



LLCd Symposium.
POSTER AND PRESENTATIONS.

Name: Riona Lall

Affiliation: The Promise Foundation

Brief Bio: Riona has completed her Masters in Clinical Psychology from the University of Mumbai. She started her work in The Promise Foundation in 2010 as a Research Assistant to Dr. Sonali Nag. She currently manages the Special Needs Clinic in the Foundation. Her responsibilities involve assisting in assessments as well as conducting individual and group sessions for children. Apart from this, she works as a coordinator for Early Learning Programmes which involves training teachers and volunteers working in government schools in North and South India. Her main interest lies in working with children with special needs and she is very keen to garner more experience in this area. Prior to working for The Promise Foundation, she was associated with an NGO in Mumbai which focused on working with children with developmental disabilities and special needs

Name: Laxmi Sutar

Affiliation: The Promise Foundation

Brief Bio: Laxmi is a teacher in the Programmes for Assisted Learning (PAL) offered by Promise to government primary schools. She also works with pre-school and anganwadi children through the Foundation's Stimulation Intervention Programmes (SIP). Laxmi has conducted teacher training programmes for Balawadi, Anganwadi and Shishukendra teachers and for trainees from the Bala Sevika Training Institute. She has done a special needs course and holds a diploma in drawing. She has developed many craft ideas and is one of the main illustrators for the Foundation's publications.

Name: Sonali Nag

Affiliation: The Promise Foundation

Brief Bio: Sonali is a clinical psychologist trained at the National Institute for Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) in India. She is one of the founders of The Promise Foundation, an Indian charity that works, among other areas, in the field of literacy interventions and serves the Foundation as its Associate Director. She is presently based in the

University of York as a Newton International Fellow and is leading two large scale language and reading programmes in Kannada, a language of South India and English. Her work in the area of Learning Disabilities and Dyslexia, has focused on understanding dyslexia, particularly taking into account the unique features of the Indian languages. Her research interest is particularly in contexts where there are interactions between multiple scripts and multiple languages. Sonali has participated in assignments with the National Council for Education Research and Training(NCERT),India; The Ministry of Higher Education, Employment and Social Security, Republic of Maldives; the Shulamit, Principality of Leichtenstein and the Ministry of Education, Rwanda.

Title of Presentation:

The tiger who had a cold. Changes in children's story writing following a language programme.

Abstract:

In this exploratory study, we examine the stories of 33 children to a supplementary Kannada language programme held in 48 sessions of 2 hour duration, four times a week. The programme was delivered by a visiting teacher to all children in Grade 4 in a government run school in a peri-urban colony outside Bangalore. All the children were between the age of 7 and 9 years and bi- or multilingual.

A screening test was used to group children with the lowest, middle and highest attainments in basic reading, spelling and reading comprehension. The same timetable of sessions was followed for all children but with individualized instruction for each group. The children in the lowest attainments group were more than two years behind grade level.

Each session comprised four periods called Talk, Text, Hands-on and Publish. Narrative writing skills were structured around an activity called 'nanna arivu', which roughly translates into 'the essence that I have abstracted' from the text. Instructions for children's written narratives followed a sequence of focus areas– writing the main idea units, using the connector 'and', using specific inflections (e.g. to, for, of) and using a selection of transitional tags to communicate time sequence (e.g. first, next, afterwards, and then).

In a pre- and post- assessment we had asked children to write a story based on a picture of a tiger wearing a scarf and clutching a handkerchief, clearly suffering from a terrible cold. These are the stories that we analysed. Here, children's performance is taken as a proxy for expressive writing, spelling and use of grammatically more complex language.

On an average, children were writing seven sentences with about three words per sentence in the beginning of the programme. By the end of the programme, children had written eleven sentences with

about five words per sentence. We recorded that before intervention 30% of all words in the story had spelling errors, up to 11.9% were nonsense words (no meaning) and 3.5% words were in the child's home dialect. At the end of the intervention, spelling errors dropped to 17% and nonsense words had almost disappeared (0.9 %). Dialect words also had reduced (1.9%). Finally, apart from more nouns and verbs appearing in the post intervention stories, we found increase in use of adjectives (0.13% to 1.63%), pronouns (0.54% to 5.01%), determiners (0.54% to 2.52%) and connectives (1.35% to 26.41%). Also, the errors had halved on noun inflections (6.42% to 3.39%) and verb inflections (42.28% to 21.61%), suggesting more complex syntax. The trends from the pre- and post-assessment indicate an improvement in children's knowledge of the language and its use in narratives.

Equally important, some children responded to the intervention more than others. The poster will present a preliminary analysis of who were the children who changed the most, and who the least. Information from these Response-to-Intervention (RTI) indices will be compared to the grouping that was done based on the screening tool at the beginning of the programme. There is an urgent need to explore the relative usefulness of RTI against the more traditional screening methods used to identify children with learning difficulties. The urgency is particularly acute because cross-sectional assessments may not be informative, and indeed may be misleading, when children with low attainments have a history of poor opportunity (e.g. print starved environments, absence of bridge programmes between home and school language, teacher or child absenteeism hence no structured instruction).

In conclusion, children's narrative writing skills are a good source of information about several components of literacy and language, a supplementary programme can improve both basic spelling and narrative writing skills, and process data collected from an intervention is useful information for understanding individual differences and for diagnostics.