



The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines Occupational Therapy (OT) as the use of self-care and work and play activities to promote and maintain health, prevent disability, increase independent function, and enhance development. Occupation includes all the activities or tasks that a person performs each day. For example, getting dressed, playing a sport, taking a class, cooking a meal, getting together with friends, and working at a job are considered occupations.

Therefore, occupational therapists assist children with learning disabilities in coping with the effects of the disability on various activities and occupations, such as academic studies, activities of daily living, social participation, play and leisure. Moreover, occupational therapists deal with the early identification and prevention of difficulties in functioning and in learning.

The occupational therapy evaluation is an important aspect of the assessment process. The purpose of this evaluation is to identify the areas of strengths and weakness of children with learning disabilities and to create an individual plan, which caters to the needs of that particular child.

Periodic reassessments have to be carried out as the child learns coping mechanisms and should be continued until the child can function independently.

The importance of OT in the context of learning disabilities is not debatable any more. Its importance has to be reiterated since the benefits of OT are indisputable.

Watch the video of an OT session conducted by our in-house Occupational Therapist, Mohamed Zaheer, here:



<https://youtu.be/wU7am62drCo>

The Editors

Understanding the role of Occupational Therapy in Dyslexia

Occupational therapists help people across the lifespan to participate in the things they want and need to do through therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations). Common occupational therapy interventions include helping children with various disabilities to participate fully in school and social situations.

Occupational therapy services typically include:

- An individualized evaluation, during which the client/family and occupational therapist determine the person's goals,
- Customized intervention to improve the person's ability to perform daily activities and reach the goals, and
- Outcomes evaluation to ensure the goals are being met and/or make changes to the intervention plan.

Occupational therapy services may include comprehensive evaluations of the client's home and other environments (e.g., workplace, school), recommendations for adaptive equipment and training in its use, and guidance and education for family members and caregivers. Occupational therapy practitioners have a holistic perspective, in which the focus is on adapting the environment to fit the person, and the person is an integral part of the therapy team.

Dyslexia includes difficulties with various reading and non-reading functions. The Occupational Therapist looks into non-academic or functional skills which encompasses navigating around classroom furniture, sharing stationery with a peer, organizing their bag for school, cutting with scissors, and writing words on paper – all of which support a student's academic performance in the classroom.

The role of an occupation therapist is creative and client based. The treatment strategies vary according to the need of the child; here are some of the common areas where a child with Dyslexia might need intervention.

- Sensory Regulation – helping children learn to calm themselves when overloaded, vs. getting “stuck” and feeling “dumb.”
- Correcting problems with the physical aspects of handwriting.
- Working on rhythm and timing games while they are verbally thinking and expressing themselves so they can learn to move while thinking.
- Working on getting ideas and brainstorming.
- Working on categorization and sequencing ideas so they make sense.
- Teaching memory strategies for spelling and Math.
- Putting all the above skills together in writing tasks.

Areas of intervention

Studies estimate that Dyslexia affects some 80 per cent of children assessed as being learning disabled. Moreover, it has been shown that Dyslexia persists to adulthood and that adult Dyslexics show spelling problems and residues of phonological processing difficulties (Leong, 1999; 2002).

Handwriting

Handwriting difficulties are the primary reason for referral to occupational therapy services in schools. One of the most common strategies that are used at the classroom level is the Handwriting Without Tears Curriculum. It is a set of sensory-based handwriting strategies that can be incorporated at the classroom level. Also Assistive Technology offers a way for dyslexics to save time and overcome some of the issues such as slow note taking or unreadable handwriting, and allows them to use their time for all the things in which they are gifted. Technologies that facilitate this process are the Livescribe Smartpen and Dragon Naturally Speaking.

Sensory Integration

Sensory integration is a specialty area of occupational therapy that is based on over 40 years of theory and research. The term "sensory integration" refers to:

- The way the brain organizes sensations for engagement in occupation
- A model for understanding the way in which sensation affects development

A Sensory Diet

Occupational therapists design what are called "sensory diets" so that children receive the type of sensory stimulation they need to remain focused and learn throughout the school day. The diet may include

movement activities such as jumping on a trampoline, rolling down an incline or swinging; activities that stimulate muscles such as propelling a scooter board, playing tug-of-war or touch activities such as crawling through a cloth tunnel or wearing a heavy blanket or vest for short periods of time. These activities prepare the child's brain to develop the visual perceptual skills needed to read and write.

Brain Gym

Some occupational therapists incorporate movement activities from the Brain Gym program created by Paul E. Dennison, Ph.D. This program is designed to improve communication between the left and right sides of the brain using whole-body movements. Brain Gym is based on the theory that improved communication between the two sides of the brain will decrease hyperactivity and increase focus.

Visual Perception Programs

Children with Dyslexia and sensory processing disorders may have difficulties interpreting visual information such as how the letters "b" and "d" are different. Visual perception programs are designed to promote skills to copy shapes, dot patterns, block designs and other tasks that involve interpreting visual information.

Specialist counseling provided by occupational therapists can emphasize on self-esteem, self-image, confidence development, and stress management for children with dyslexia.

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Intervention for Co-occurring Deficits that Accompany Learning Disabilities

Adapted from the paper Occupational Therapy for People with Learning Disabilities throughout the Life Cycle, published by the Israeli Society of Occupational Therapy Email: info@isot.org.il

Research findings report that in about 50% of children coping with learning disabilities, there are accompanying deficits such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) and Sensory Modulation Disorder (SMD). Occupational therapists place great importance on simultaneously addressing additional co-occurring deficits.

1. Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)

Therapists guide the child in developing strategies for regulating their level of excitement, modulating their responses and applying self-control to suit the task's requirements. Occupational therapists may also recommend technological adaptations in order to improve function (such as adapted computer programs), the use of assistive devices (such as weighted vests to reduce "out of task", irrelevant behaviours).

2. Developmental Coordination Disorders (DCD)

Occupational therapists assist a child with deficits in performing motor and perceptual-motor skills. Examples include improving postural control, coordination and power regulation. Such difficulties may be manifest in the performance of leisure activities, sports, writing, playing an instrument, as well as in the manipulation of various objects and tools (such as a pen, ruler, eraser, keyboard, lab accessories, eating utensils, etc.). Intervention also focuses on improving movement planning and execution of movements in time and in space.

3. Deficits in sensory processing and modulation

Occupational therapists help a child with deficits in hyper- or hyposensitivity to touch, movement, visual and auditory stimuli and/or smells. These are sometimes expressed as avoidance of certain materials used for crafts or for learning, avoidance of participating in games on the playground, or discomfort in a noisy environment, and so forth. For example, occupational therapists may guide the child, and if needed, her family members in her environment in adapting the environment or the task, such that it will suit her sensory needs.

Mrudula Govindaraju, Member of the Editorial Team, in collaboration with

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Spotlight

Vidya Mandir Senior Secondary School

From this issue onwards we will highlight the commendable work mainstream schools are doing towards early intervention, and integrating children with learning difficulties (LD) within their own school. They underscore the fact most children with LD don't need a 'special' school but timely intervention in their own classroom.



“Every child grows and develops at its own pace.” Rooted in this firm belief, the Special Learning Centre at Vidya Mandir Senior Secondary School, Mylapore, was founded around 1988 to help children cope with learning difficulties in a systematic and scientific way. The school was one of the pioneers in Chennai to recognise the existence of learning disabilities and to provide help and support to children and parents in need of these services. The school drew upon the expert services and guidance of Lalitha Ramanujam and Jyothi Valecha to set up the Centre and draw a blueprint for guidance and intervention programmes. In 1992, the Centre was handed over to Chandra Thirumalai and Lakshmi Srinivasan who were mentored by them under the aegis of the Madras Dyslexia Association (MDA). Since then, the Centre has been growing from strength to strength and doing full justice to the school policy of doing its best by every child in the process of education.

Currently there are three experienced and trained Special Educators (Praveena, Suneta Shiva and Gowri Ganesh) to cater to the needs of 41 children. The special



educators, using tools set in place by MDA, assess children who have difficulty in reading and writing. Their area of difficulty is identified and a “one-on-one” programme is chalked out for remediation. Since the parent and teacher are important components of the child’s learning process, frequent sensitization workshops are conducted for them. This enables the classroom teacher to understand the child’s difficulty in processing words and numbers, facilitates early assessment and effective intervention. Regular communication between parents, the special educator, and the classroom teacher helps them to provide the space for the child to grow and develop his skills.

The resource room is equipped with essential teaching aids. An Individual Education Programme (IEP) is prepared for each child to know her strengths and weaknesses. With generous co-operation from parents and class teachers, the objective of making a child with learning difficulties comfortable in mainstream education is achieved.

Sudha Suresh
Vice Principal, Primary

Baking Bread and Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is any kind of learning where the student learns, understands and applies their knowledge to real-life situations. Children in schools are exposed, in a limited way, to such learning in science and language labs, art and craft classes and on the games field. However, when children are given opportunities to learn in authentic situations then the learning becomes more powerful. It has the capacity to change the way a child understands and learns in fundamentally transforming ways.



When children are exposed to guided real-world situations it deepens their knowledge of what they learn. They develop skills through practise and by reflecting upon what they learned. This will, in turn, help them find solutions independently. They will extend their learning when they bring it back to the classroom.

Why is experiential learning important? It teaches children competencies they need for real-world success. Although we can simulate the real world in the classroom and laboratory, authentic experiential learning creates an

invaluable opportunity to prepare students for a profession or career, learn the craft of a fine artist, or discover how people learn. What goes unnoticed most of the time is



Multiple Intelligences, which plays a primary role in experiential learning.

When there is motivation to learn, it creates self-directed learners.

To complete a set of tasks, students need to figure out what they know, what they do not know, and how to learn it. This requires students to: reflect on their prior knowledge and deepen it through reflection; transfer their previous learning to new contexts; master new concepts, principles, and skills; and be able to articulate how they developed this mastery. Ultimately, these skills create students who become self-directed, life-long learners. (Linn, et al., 2004).

Hydra, an initiative of Multiple Intelligences Foundation organised a baking workshop for their students at Old Madras Baking Company, Adyar Branch.

How did the children learn?

Executive Chef Prasath and Sous Chef Senthil at Old

Madras Baking Company showed the children how to measure flour; the importance of adding yeast and what it does to the flour; how long to wait for the dough to rise; how to weigh the dough to make bread; how to pre-heat the oven and when to remove baked bread from it.

Dhwani, Store Manager and Kamalika, Customer Service Associate showed the children how to actually manage a bakery and, what processes to follow in order to set up one.

When the children weighed and shaped the dough to make bread it was not just bread they were making. It was



a sensorial experience where the smell of the ingredients and the aroma of freshly baked bread triggers a surge of desire and happiness to participate in the process of baking. Each child used their imagination to

create shapes of immeasurable satisfaction.

So, what did they learn?

Children learn what is yeast (Biology); how it behaves under different temperatures (Chemistry); ratio of

ingredients (Maths); how to regulate heat for best results (Physics). Imagine teaching this on a blackboard in the classroom. When children actually experience it and come back to the classroom, their learning extends to a deeper understanding of concepts they are exposed to.

Most importantly, they have fun learning and acquire a life-skill. Moreover, nothing can replicate the experience of learning in a commercial bakery under the guidance of chefs, dressed like them and using ingredients and utensils just like them. Who knows one of these children may become a successful baker! Or even better, they bake because it makes them happy.



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Helping A Dyslexic in Goal Setting

As Yogi Berra says, “You’ve got to be careful because if you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll wind up somewhere else.” Goal setting is an ability which is plain and simple. Some of us have a natural skill to be able to do it well and others lack the capabilities needed to make us as good at it.

Unfortunately, many children with learning disabilities find goal setting difficult. They often have difficulty in executive functions, which makes it tough for them to plan ahead, to do what they wish to do, and to check their behaviour. More than that, ‘society’ sets goals for them: such as scoring good grades and performing well on jobs, which challenge them in their area of disability.

Both long-term and short-term goals are vital. Having clear goals will help dyslexics stay motivated, prioritize time and energy, manage their time, see the bigger picture, focus on important things and take pride and ownership in their experiences. Establishing good, clear goals, however, is a difficult task. It requires clarity of thinking and often a great deal of self-reflection.

Here are some ways to help young adults with learning disabilities set their own goals and reach them.

Dyslexic children essentially want the same three things:

1. The chance to do what others do
2. To make their own decisions
3. Respecting their opinions and decisions

Ask Questions

- Help your child to set Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time (SMART) bound goal and create an outline of how to get there by asking questions or requesting more information.
- What’s your plan for the future?
- Do you have a plan for that?
- Explain your agenda.

This puts the responsibility on the child to think about how to reach a goal instead of relying on you to manage things.

Start with smaller, attainable goals

Parents and teachers always want their dyslexic children to be good readers. While this is a valuable goal and is obtainable, it cannot happen overnight. Therefore, it is important to set short-term goals so that you can celebrate the small wins frequently and keep them motivated.

Work Together

Prepare a to-do list with them. They say "I will remember." But creating a to-do list will help them be more focused. So, start by making a to-do list for them. Always make sure that: You give minimum support to them.

Create Rewards

An incentive system will encourage them to work more on their goals. Rewards will help them to practice, which will improve their skills. When you decide to reward, make sure it is a fair system, because in most cases parents and others ask for too much for little payoffs.

Let the goals have relation to their desire

Jack Horner, a world-renowned palaeontologist shares in his autobiography that he was unsuccessful in school subjects but excelled in science projects. His goal was simple: to be a dinosaur palaeontologist. Teach and model perseverance. People with learning disabilities often face

barriers that others do not. This means perseverance is particularly important.

Coach them to handle set backs

Make them understand that failures are doors to success. Don't give up; try until they reach the goal.

Tell them they are not alone and everyone has difficulties

Often Dyslexics are under the impression they are the only ones who struggle. Share with them your weakness and make them feel you understand them. Sometimes hard work is not fun. So, take time off; if you can relate this fact to them through your experiences they are more likely to push on in the same way you do.

To achieve goals it should be turned into action plans. Good questions to ask them are: How are they going to achieve this goal? What are the steps and actions?

Defining specific goals will make them more confident. It is important to allow them to take ownership and responsibility for their actions.

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Teacher Training Workshop at AVM School

MDA (Resource Rooms) held a teacher training workshop at AVM Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Virugambakkam in May and helped set up the Resource Room there.

The idea was to train all teachers in the Primary section and a few English teachers in Class 6 and 7 to enable

them to help children with mild difficulties in the classroom itself. In this way only children who need one-on-one remediation can be referred to the Resource Room. Two teachers trained by MDA work in the Resource Room.

The teachers, who were used to the traditional talk and chalk method, were excited by the creative methods of teaching presented by MDA. In their words: "It was interesting, new and gave us a different look at the way we were teaching. The information was exhaustive and well presented. We hope to use these methods and make a difference in the lives of the students."

MDA (Resource Rooms) Team: Vilasini Diwakar, Geetha Raghavan, Harini Mohan, Harini Ramanujam, Jaya Shyam, Visalakshi Iyer and Renuka

Vilasini Diwakar

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Our Prize Winners

The annual Soroptimist International Competition was held this year at Little Peepal Montessori School, Anna Nagar. Both junior and senior children represented Ananya. Senior children won prizes in Art, Music, Oratory and Drama. Prize winners:

Art: S Janavi (3rd prize)
Raghav Mukundan (2nd prize)
Subash S (Special Commendation)

Oratory: Sai Sarvesh (1st prize)

Music: Nitin Prabhaakar (Instrumental Solo, 1st prize);
Srirakshitha (Special Commendation)

Drama: 2nd prize

Participants: Nitin, Akshaya, Keerthana, Sadhana,
Radha Gupta, Anoush, Mukund and Diya.

Best Actress: Keerthana

Director: Nandini Sridhar



Snippets

Junior school conducted two projects in the months of July and August. In July we conducted a project on Sight words. The sight word project was inaugurated by Ms Vasantha, Principal, Saraswathi Kendra Learning Centre. Children exhibited how they use different methodologies to learn sight words and how much they had achieved in reading in 60 hours since the start of school in June. In August it was a project on Phonemic awareness. In this project children demonstrated how by learning sounds and gaining mastery in it, helps them to decode, read and write multi-syllable words. The efficiency of reading was achieved in 148 hours.

Lata Vasanth
Special Educator

A national level 2-day seminar on Specific Learning Disability was jointly organized by Aurobindo Institute of Medical Sciences, Indore and NIEPMD, Chennai on the 4th and 5th of September. Participants were audiologists, speech therapists, psychologists and teachers from mainstream schools. The highlight was: Metaphonology and Literacy: A few Cross Linguistic Considerations. Emphasis was on auditory processing and speech. Sri Nachiketa Rout, Dr Pramod Pandey and Dr Apoorva Pauranik were key speakers. Special Educator Harini Mohan shared her experiences: as a teacher, about multi-modal intervention requirements and about the challenges encountered by dyslexic children in the classroom.

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New Office Bearers of MDA

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Active value investor for 22 years

Secretary: Ajit Narayanan
Founder, CEO, Invention Labs and inventor of AAC, the first assistive communication device for children with disabilities. An Electrical Engineer from IIT Madras. A prolific inventor with more than 20 patent applications.

Treasurer: Rajagopal Subramaniam
Handling Group Finance, Investments and Business Strategy as Executive Director, Finance and Strategy at the Tattva Group for over 5 years. Holds degrees as a Chartered Accountant, Company Secretary and a Bachelors of Commerce from University of Madras.

Team Building Workshop

MDA team was there in full strength on the 4th of July at Hotel Sabari Inn to participate in the Team Building workshop conducted by well-known Management Consultant Tilak Shankar. After highlighting some salient aspects of collaborative working, leadership, working towards a common objective, feedback mechanisms for improved performance and goal setting the speaker set the tone for an interactive session.

"You make a dedicated and a passionate team complementing each others skills very well which has contributed to the successes achieved till date." The focus then shifted to what next leading to an interactive session.

- 1) Are you happy doing the same things, going forward?
- 2) What goals do you have in reaching out to the thousands of other dyslexic children who need help?
- 3) What is the big picture that you have for MDA in terms of identifying short and long- term milestones that you want to accomplish?
- 4) Do you the feel the need to scale up your operations and if yes, what are the challenges that you face?
- 5) How do you propose to build a model of excellence, which can then be replicated? 6) Do you have internal critique sessions on a continuous basis to discuss processes that are not yielding the desired results and agree on corrective actions? 7) Are you happy taking on new roles and responsibility as the need arises to achieve goals set out? 8) How are you mentoring and guiding the new entrants to cope with the challenges in dealing with children and their parents?

All in all, the participants were happy to have participated in the workshop, which provided a lot of food for thought. It was agreed that follow up meetings would take place to come up with a plan to address various challenges backed by action plans. It was suggested that such workshops be conducted periodically.

Ram S
Member of the Editorial Team

We welcome the new office bearers.

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