwaker
Special Educator

Dyslexia Awareness in TN – Pilot Project

There is a need to create awareness about identifying dyslexia and taking long-term remediation measures to benefit children with dyslexia in Tamil Nadu. To

achieve this objective MDA decided to do a pilot project in Chidambaram.



Special educators Harini Mohan and Visalakshi Iyer trained teachers to use a check-list prepared by MDA that would help them identify Dyslexic children. Once trained, the teachers can use the checklist and send the data back to us at MDA.

Specialists at MDA will process it and arrive at criteria that will form the basis for their next course of action, which will include training 200 teachers. The pilot project at Chidambaram was conducted on 6 and 7 February 2015 and 28 teachers attended.

Harini Mohan
Special Educator

Teacher Training and Occupational Therapy

MDA has been offering training programmes to suit different needs. For teachers in mainstream schools, special educators, counsellors, parents and those who want to become remedial teachers. We have also started to offer special bi-lingual sessions to help people with limited knowledge of English but keen to learn methodologies to help children. A 3-day workshop in May 2014 has made an impact and requests have started coming in. We hope to have a workshop this May again.

Apart from regular training programmes, tailor-made workshops on requests from schools are also being conducted. Plans for offering on-line courses are being explored.

Offering Occupational Therapy to children with dyslexia at an affordable fee one of MDA's recent endeavours. Starting with part time OT services in the year 2011, we have been able to help many dyslexic children acquire necessary skills that added value to remedial intervention provided at Ananya or at the MDA remedial centre. We hope that the OT centre will expand soon with other special services like speech therapy and counseling under one roof.

Geeta Raghavan
Special Educator

College Students Transform Remedial Centre

What a transformation!!!! A truly new look to the remedial centre. It is indeed a fantastic effort by the students of Stella Maris College to create such a wonderful environment. After all it is the environment that shapes our thought and action. The students have created a space that brings the nurturing aspect of Mother Nature to the entire Centre.

As you enter the Centre, climbing up the stairs there is an incredible but refreshing tree that extends from the staircase branching into different classes, like the tree of knowledge. The concept and colours are pleasing and welcoming. When you are inside everything is magical. The walls of the rooms have

inviting colours and drawings. The front room is not only visually soothing but it also gives a feeling of being one with the infinite splendour of nature. The beautiful world of water comes alive with colourful fishes and other sea creatures. The entire theme gives a sense of wonder and enthuses the teachers and students to get into a positive frame of mind.

The students of Stella Maris can be proud of creating an inspiring environment. We thank them for their wonderful contribution.

Savitri Krishnan
Special Educator

Children's Corner

My Mother

My mother's name is Prabhalini. She is 43 years old. She teaches Tamil at Ananya Learning Centre. She likes to read Tamil books. She has three sons including me. She is a very good cook especially when it comes to non-vegetarian dishes. So she spends half the time in the kitchen experimenting with new ingredients. She works hard to keep the house clean. My mother does not like to watch television as she thinks it is a waste of time and energy. My mother wears glasses for reading purposes. My mother is not strict with me and that is why I sometimes play the fool. **Mythraian K (Std IX)**

Baking Experiences

We go to our bakery class every Friday. We have learnt to make a simple sponge cake and biscuits. We all had fun in the class. We would like to learn more items. It was a very good experience. Hope it continues **Neha M (Std X NOS)**

My bakery class was at the Spastic Society. I learnt to bake biscuits and cakes. It was an exciting experience. My cake came out very well.

I am very much interested in learning bakery.
Rosy Hariharan (X NOS)

My bakery class was a vocational class. I have learnt to make cakes and biscuits. I had the experience of baking cakes and biscuits for the first time. When I baked my first cake it became very hard and when I made chocolate biscuits they got burnt. But it was an enjoyable class.

Sadhana (X NOS)

Visit to Adyar Poonga

I have realised how they struggled to clean and make 58 acres of land into a beautiful green forest for birds and animals to breed. I also liked the way they have sculpted different species of birds, animals, insects and reptiles on stones.

Rajpurush Sundar (Std X State Board)

I was impressed with the 58 acres of land, which was once a dump yard with waste matter was cleaned and converted into a fresh green home for birds and small animals. It now has many herbal plants, trees and flowers.

Mahatheeswaran (Std X State Board)

Prize Winners at 'Javate' in Lady Andal School



Janavi
I Prize, Junior Level

Darshan
III Prize, Beginners Level



Shraddha
II Prize, Junior Level



MDA News Snippets

- 02.02.2015 8 week Intensive Teacher Training Programme starts at MDA Training Room with 22 participants
- 06.02.2015 Ananya Annual Day Celebrations at Infosys Hall, Ramakrishna Mission School, Bazullah Road. Vidya Shankar Krishnan, Managing Director, MM Forgings Ltd was the Chief Guest. MDA honours of 3 of their senior resource persons: Jyothi Valecha, founder member of MDA; Savithri Krishnan and Janani Subramanian senior remedial teachers
- 06.02.2015 and 07.02.2015 2 day Dyslexia Training Programme organized by the Indian Academy of Paediatricians, Tamil Nadu Chapter, SSA and MDA at Chidambaram. 20 Elementary School Teachers were trained by MDA resource persons to screen 2000 school children for Dyslexia in Cuddalore District. Harini Mohan and Visalakshi Iyer were the resource people.
- 07.02.2015 Harini Ramunajan was guest speaker at the City Conference of 'Teach For India', Chennai Team for their Leadership Forum. She spoke about her experience at MDA
- 09.02.2015 Senthil Kumar, Chariman, Helikx Institutions, a special school for children with learning disabilities in Salem, addresses the senior school students of Ananya on coping strategies and his own experiences of overcoming learning difficulties
- 13.02.2015 MDA Remedial Centre starts classes with an informal inauguration after the premises gets a new look with paintings done by a group of Stella Maris College students
- 16.02.2015 43 Senior school children of Ananya along with teachers visit the "Adyar Poonga" on a field trip in the bus provided by the Hinduja Trust
- 20.02.2015 Geeta Raghavan attends the school-day programme at Little Steps, a pre-school as chief guest and addresses the parents on the importance of nurturing children to develop skills for life
- 21.02.2015 Revathy Sankaran, a multifaceted TV Anchor and actor shares her life experiences in a complete 'unwinding' session with 23 teachers of MDA and Ananya at the new office premises on G N Chetty Road
- 21.02.2015 Ananya students participate in a special cultural programme "Javate" organized by Lady Andal Venkatasubba Rao School, Chetpet and win prizes in music, drawing, dance and fancy dress competitions
- Awareness programmes in February conducted by Harini Mohan**
- 17.02.15 Latent view
- 18.02.15 Rotary Club, Meenambakkam
- 20.02.15 Synergy Maritime
- 21.02.15 Surana Group of Schools, Park Town
- February 2015 New editorial team for MDA Newsletter formed

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Editorial Team - Ram S, Kalyani Balakrishnan, Mrudula Govindaraju