

*Library Services to People with Special Needs Section and Libraries for Children and Young Adults
Section
“Inclusive Library Services for Children and Young Adults”
Date: 23 August 2018
Location: National Library Building (Singapore)*

Promoting a reading environment for children with dyslexia in Japan

Aya Makino

Chofu Public Library, Chofu City, Tokyo, Japan

Email: chofudaisy@gmail.com



Copyright © 2018 by Aya Makino. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Abstract:

I work in a public library in Chofu City as a librarian and I have a child with dyslexia.

10 years ago, I went to my library to see the person responsible for library services for people with disabilities to get advice for my daughter, who was having difficulties in reading, and came to know about DAISY multimedia books. But at that time, DAISY multimedia books were not available for my daughter since there was no library service for children and young adults with dyslexia in Japan.

To solve the situation, I established a group of volunteers called “Chofu DAISY” in order to produce DAISY multimedia books for children. I also became the representative of the group to create a better reading environment for these children. I disseminated information about people with dyslexia, and about their problems in reading printed books since dyslexia was still not well recognized in Japan. I promoted DAISY multimedia technology which is useful in helping those children to read. With this purpose, my group organized many lecture meetings and requested libraries to provide DAISY multimedia books and a PC to read them.

Today, I can find a PC to read DAISY books and a bookshelf full of those books in my library. However, very few library users know about this useful information. So, my challenge is to encourage children with dyslexia and their parents to ask libraries to provide more books in readable format. The Japanese copyright law allows them to do so. Finally, I would like to reiterate the critical importance of accessible publications.

Keywords: Dyslexia, DAISY Multimedia Books, Awareness, Volunteer Group, Accessible Publication

I work in a public library in my city. My major responsibilities are circulation and shelving books.

The other day, when I was shelving the books, I heard a loud voice at the counter. A deaf lady had come to the counter and the library staff was yelling to her in a loud voice. The deaf person wrote “reserved” on the writing board. The staff checked her data and wrote “You have no reservation”, while yelling this information at the same time.

I know some sign language, so I walked over and signed “Are you having any trouble?” She responded in sign language, “I had reserved a book but couldn’t come to pick it up before the due date. I know the book should be in the library and I still want to borrow it.”

I was able to find the book for her. Before going home, she remarked, “I am deaf, so it is useless to yell at me in a loud voice.”

The library staff had made 2 mistakes:

- (1) She was yelling at a deaf person who cannot hear at all.
- (2) She thought that writing would solve the communication problem with deaf people.

Of course, deaf people cannot hear no matter how loudly you speak. Also, some deaf people are not skilled in writing. The lady that came to the counter probably did not know how to write detailed explanations, so she just wrote “reserved” and kept tapping that word on the writing board.

What would have been the better thing to do? Even though she did not have a book reserved, she kept tapping on the word as if to insist that something was reserved. The library staff could have changed her questions in such a way that the deaf lady could respond with a simple “yes” or “no”.

If we want people with special needs to come and use our libraries, we need to know about them. We need to know how they want to communicate, and we need books in formats which they can access. I want people with special needs to like our libraries.

I have a daughter with dyslexia.

Before she entered school, I never even heard of such a disability. When her teachers started to give her homework, that was when I realized that she was having difficulties. No matter how many times she practiced writing and reading letters and words, she could not read sentences smoothly. If she practiced reading the same story over and over again, she would become somewhat better, but when she had to read a new story, she would not be able to read it.

In an interview with her class teacher, I was told, “Your daughter cannot read words. She cannot write. She cannot count backwards from 10 to 1. I’m afraid she cannot continue in this class.”

It was such a shock to be told bluntly that my daughter cannot continue in school, so I cried and cried. I discussed with my husband and decided to ask for advice from the Educational Counselling Office. There, my daughter took what is called the WISC-III intelligence test.

The surprising result was that my daughter's intellectual performance was normal. However, we were told that she scored high above average in some areas, while showing poor results in other areas. So when all her scores were averaged, her IQ was normal.

After receiving this result, I started to think that perhaps learning and studying in a normal manner might not be suited to her. I searched the Internet. When I searched for "cannot read/disability", the result that appeared was the name of a famous actor...Tom Cruise. The search results showed an article revealing that Tom Cruise has dyslexia. I next searched the word "dyslexia" in the Internet and found many qualities that exactly fit my daughter's situation. "She has dyslexia!" After finding this out, I started to understand how I might help her.

I changed my basic stance for supporting her from "What can I do to make her read well?" to "What can I do to help her get along in school even if she cannot read?"

I consulted the school and the Education Counselling Office, but at the time they had no effective support for my daughter. In fact, they did not have much knowledge about the disability called dyslexia. Finally, I went to the disability services section of my own library to ask for advice. It was there that I learned about DAISY multimedia books for the first time.

I learned that DAISY is a means of creating digital books to be read on the computer. DAISY produces printed material in audible format and highlights the part that is being read out, making it easy even for people who have difficulties in reading to follow which part is being read. I thought DAISY would be the perfect solution to my daughter's reading problem.

At the time, however, the library didn't have a single DAISY multimedia book. I was lucky, however, to learn from the librarian that a training session would be held soon in a nearby location to teach how to make DAISY books. I signed up to participate in this training session. The people who participated in this training decided to form a group to make DAISY books for our library. That was the start of the organization which I represent called Chofu DAISY.

Even today, libraries in Japan still do not have services to enable children and young adults with dyslexia to access printed materials. So Chofu DAISY started with activities to disseminate information about people with dyslexia and about their difficulties in reading printed materials. Chofu DAISY organized many lectures on this topic. We invited persons with dyslexia themselves to explain exactly what it is like to have reading problems. We invited experts on dyslexia to give talks from the professional viewpoint as well. To publicize these lectures, we printed 10,000 flyers each time to distribute to the households of all the children attending elementary schools in Chofu. We also publicized these events to people working in the libraries and schools.

We also asked the library to start providing DAISY books, and to install a computer to enable people to read these books. As we continued with our activities to make books and to organize lectures, the members of Chofu DAISY came to realize that people with dyslexia are not the only people with reading difficulties. We came to consider how all persons with all sorts of special needs can enjoy reading. We wanted as many people as possible to access our lectures, so we added captions and Japanese Sign Language interpretation to the video

recording of the lectures and uploaded them in YouTube. That was how I took an interest in sign language and started to learn it. You can see these video clips in the Chofu DAISY website.

<https://www.chofudaisy.org/lecture.html>

Chofu DAISY is now in its 10th year. Today, the Chofu public library has a shelf for multimedia DAISY books as well as a computer which can be used to read them. However, this service is still now widely known. Unless the library takes the initiative to disseminate this information, people with reading difficulties will not come to the library.

Our challenge is to continue to provide information to children and young adults who need it and to their parents as well. The Copyright Law now permits us to rewrite books into accessible format, so we will continue with our activities, eventually hoping for accessible publications to become the standard.

Every public library in Japan has a notice on the wall which reads:

“All the people have the right of access to library materials whenever they need them. Guaranteeing the right is nothing but guaranteeing the freedom to know as a social system. Libraries are the organizations having full responsibility to ensure the freedom to know.”

If libraries can provide materials catering to all sorts of different reading methods and styles, and if people can come and choose the method they find to be most suitable to have a good reading experience, then our libraries would become a place where persons with special needs would want to come often.

In future, I hope that the services for persons with special needs would no longer be considered “special”, but that they would become incorporated into the regular services of the library. It is the responsibility of libraries to provide books which all citizens can read

Acknowledgments

Hiroshi Kawamura, Assistive Technology Organization

Misako Nomura,

Machiko Takagi, Freelance Interpreter

Assistive Technology Development Organization

Chofu Public Library

Members of Volunteer Group, “Chofu DAISY”

References

Japan Library Association (1979), *Statement on Intellectual Freedom in Libraries*.

<http://www.jla.or.jp/portals/0/html/jiyu/english.html>

Chofu DAISY

<https://www.chofu-daisy.org/>