

## **The International Conference on Dyslexia on the 17th,18th and 19th of December,2013 in Kolkata.**

The International Conference on Dyslexia on the 17th,18th and 19th of December,2013 in Kolkata organised by Breaking through Dyslexia was very well received by all those who attended it. The speakers from the University of Columbia,USA were very impressed with the teachers , the budding and practicing psychologists, special educators and parents who came together on a common platform to raise awareness, help understand and reach out to children with Dyslexia.

Dr. Margret Jo Shepherd set the tone for the conference with her keynote address on Dyslexia as it affects monolingual English speakers. She brought out the contrast between skilled readers and readers with Dyslexia. She introduced the audience to the Simple View of Reading (SVR), a mathematical model of skilled reading. The model predicts that skilled reading is a product of the ability to translate print back to speech and the ability to understand spoken words, and use that knowledge to interpret oral sentences and discourse i.e. Listening Comprehension.

The two parallel breakout sessions were conducted by Dr. Marzola and Ratna Dalvi. Dr. Marzola spoke about the importance of Phonemic awareness as intrinsic to learning to read and spell effectively, while Ratna Dalvi took her listeners through how to make inclusion work in a mainstream school. Ratna's audience had a large number of people involved in school administration, so she brought out the importance of the need for a resource centre in every mainstream school.

**Day 2** began with a very interesting session with Mr. Nikate Khaitan on Music Therapy and how it helps improve focus and attention in children thereby enhancing learning. He demonstrated the effective use of the Hemi-sync technology and how it affects brain wave patterns.

The keynote address by Dr. Dolores Perin elaborated understanding how children write and likened it to a business model, where children do a cost benefit analysis. A child would make an effort to write only if the benefits outweigh the costs, which means that the child should feel motivated to write. Writing is expressing ideas in print and Handwriting and spelling are important but they are a means to expression of ideas.

Dr. Perin's breakout session in the afternoon took off from her keynote. She emphasized the need for quality instruction in teaching writing strategies, teaching composition over and above handwriting and spelling, and enhancing motivation to write.

Dr. Marzola took her audience through how to enhance fluency, which is the ability to read accurately, effortlessly, and with expressions; some of the most effective strategies to help students improve comprehension skills and the need to build vocabulary for effective reading.

Dr Jo Shepherd took a holistic look at assessment. She requested Purnima Mirchandani, Senior Consultant Psychologist and Special Educator to join her to help bring out the important ways in which the assessment is adapted to the Indian setting.

On the **third day** in the morning session, Dr. Ram and Dr. Reena Sen addressed a joint session on the emotional fallout and the implications of misdiagnosed and mismanaged SLD. He brought out the need to look at the child's environment being a major determinant in the learning process. In this regard he generated a discussion on the prevalence of sexual abuse and how we need to tackle the problems associated with it. Dr. Reena Sen appealed to everyone to put the child before the disability, the need for sensitivity and support, and to use the assessment report as a tool to find appropriate intervention to help the child and not document that gives a verdict.

The three speakers from Teachers College, Columbia University were the panelists for the afternoon discussion. They addressed questions put forth by the delegates ranging from IQ as being integral to the testing procedure, to adapting curriculum and evaluation for children with learning difficulties in the mainstream school classroom. Mr John Mason, who was the moderator for the sessions , made a tremendous contribution by bridging the cultural differences between the American and Indian education system and highlighting the need for the entire teaching community to come together to make changes and bring about the necessary legislations to support them.