

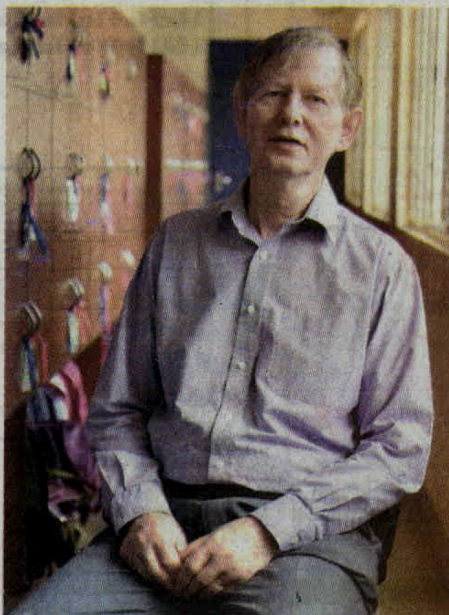
ABC's of Dyslexia

The Goa Dyslexia Association has been working towards aiding the learning of dyslexics across the state. The latest offering is a full day's workshop on Assistive Technology by Consultant in Dyslexia and Assistive technology, **Malcolm Litten**, who is a part of the British Dyslexia Association. **NT Buzz** talks to the resource person to know more.

■ JANICE RODRIGUES | NT BUZZ

A child even after months of learning to read still finds it difficult to make sense of the written word. Not because he is not intelligent, but because his brain is simply not able to comprehend the letters because of their neurological conditions. Thus while other children can generally read by the age of 7, the dyslexics are often still struggling with the basic.

Dyslexia could be the most misunderstood of the psychological conditions. Often misjudged for 'no interest' in studies, a dyslexic's difficulties are often overlooked. "Most children show some kind of impairment because they are struggling to deal with their environment," says Dyslexia con-



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sultant Malcolm Litten. It is often difficult to spot a dyslexic at a very young age, as the condition manifests only once the child goes to school and starts learning to read. "They also find it difficult to maintain the sequence of letters, syllables or sounds, often mixing up words. For example, they would say e-pha-lent for elephant," says Litten.

"One of the major manifestations of dyslexia is that of slowness and along with this

>The Goa Dyslexic Association was established in March 2015, with the aim to create awareness and advocacy to educate people about dyslexia. "One out of 5 children is dyslexic. That is quite a number. We wanted to help people understand how you would actually deal with the problems like dyslexia," says chairman of GDA, Umaji Chowgule. The GDA aims to become a research centre for Dyslexia.

there can be impairments in other learning problems," says Litten. He says this can be seen when children may not be able to follow multiple instructions. For example, if you instruct a child to go upstairs and get his socks and shoes, it is most likely that he will come back with only one. "The same things can be seen in the classrooms, where the teacher will give a couple of instructions at a time, but the child will be able to follow only one," says Litten. Often confused with Attention Deficit disorders, Dyslexia is a different disorder. "Like other similar conditions, ADHD is a condition that can be co-related with dyslexia, but it should not be confused," asserts Litten.

There is a theory that dyslexics process the information got to the senses in a slower manner. It is not that they are slow in learning or cognition, but the slowness lies in the processing of the information, mainly visual and sound. "Dyslexia can occur right across the IQ spectrum, there is no connection with the quality of your intelligence," says Litten. The right kind of teaching can help children in dispelling the thought that they are stupid.

Immense research in the field of Dyslexia is on, but various aspects are still unclear, including the cause, manifestations and the brain conditions. Often causes are thought of as a different kind of 'wiring' in a dyslexic's brain, however, Litten insists that this is just a theory and not proven. "There is a lot of research on the topic and the condition of the brain but there is no certain answer. For instance during MRIC scans, when a dyslexic is given a language act to do, some areas of the brain light up for the activities, sometimes not seen in a normal person, but this is only a theory and is not proven yet," he says.

When dealing with dyslexics we need to be very careful, as it tends to affect their confidence. When asked about creativity and dyslexia, Litten states that though there have been a number of creative people who have shown signs of dyslexia, it doesn't guarantee creativity.

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ABC's of Dyslexia

"We have to be very cautious; there are some qualities that are recognised as stronger or valuable in dyslexics. They may be able to visualise an architectural plan in their heads and will be able to see the possible problems with the plan. Thus some may be particularly talented with spatial awareness or with an artistic quality. But what if you are not or you are just as bad spatially, and then you might feel let down, with the thought 'not only am I a dyslexic, but I am a bad dyslexic', thus we have to be very careful with dyslexics," explains Litten.

Speaking about how we could help a dyslexic, Litten says that technology has now been used to help such children. In the workshop organised by the Goa Dyslexia Association Litten will tell teachers more about this aspect.

"In this workshop I will get to see what can be done, when dealing with the dyslexics, using Assistive Technology," says Litten.

Assistive Technology is basic software that piggybacks on the operating system and turns the text into speech. Be it a PDF or any Word processing file, it breaks each written word down to the level of the child, where one can adjust the speed and select an accent.

"We hope this is a way of both, assisting the task of educating the children and also allowing them to develop a sense of independence," says Litten.

The problem with dyslexia is that it is often overlooked or ignored. "Every school, every classroom has a dyslexic child. Too often schools are slow in detecting them. There have been cases

where parents will be expressing concern about their child's progress but schools will be saying it's alright. If the child had a physical problem, like hearing or sight, they wouldn't tell them to get on with it, then why do we say that to our dyslexic children? We should be able help them out. Another thing is they are made to the same thing over and over again to attain perfection. But this is wrong. They should try and find other ways to succeed," he explains.

What can parents do to help a dyslexic child? "First, if there is a dyslexic child the parents don't have to worry, they are ways to help the child in reading and writing. Second thing all parents need to do, regardless of the fact that the child has dyslexia or not, is talk to the child as much as possible. This will help develop rich language skills. Third, parents need to support not to over-burden their child. Your child has to deal with the problem at school,

and you don't want to continue it at home. Find the strengths in your child and try to develop those," says Litten.